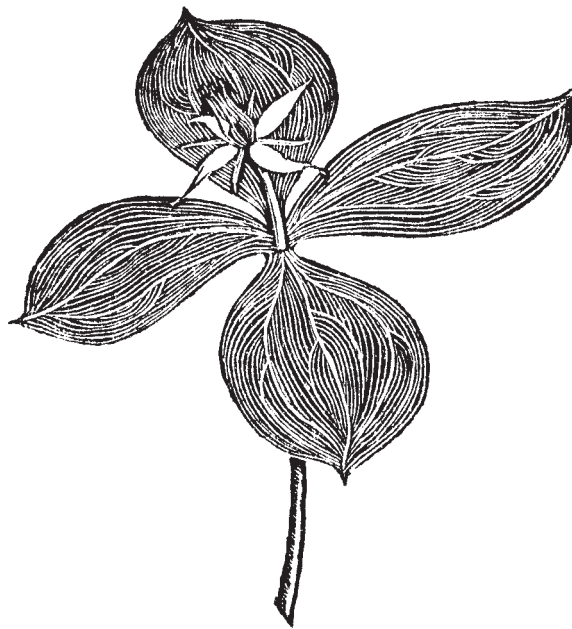


The Reading Naturalist

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THE READING NATURALIST

No 55 for the year 2002

The Journal of the
Reading and District Natural History Society

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EDITORIAL

Another year has gone by. With the Foot and Mouth outbreak well behind us we were able to get back into the countryside. Unfortunately the combination of a wet summer followed by a dry autumn meant that many groups of organisms had a poor year – the lepidopterists reported the lack of both butterflies and moths and the mycologists bemoaned the dearth of fungi. Naturalists are taking on the farmer's traditional reputation of always moaning about the weather!

The weather notwithstanding, we have a full issue, including several articles highlighting some of the never-ending stream of new species arriving in our area.

Members should note that the society now has a web-site www.rdnhs.org.uk (thanks to Chris Raper) which will bring us to the notice of a wider public. It also gives the opportunity to informally publish longer articles and reports at practically no expense. The first of these, *The Moths of Bracknell 1976-1985* by the late Dr Michael Dumbleton, will be available online by the time you see this – more details in David Notton's Entomology report (page 28). It is also intended to put the last few year's *Reading Naturalist* on the web-site (in colour!) and maybe some of the earlier supplements. Paper copies of the online publications will be available on request from the editor. The Editorial Subcommittee welcome other suggestions or offers of material from members.

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OBITUARY

Dr. Alan Brickstock 1930 – 2002

The death of Alan Brickstock on 7 May 2002, following so closely the loss of Eric Watson and Humphry Bowen, has deprived the society of yet another senior and well-loved member.

After gaining his PhD in physics at Cambridge, Alan came to Reading to take up a post with the Atomic Energy Authority at Aldermaston where he remained until his retirement in 1990. Although initially having no particular interest in natural history, an increasing fascination with fungi led to his attending Dr. Hora's celebrated WEA classes in fungi at Reading University. It was but a short step from there to becoming a member of the Society which he and Ivy joined in 1974. He was soon fully involved in all the Society's activities: seldom missing an indoor meeting and leading excursions, serving on the committee almost continuously from 1980 and acting as Hon. Field Excursion Secretary for 3 years and as Recorder for Fungi and foray leader for some 20 years. His contribution to the society was recognised by his election as President on two separate occasions, for 1984-86 and 1998-2000.

During his membership of the Society, Alan's natural history interests widened to embrace flowers, birds, mammals and insects as well as fungi. He became an active supporter of the local naturalists trust (BBOWT as it has now become) raising funds by giving slide shows and, with Ivy, growing plants and selling them at events all over the county. For their huge success in fund-raising they were specially honoured by BBOWT in 2000. Alan was also a popular lecturer on the wildflower courses he ran first for the WEA and then for Reading Council and because of his expertise he was invited to lead a wildflower holiday in Bulgaria.

Perhaps Alan's most notable achievement in the natural history field was his founding of the Reading Fungus Group. For more than 10 years he ran the Group single-handedly, including the preparation of the annual foray programme and the production of a regular Newsletter. He became something of a local 'guru' whose views were sought by the press and radio on fungal topics and by members of the public on matters such as whether the toadstool they had just eaten was poisonous.

Although natural history came to take up most of Alan's non-working life, he had many other interests including photography, gardening, fell-walking, cricket, music, dogs and maintaining old cars – few of us will forget the trauma of the theft during a society meeting of his beloved but near moribund Hillman Minx.

We shall remember Alan for his generosity, his friendship, his insistence on accuracy and his impish sense of humour. We shall remember too his incredible physical toughness. On a freezing winter's day when the rest of us retreated to the protection of our cars for lunch Alan would insist on eating outside, challenging the elements to do their worst. In his later years he broke both wrists in two serious falls and survived major surgery. We thought that he was indestructible but it was not so. We all miss him.

Neville Diserens

MEMBERS' OBSERVATIONS

Before each evening talk begins, members are invited to announce their observations. Here is a selection of observations from the 01/02 winter meetings:

25 Oct 2001 Norman Hall reported 2 Red Admirals feeding on Strawberry Tree (*Arbutus*)
 Michael Kieth-Lucas saw a Small Copper at Wildmoor
 Heather Baker had seen a Brimstone
 Y. Robertson had Peacock feeding on Michaelmas Daisy
 Martin Sell saw Comma feeding on Marigolds
 Ivy Fletcher mentioned Pipistrelle bats in South St.
 Ken Grinstead reported a Badger at Grazeley

8 Nov 2001 Brian Walker saw Buzzard at Clayfield Copse
 Chris Raper had seen a Red Admiral on 5th Nov and a Painted Lady on 2nd Nov

K.Grinstead had counted 30 fungi at the eastern end Greenham Common on 31st Oct.

22 Nov 2001 Martin Sell had seen Red Admirals in The Warren on 22nd Nov
John Marshall reported 11 hen and 3 cock Pheasants on his lawn

10 Jan 2002 Martin Sell said there had been Great Northern Divers over a gravel pit, (Christmas period) and male Mandarins on opposite side of the pit on Jan 2nd,
20-30 Goosander over Moor Green lakes, a Green-winged Teal, a flock of 20 Bramblings with a few Chaffinches and a Barn Owl.
Chris Bucke reported a Weasel opposite the entrance to Kurtons Farm.



Vanessa atalanta
Red Admiral

Norman Hall had found a dead Hedgehog in the garden ?attacked by Magpies or succumbed to cold.
Malcolm Storey mentioned a newly arrived species of leaf miner in Stinking Hellebores.

24 Jan 2002 Martin Sell had seen a Crane flying over Wigmore Lane, winter Iceland Gull and 2 Red-crested Pochard at Burghfield Pits and Bittern at Hose Hill Lake, Theale.

14 Feb 2002 Janet Welsh had seen 1 Red Admiral at Harcourt Arboretum earlier that day.
Martin Sell reported 3 Smew at Twyford Pit (1 male 2 female)
Tony Rayner had 12-15 Corn Buntings in his garden
Ken Thomas saw a Peacock butterfly in his garden
Heather Baker saw 17-18 Goldfinches in her garden
Alan Burt had seen 2 Blackcaps

28 Feb 2002 Alan Burt reported a pair of Blackcaps feeding regularly on porridge oats in his garden
Heather Baker regularly sees about 50 Swans on a couple of fields in Benson/Dorchester region.
Both Martin Sell and Michael Keith-Lucas reported first frog spawn 21st Feb.

14 March 2002 Chris Bucke had seen a Fox in his garden and Cornelian Cherry hedge on walk in Aldbourne/Ramsbury area.
Heather Baker had seen a Brimstone, and a male Sparrowhawk sitting on chimney pot
Ray Lush mentioned Sparrowhawk suspected of swooping down on Robin.
There were similar observations from other members.

28 March 2002 (Members Evening) Martin Sell had seen Comma, Brimstone and queen wasps
Tony Rayner reported a Holly blue at Cholsey
Catherine Butcher had found 2 dead Badgers about half mile apart from each other on Pangbourne Streatley Rd ?run over or dumped by roadside.

EXCURSIONS

Meryl Beek

This year has been much more satisfactory than last year with no more foot and mouth disease restrictions. With the exception of the January coastal birds meeting, which had to be cancelled because of the bad weather, there have been around 30 excursions in the 2nd October 2001 to September 2002 period.

2001

On 20th October 9 people walked in the Whitchurch Hill area and through Great Chalk Wood. A reasonable number of fungi were seen on this pleasant and sunny autumn morning walk of three miles.

A party of 12 members enjoyed a downland walk on 10th November through the Well Barn and Yattendon estates. The scenery and autumn colours were spectacular in bright sunshine and although we saw Red Admirals, Fieldfares, Redwings, Skylarks and even a Corn Bunting – it was the 4 Buzzards and several Red Kites that stole the show. Before completing the walk, we felt obliged to pause at the Bell in Aldworth for some delicious soup, ham rolls and real ale.

Fourteen members and guests met at the Tyle Mill car park on 8th December, a beautifully sunny afternoon and, after admiring the construction work on the new swing bridge across the canal, walked



Euonymus europaeus
Spindle – berries

through fields to Ufton Nervet and on to Padworth Mill. The return route was down to Aldermaston Wharf and along the canal. The winter sun illuminated the trees very nicely and there were some fine displays of berries, particularly Spindle and Guelder Rose. The birders in the party were most enthused by the stretch approaching Padworth Mill where the path goes between the Kennet and a gravel quarry still being worked. The quarry housed many gulls and ducks and perhaps the star observation was a group of a dozen or so Dabchicks. A party of Siskins was observed feeding in Alder trees beside the river. Otherwise the number and range of birds seen was disappointing. Numerous V's of mixed species of gull were seen flying eastwards

as dusk fell. As the party neared Tyle Mill some frisky Roe Deer were spotted in the field close to the car park.

2002

Seán O'Leary led about 10 budding moss enthusiasts for the annual "Introduction to Mosses & Liverworts" walk at Moor Copse on 23rd of February. After a brief introduction to the rather bizarre lifestyle of these beautiful plants, we hunted out some examples of 'stand up in the middle' (acrocarpous) and 'lie down on the ground' (pleurocarpous) species. The rich variety of habit, colour, shape, size, habitat, soil requirements and even odour was evident among the Bryophytes even in this small wood. Often overlooked, the delightful symmetry and perfection of these tiny plants was especially clear in the exquisitely constructed spore-bearing capsule with minute but perfect teeth covering the mouth. Don't ignore these little treasures when out flower spotting!



Scleropodium purum
Capsule teeth

On 16th March three members walked through the woods, across the meadows to the Pang, into Tidmarsh, across the meadows again, down the lane to Sulham and back into the woods behind Sulham church. The weather was dull with rain threatening so the promise of seeing butterflies was not fulfilled. One or two spring flowers were seen, the first Wood Anemones, Marsh Marigolds in the Pang, a clump of Loddon Lilies on the bank of the Pang near the late Bill Baker's garden. A very early flowering of Ground Ivy was noted in the shelter of the footpath approaching Tidmarsh. A pair of Mandarin Duck were seen on the Pang. It was not the time of year for fungi but *Tremella mesenterica* was found on a cherry twig in the northern part of Sulham Woods. A target plant for the afternoon was



Adoxa moschatellina
Moschatel

Moschatel, which was duly found, not in abundance, in the southern part of the woods. This walk was led by Chris Bucke, as Alan Brickstock was too ill to attend.

The new summer season started on April 21st with a visit to Sandford Mill & Dinton Pastures which was led by Tricia Marcouse. The Loddon Lilies were seen in all their glory before a stroll through Dinton Pastures.

Martin Sell led a birding evening at Woolhampton on 15th May. The Cuckoo, Nightingales and a Reed Warbler were all in good throat. An attendance of 13 was very encouraging

On a mid May evening Chris Raper led a party of 16, which included several visitors, on a visit to the Hartslock Reserve. Again Monkey Orchids and other goodies were seen in profusion!

Another very memorable excursion was held on Saturday 25th May when Martin Sell led the party of 18 onto the Berkshire Downs near the Aston Upthorpe reserve. The "pièce de resistance" was several large clumps of Shepherd's Needle. This is a very rare plant nowadays. It was a wonderful find, but it could have easily been overlooked!

An excursion with a difference was held, on Saturday, 8th. June, when Tony Rayner took the party to several newly created private wild flower meadows. Four of these were in Cholsey, and were in various stages of development, which made comparisons interesting. Some of the meadows were proving a great magnet for wildlife, and all provided a riot of colour, which made for easy photography!

Last year's coach outing to College Lake near Tring was cancelled due to foot and mouth restrictions. It is a site worth visiting so six members and three people from BBOWT had a good day on the 15th June. They travelled by cars to the reserve which has been formed from a worked-out chalk quarry. The volunteer guides, George and Simon, took the party round the lake, into some of the hides and finished in the flower field. A look at the Museum of old farming implements and the wildlife garden completed a happy day.

The coach outing to Dorset on June 28th was enjoyed by 38 people and led by Neville and Mary Diserens, who met the party near Pamphill Meadows which were rich in Southern Marsh Orchids and other water-loving plants. Afterwards the coach was driven to nearby Badbury rings. There had been gloomy predictions in the previous week as the sheep were nibbling and grazing the Rings. The worst fears were proved to be too pessimistic. When the party arrived the sheep had gone and the many chalk-loving plants including the Frog Orchid were surviving. The Excursion Secretary probably aged somewhat over this episode but she lives to tell the tale and to arrange another coach outing in 2003!

Rod d'Ayala (for RDNHS) and Nigel Snell (BBOWT Reserve Warden) led an evening meeting on July 13th to BBOWT's Warren Bank reserve. After being cancelled in the previous summer (foot and mouth) the Society finally got to set foot on Warren Bank. The evening was neither hot nor cold, cloudy nor clear. The quarry for the evening, Glow-worms, were not expected until dusk or after. So to start off the assembled company strolled across the reserve and out the other side to look at an area of unimproved chalk grassland recently taken out of hard grazing – which is now recovering with good numbers of typical chalk flora, including common plants such as Yellow-wort and the more local Dropwort. The latter is not common in the area, occurring in some but not all grasslands – it was also found in the reserve itself (a new record for the site?) on the return journey. As dusk fell an owl was heard in the distance and odd rustles (cause unidentified) were heard in the surrounding bushes. As for Glow-worms – this small site in recent years has been outstanding with on some evenings 100's of glowing female beetles, perched in the grass and scrub edges waiting for the flying males to spot them and come down to mate. And tonight – there were three females – one for each of the select visiting group. Some days nature has the last laugh, which is all part of the charm of natural history.

On July 27th, there was a good turn out for the walk to Clifton Meadow led by Janet Welsh. We met at the Cherry Tree car park just south of the bridge at Clifton Hampden on a sultry afternoon. Clifton Meadow is a Northmoor Trust Reserve, managed by mowing and grazing. It could be called rushy meadow! It has escaped drainage, is relatively unimproved and retains quite a good flora but its interest is primarily in the tussocky structure which attracts wintering Snipe. On the way to the reserve there

was good opportunity to brush up on the river marginals and some of the more photogenic plants were captured on camera: Purple Loosestrife, Common Valerian, Wild Angelica, Fleabane, Yellow Iris, Skullcap and beautiful *Butomus* – Flowering Rush. At the entrance to the meadow there is a remnant ditch which has goodies, notably Tubular Water-Dropwort, not a common plant in Oxon, Common Meadow-rue and Sneezewort, almost, but really in the adjacent field.



Iris pseudacorus
Yellow Iris

Further in the sward is dominated by tussocks of Hard Rush and Tufted Hair-grass with drifts of Meadowsweet. Rod caught an Essex Skipper, identified by the black tips to the antennae, as if dipped in Indian ink (thank you Jim Asher.) By the dry pond we noted Quaking Grass, Devil's Bit Scabious, one flower hanging on, but there was still quite a reasonable amount of Adder's-Tongue Fern in the short lawns and also lurking in the taller grass where the cattle had left it. It's another site to return to earlier in the year. Plants to look for are the marsh orchids, Marsh Marigold and Meadow Saxifrage.



Valeriana officinalis
Common Valerian

The Society visited Coley Meadows on 3rd August, lead by David Notton. This afternoon walk was well attended despite intermittent grey clouds. A good selection of water and wetland plants were seen including Fool's Water-cress, Water Plantain, Gipsywort, Purple Loosestrife, Water Mint, Yellow Waterlily, Celery-leaved Buttercup, Greater Yellow-cress, Common Figwort, Marsh Ragwort, Branched Burr-reed and Brooklime. In particular, Flowering Rush, Orange Balsam and Marsh Woundwort were in full bloom and a good display of Guelder Rose berries was seen. Large stands of Creeping Thistle (in all colour shades from white to mauve) and Spear Thistles were providing nectar for a variety of butterflies and seeds for goldfinches while a light wind spread the thistledown far and wide. This site is very rich botanically and the above merely scratches the surface, for example, there are numerous sedges and unusual umbellifers which were not investigated fully.



Butomus umbellatus
Flowering Rush

Wetland insects were similarly varied with good numbers of the Banded Agrion damselfly and a star appearance from the rare White-Legged Damselfly. Large numbers of the Straw Dot moth seen resting on grass suggest a breeding population. The wasp mimicking sawfly *Tenthredo scrophulariae* was seen on Figwort, its larval foodplant. Some other more conspicuous species included the Long-winged Conehead bush cricket, Ruby Tiger moth, groundhoppers (*Tetrix* sp.) and the attractive *Ptychoptera contaminata* (like a crane fly but with black blotches on the wings). Other animal magic was provided by a Muntjac deer whilst a small family of Sparrowhawks made themselves heard for much of the walk, but stayed annoyingly out of view behind trees.



Tenthredo scrophulariae



Ptychoptera contaminata

Watership Down on 17th August was led by Graham Saunders. The seven or so people who came all enjoyed the afternoon's botanising and admired the wide, distant views over several counties. The site has not been visited by the society since 1988, so it was good to come back again.

Greenham Common on 31st August was lead by Malcolm Storey. The bright sunshine on this combined RNDHS and BBOWT outing attracted 48 people, a record in recent years. The first stop was one of the many ponds created by removal of fuel storage tanks during the decommissioning of the site. Unfortunately Australian Swamp-stonecrop has now found its way here and attempts are being made

to control it by covering the clumps with black mats. The Autumn Lady's Tresses were the main target for the afternoon and they put on a good show for us. We found a few Broom Moth caterpillars on Knapweed stems during the walk back.

Eleven members and friends met in central Purley on 7th September and walked through the old village and parallel to the railway line to the outskirts of Pangbourne, then across to the Thames, returning beside the Thames to Mapledurham Lock (for ice creams) and back. This proved unexpectedly varied with good chalk grassland beside the railway, Pale St John's Wort being perhaps the rarest plant noted. The edge of a field where beans had just been harvested had some good plants also, Scotch Thistles and Small Bugloss, also a yellow-fruited relative of Black Nightshade. The riverside had the expected plants and there was considerable taxonomic debate occasioned by the presence of both Bullrushes and Lesser Reedmace. Brooklime was seen in some quantity. Rather few birds were seen and no wild furry animals.

On Sunday 22nd September about 17 people visited Yateley Heath with Michael Keith-Lucas. The area hasn't been explored by the Society for many years but it yielded some good plants in the acidic ponds and on the higher gravel above the sand level. Lists of flowering plants, mosses and fungi have been sent to the society's recorders.

This season was completed with a fungus foray led by Malcolm Storey in Fence Wood on 28th September. The weather had been dry for some time so fungi were rather sparse but a small group of members and friends enjoyed an afternoon out. The highlight of the day was *Faeberia carbonaria* (= *Geopetalum carbonarium*), growing on an old bonfire site. It had been some years since we forayed at Fence Wood, following parking restrictions. When new car parks were opened Alan was keen that we return to the site. It's very sad that he couldn't be with us.

WEDNESDAY WALKS

Special mention must be made of Ken Thomas, who organised six Wednesday morning summer walks. These started with Lyde Green, Hampshire, which was a repeat of Ken's very first Wednesday walk about 10 years ago. The other five walks were at Stoke Row, Aston and Remenham, Goring and Great Chalk Wood, Hermitage and Oare, and around Mortimer West End. Ken's information on local history and church architecture always adds an extra dimension to the walks.

Alan Brickstock has been greatly missed by the "Wednesday People" this year. In a small way other members are contributing to his previous vast botanical lists and are sending items to the appropriate recorders. One of Alan's last wishes was that the summer Wednesday walks should be extended into the winter season, and last autumn Ken agreed to extend his work to three informal walks during the months of November, January and March. Alan was right – these walks have been much appreciated, and even in the depth of winter there is always something to see.

Thank you to all leaders this season. A lot of time and energy has been put into the programmes by many people. With a couple of exceptions, numbers attending have been good, with many meetings going into double figures. On the whole it is noticeable that venues close to Reading attract more people than some further away places. This will be borne in mind in next year's programme, but in high summer it's nice to go out a bit further from home.

Suggestions of excursions are welcomed and will always be considered by the committee.

It is hoped to provide plenty of variety in 2003 – see you there – the more often you can join us the better!

MEETINGS (2001–2002)

Catherine Butcher

The talks have been fairly well attended with an average of 37 members.

The first lecture of the season was given by Dr. Peter Evans from the *Whales, Dolphins & Sea Watch Foundation* on 25th October 2001. Dr. Evans stated that in the 1960's the knowledge was all based on dead animals which were stranded and washed ashore. The Foundation were funded by the

Department of the Environment to establish a national observer network to monitor Whales and Dolphins and try to identify the threats they faced. Grey Whales unfortunately are now extinct and Humpbacks are rare. Pollution from tanker disasters and melting ice caps which have changed weather patterns creating food shortages are just two of the threats that whales have to face. A most interesting talk.

Mr. Mike Read came once again to speak to members, the subject of his talk this time being "From the Rio Grande to the Grand Canyon". He is an excellent photographer and once again we were delighted to see slides of birds taken on a tour of the Rio Grande to the Grand Canyon. Starting at the Santa Anna Wild Life Reserve, where we saw slides of the Chickadee and the Green Jay, he proceeded to the Padre Island where 80% of North American birds over-winter. He showed slides of different wildlife Reserves along the coast, one of which was High Island at the end of the Bolivar Peninsular. All migrants make for this area and at times the numbers of birds of different species are staggering. At the Basque del Apache in New Mexico there is an area of lakes where about thirty five to forty thousand Snow Geese gather in winter. His final slides were of the Grand Canyon at sunrise and sunset showing its magnificent colours and rock formations.

On November 22nd Dr. Richard Fortey, a renowned palaeontologist spoke to 39 members on the "Evolution of Life". He commented on the impossibility of trying to condense the evolution of life into an hour's lecture. Studies have been carried out which indicate that from the most primitive forms of life, certain thresholds have been crossed, each adding to the complexity of life. He showed slides of fossils sixty million years old from the Burgess Shale in British Columbia as well as fossils from China. Trilobites, chelicerates and crustacea were three forms of fossils and these were all stepping stones on the way to living animals. His opinion was that we were still living in the aftermath of the Cambrian explosion. He spoke to members about the age of the dinosaur, mammals, the great apes, the missing link and lastly *Homo sapiens*. Sometimes he does not feel very optimistic about the future and the one thing remaining when the world is dead will be the cockroach! A sobering thought!

Our own member, Dr. Michael Keith-Lucas from the University of Reading was our speaker on 10th January. Forty seven members were present to hear him speak on the "Deserts of Europe". Dr. Keith-Lucas takes students every springtime to the deserts or the Sierra Nevada and Cabo de Gata National Park where more than a third of the plants are found nowhere else in the world. In this area there is a lot of volcanic activity and extreme weather conditions. It is virtually uninhabited and has an inhospitable landscape. *Antirrhinum*, *Cape Dianthus*, *Convulvulus* all grow in Spring when, briefly, the desert blooms with great profusion, breathtaking in its abundance. Grazing by Wild Boar, Donkeys and Goats is a major problem. He had also visited the Almeria Desert, a location used frequently by filmmakers for their spaghetti westerns. This area had many rare plants, which his students were monitoring, e.g. succulent *Caralluma*, *Dipcadi serotinum*, *Cleome violacea*, *Coris hispanica*, *Aristolochia baetica* and *Limmie insigni*. Butterflies from Morocco, scorpions and lizards were also in abundance.

Our next speaker was Mr. Dennis Bright who talked about "The Valley of the Barn Owls". The hurricane of 1987 brought down thousands of trees, destroying the habitat of the Barn Owls in the Winchester area. With a friend, he started a project to provide nest boxes, particularly in the area of the River Test to which owls were attracted. Tea chests were obtained from the local Twining tea factory in Andover and together they installed about a hundred nest boxes. As soon as a box was put up it was occupied immediately and soon there were sixty to seventy pairs of Barn Owls. This number is growing all the time. Mr. Bright told members that the River Test is free from chemical contamination and is one of the finest chalk streams in the world. However, commercial fishing which costs £130 per day, has had an impact on wild life. Birds cannot survive if there are no hedges to provide linear margins and Mr. Bright stressed the importance of giving farmers incentives to make land more supportive for them in the next decade. His obvious enthusiasm for the preservation of Barn Owls, in particular, came across to the audience and we hope he manages to continue the work he is doing.

Dr. Kate Scott's lecture on "Hunting Elephant & Mammoth in the Thames Valley" was well attended. She spoke about the wealth of fossils found at a gravel pit at Stanton Harcourt, Oxfordshire. There were ten pits, nine of which had been flooded after the gravel had been extracted, but palaeontologists were allowed to work on one of them and this commenced in 1990 after six to eight metres of gravel had been removed. The whole area of five acres was gridded into one metre squares. They found the remains of an ancient river bed which was thought to be a former course of the River Thames. This was full of bones and organic debris, the most common being Woolly Mammoth with tusks 9 feet long, the second

most common being the Bison. Lions were predators in the Thames Valley and Elephants and Hyenas roamed the forested area. There were four major glacial surges when warm weather animals were replaced by the Arctic Fox and the Woolly Rhino. The palaeontologists found 100 species of insects and Dr. Scott showed slides of tusks and jawbones over 200,000 years old. Axes and stone tools were also found. Work is now being continued at Cirencester and Abingdon.

Professor Crabbe from Reading University was the speaker on February 28th. His subject was entitled "Paradise Lost: Is the Coral Strand Losing its Beads?" and he spoke on the effect of the environment on coral reefs in the Atlantic/Caribbean and Indo/Pacific regions. He had been to the Underwater Marine Laboratory to study coral growth and explained the biology of the reef. The *El Nino* event in 1998 had raised sea temperatures off the Great Barrier Reef causing considerable bleaching of coral, but thankfully there has now been some recovery. Professor Crabbe also visited three sites in Indonesia where there are extensive reefs. At one site, Sampela, there is a significant trade going on with natives selling boat loads of coral. They even bomb the site for building purposes. Conservation is therefore a major factor. Overfishing, the *El Nino* effect and raised sea temperatures have caused considerable damage.

The final lecture of the season was given by Mr. Cyril Nash who spoke about "The Secret Life of the Dragonfly". He first became interested in this subject when he watched the amazing transformation which took place with the emergence of a dragonfly from the nymph. He was so fascinated that he tried to simulate conditions by having a tank filled with pure spring water with thoroughly clean and filtered sand and plants. We learned that dragonflies spend 95% of their lives in water. There were two main groups, the weak flying damselflies and the hawkers and darters. During its larval stage the dragonfly sheds its skin fifteen to twenty times, depending on the species.



Aeshna cyanea
Southern Hawker
nymph - shed skin

Development stopped during the winter but at the end of that period the light triggered off development once more. With the aid of slides Mr. Cyril Nash showed the wonderful transformation which takes place as the dragonfly goes through the metamorphosis process. Finally, the dragonfly produces enzymes which dissolve the skin and in a matter of hours it is ready to leave the water. It climbs up a stem, pumps air into its skin, flexes its muscles and joints and its skin begins to split, exposing its shimmering wings which, once open, never close again. Mr. Nash's final words were "that to be born once is amazing, but to be born a second time as a completely different animal is one of nature's miracles".



Aeshna mixta
Migrant Hawker Dragonfly

Members evening was on 28th March with 22 members present. The first speaker was Mrs Meryl Beek who showed slides of her recent visit to South Africa. She had visited Pilanesberg Park in Johannesburg where she had seen many Elephants, Hyenas, Zebra and Rhino. Then on to Cape Town and Table Mountain, which has more different species of flora than the whole of England. Mr. Alan Burt talked about a hen Pheasant with its chicks which had occupied his garden for several years before finally disappearing. He also gave an account of his fiendish methods of ridding his garden of Squirrels – not nice! Finally, Mr. Tony Rayner showed slides of the Estremadura area in central Spain where he saw Storks, Hoopoes and Cranes in abundance. He also saw a Black Vulture, the largest in Europe.

NEWSLETTER AND QUESTIONNAIRE

Tony Rayner

Many thanks to all those who completed the questionnaire. Key findings are as follows:-

1. There is support for a change of venue with on-site parking – you voted 3 to 1 on this. Support for change came especially from newer members.
2. By a small majority you voted in support of an out-of-town venue. Tilehurst members were among the supporters for change, whilst not surprisingly Reading members were against the idea. Once again there was strong support for change from newer members (those joining in the last ten years).
3. Members liked the facilities available at the Abbey Baptist Church. (Parking and access are the problems)
4. There was little support for a later start time for our meetings, but members wanted a prompt 7.30 start.
5. There was widespread appreciation for the winter talks programme. (Thanks Alan Burt)
6. There was widespread appreciation for our programme of outings. (Thanks Meryl, Ken et al.) Whilst individual members had ideas for change, there was no commonly held view on any of these changes.
7. Members were united in their satisfaction with information provided to them. I regard this as a tribute to *The Reading Naturalist* and to contributors including our secretary Cath Butcher. We cannot afford to be complacent, so am pleased to announce our website www.rdnhs.org.uk Thanks are due to Chris Raper for arranging and setting up this site.

The committee is already taking your views into account, and in any event the church are now insisting that we meet on an evening other than Thursday.

THE FISHLOCK PRIZE

Fishlock Prize has not been awarded this year.

MEMBERSHIP

Norman Hall

The following members joined in calendar year 2002:

Roger and Linda Allen
Dr. Jeremy Burchardt
Colin Dibb
Mrs June Gabriel
Dr Laurie & Jan Haseler

Graham Jones
Mrs Rosemary Nagle
Ted Nelson
Alan Parfitt

WEEDS AND ALIENS

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – by Rod d’Ayala

(Based on an illustrated lecture given on the 10th October 2002)

Preamble

The Presidential Address, a grand title, sounds like it should be an erudite, original and thought provoking lecture on a major issue of the day. It should inspire those present to carry great actions and feats, in turn leading to a continuation of the tradition ... with some members of the audience returning at a later date to give a similarly awe inspiring address themselves.

Alas, most of us are mere mortals capable of raising a slight titter or belly laugh, occasionally surprising somebody with a fact they didn’t know, or introduce them to a subject they had previously not really thought about very much.

WEEDS AND ALIENS

(With thanks to Sir Edward Salisbury for the use of the title of his famous book)

Native or Alien?

October 2002 saw the publication of the New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora. This massive book (and much smaller CDROM) catalogues the current distribution of all (or most) of the vascular plants found growing wild in the British Isles. For the purpose of this Atlas each species of plant has been allocated to one of three categories:

Native - species those that arrived by natural colonisation (1396 vascular plants)

Ancient introductions or “archaeophytes” – species introduced by man before AD 1500 (149 vascular plants)

More recent introductions or “neophytes” – species introduced by man after 1500 (1402 vascular plants)



An alien!

There is room for debate about which category some species fit into, however for those marginal species which category they are assigned to is not actually that important. What these simple statistics for vascular plants show is that we, i.e. *Homo sapiens*, have had an enormous impact on the distribution and type of species present in our small corner of the world. For example, the total number of native plants is less than the total number of introduced species (1396 and 1551) and most of the introduced species are of relatively recent origin (1402 compared with 149).

Many of our native species of plant are associated with natural or semi-natural habitats – e.g. coastal areas, woodlands, downland or mountain tops. Almost none of these habitats are pristine wilderness areas, entirely unaffected by the activities of man but they share one feature – they support communities dominated by a suite of native species and, to a greater or lesser extent, are driven by natural processes or human activities which mimic natural processes. Some of the species they support, especially in lowland inland habitats, are often more common and/or dominant than they ever were before man came along.

Most of our countryside is not natural. Although it still supports native species, those that are common and widespread are often generalists, i.e. those species able to cope with this much altered environment. Specialist species require niche habitats, which may have been lost entirely, or are much reduced and/or only occur in small isolated pockets. Even in untouched wilderness areas some of these specialist species would always have been rare, but the majority of them would have been much more common than today.

With man came the species that lived with him, some invited and others just hangers on. In our early history relatively few species came with us (in the case of plants these are the archaeophytes), but once

the world was opened up to trade, and the new world discovered, many more species arrived (in the case of plants: the neophytes).

These new species usually arrive without their natural control mechanisms (e.g. predators and parasites), and if conditions are suitable can, in the short or medium term at least, spread rapidly. After a period of colonisation, they may eventually live happily alongside the existing species adding to the diversity of species present, and have no detrimental impact on the community of species or habitat around them. Some can only survive in very specific conditions (e.g. green-house aliens), or specific parts of the country (for example, with just the right climate). They don't spread or cause any (apparent) problems but become interesting local features. However, some species become so dominant as to directly and/or indirectly outcompete and cause the decline or extinction of some of the original native species or habitats. The effects of these introduced species in combination with other changes such as technological improvements to farming and forestry, pollution and man-induced climate change – means that potentially some of our natives are in trouble.

Our vascular plant flora is richer than it has ever been, in terms of the number of species. But in other ways it is poorer, with some of our native species being pushed to the very edge of survival by the changing world around them.

As for vascular plants so other organisms - mosses, birds, amphibians, mammals etc. Alien species have been introduced and native species lost (sometimes deliberately persecuted to extinction e.g. the Wolf). Thus we have altered the distribution and abundance of native species – as well as bringing new species in. With the ease of world transport, the gates are wide open for more new species to invade the countryside and the city landscapes.

What is a 'weed'?

So we know what an alien is – but what is a weed? There is no simple technical definition, as for an alien, so I would suggest the following definitions.

Gardening definition – A weed in a garden is a plant in the wrong place, to be pulled up and composted, planted elsewhere or passed onto somebody else who likes it! Gardens are very artificial in nature consisting of a mixture of native and (many) alien species in unnatural species associations, conditions or habitats.

Conservation management definition – Conservation management is usually carried out on a bigger and/or “wilder” scale but the same principles apply; for example trees in heathlands may be unwanted and are controlled by appropriate site management e.g. grazing. (Some people get quite upset when a direct comparison is made between gardening and conservation management, but the two have similar aims – the maintenance of a certain community of plants and/or animals. In conservation management effort is directed to maintaining natural or semi-natural habitats and to a much greater extent working *with* nature.)

Agricultural definition - “Weeds” are traditionally thought of as the suite of (often annual) plants that rely on the regular disturbance of the soil to provide conditions for their seeds to germinate and are potentially able to compete with the crop being grown or to contaminate the harvested crop. In grasslands or fallow land, plants such as Thistles and Docks are the weeds. A cynical view of modern agriculture could be that these plants are only one of several “weeds” to be eradicated – along with hedges, birds, most invertebrates, most animals ... – in fact almost everything except the crop being grown! (Perhaps ultimately man himself with all the chemicals required to farm in this way!)

Philosophically, a weed to one person is a desirable species to another and just like beauty – weeds are “in the eye of the beholder”. Weeds, i.e. plants growing in the wrong place, are not always a problem and much of the human (especially modern) anxiety about them is a symptom of the peculiar way we view nature and the world around us – as something that we have to continually fight and be master of.

Weeds and/or aliens

Weeds (species) can be native or alien. Aliens can be desirable species as well as “weeds”. It all depends on who and where you are, and what you are trying to do.

A plant that most would agree is a weed and an alien, is Japanese Knotweed *Reynoutria japonica*. This plant was introduced as a garden plant. It escaped and has spread to such an extent that it can dominate whole valleys, especially wet places, outcompeting all other plants. It is very difficult to kill, even with modern herbicides lethal to most other plants. Himalayan Balsam *Impatiens glandulifera* can behave in a similar way, but in comparison is much less aggressive.



Impatiens glandulifera
Himalayan Balsam

For each real problem species there are usually many aliens which are not weeds or problems. In Prospect Park in Reading, around the edges of the pond can be found Purple Toothwort *Lathraea clandestina*, a small purple parasitic plant growing on and with Willows. It does not spread but stays



Eranthis hyemalis
Winter Aconite

within the confines of the pond. Naturalised garden escapes, often become cherished features – early flowering plants such as Snowdrop *Galanthus nivalis* and Winter Aconite *Eranthis hyemalis* are classic examples with perhaps the most famous show locally at Swyncombe Church. Fields full of Crocus *Crocus purpureus* or Fritillary *Fritillaria meleagris* (perhaps



Fritillaria meleagris
Snake's Head Fritillary

both aliens) have been venerated and protected, often over and above “ordinary” species rich meadows which have long been agriculturally improved. Old established useful medicinal plants still hang on in a few locations, such as Birthwort *Aristolochia clematitis* at old nunneries or monasteries (for example Godstow Nunnery near Oxford).

Arable Weeds or Arable Flowers

[“Weed” is derogatory, so the term “arable flowers” has been coined to create a better image and make them more respectable and sellable to the wider world beyond conservation.]



Agrostemma githago
Corn Cockle

One of the most rapidly declining group of plants, especially during the latter part of the twentieth century, have been the arable weeds including species such as Corn Cockle *Agrostemma githago*, Corn Marigold *Chrysanthemum segetum*, Weasel Snout *Misopates orontium*, Poppies *Papaver* sp., Shepherd's Needle *Scandix pecten-veneris* and Pheasant's Eye *Adonis annua*. Many of these are old introductions, archaeophytes, to the British Isles (“honourary natives”?). There is much irony in the situation, where even the species which would not be here without us, are now declining as we become ever more “efficient” managers of the landscape around us. In recent years conservationists have been trying to raise their profile and improve their future. More and more, agricultural environmental schemes designed to improve the wildlife friendliness of modern farms, are taking into account the needs of the historically much persecuted arable weeds.

Agricultural improvements have led to the increase in crop production but a decline in all of the wildlife associated with the farms. Herbicides, heavy use of fertilisers, changes in sowing times (with no period when fields remain unproductive) and improved seed cleaning have led to dramatic declines. One of the main changes is the increase in winter-sown crops at the expense of spring-sown crops. This has resulted in the decline of not only plants but also the other wildlife which depended on them. Fields full of plants through the winter provided a lot of food (seeds). Some weed plant species have thrived under these new regimes, especially those which can tolerate and take advantage of higher levels of fertilisers. (Ironically they may cause more problems than the original suite of weeds!)

Some arable flowers remain widespread, if not common – for example Common and Long-headed Poppies *Papaver rhoeas* and *P. dubium*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*, Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia* etc. Wherever fields or field margins are



Euphorbia helioscopia
Sun Spurge

disturbed, but not sprayed these type of species can be found. The best areas for arable weeds are light and/or well drained soils e.g. sandy soils which are favoured by the likes of Bugloss *Anchusa arvensis* and Corn Spurrey *Spergula arvensis*. In contrast, some species are close to, or believed to be extinct as wild plants. Thorowax *Bupleurum rotundifolium*, Corn Cockle and Corn Flower *Centaurea cyanus* are in this group.



Anagallis arvensis
Scarlet Pimpernel

It is easy to imagine annual plants as being unfussy, but like all plants some are generalists and others most definitely specialists. Some species seem to be confined to restricted locations – perhaps only growing in specific fields, or even specific field margins where conditions (soils and/or geology) are just right for them. The conversion of less productive arable land (usually those that are less fertile) to other uses, as part of agricultural improvements or agri-environment schemes) can run the risk of destroying some of the best arable flower sites. DEFRA, the government body in charge of agricultural policy is now aware of this and measures are being taken to incorporate arable “flowers” into agricultural planning.

Where are the Modern Weeds?

The modern landscape of Britain includes a lot of disturbed landscapes ideal for weeds. Small or annual plants require regular disturbance otherwise they are outcompeted by more robust and/or longer-lived plants as these habitats stabilise and become colonised by other plants. Thus abandoned land can be very rich wherever it is. Perhaps the successor to the arable fields of old, are the urban brown field sites such as cleared or derelict building sites, contaminated land, land fill sites and disused sewage works. These sites can be very rich in plants, with numerous species ideally suited to the habitat, many of them aliens. The less extreme climate of an urban city such as London allows species to grow that would not survive in the wider countryside. There are numerous garden escapes, immigrants from the port areas and escapees from commercial bird food mixes. In sewage works plants such as Tomatoes are common components, their seeds having arrived in the sewage itself. Among them will be some species once common in arable fields, such as Cornflowers, presumably garden escapes that have been re-introduced into these “new fields”.

Disused allotments if they are not developed, or tidied up, have a distinctive flora – often including fruit trees, Horseradish, Marigolds and Lupins (or other garden plants) as common components. The latter two species if present are often locally dominant in some parts of the site, outcompeting all other plants for many years. With scrub, bramble and rough grass they often form superb habitats (when compared with the sterile urban environment around them) for a whole range of species – but not being classic natural or semi-natural habitats their conservation interest receives little or no consideration when developments are planned.



Senecio squalidus
Oxford Ragwort

Modern urban streets have a flora of their own (though it is somewhat limited) – in cracks in pavements plants such as Chickweed *Stellaria media*, Canadian Fleabane *Inula canadensis*, or in parts of London Sumatran Fleabane *Conyza sumatrensis*, Oxford Ragwort *Senecio squalidus*, Gallant Soldier *Galinsoga ciliata*, Annual Mercury *Mercurialis annua* etc. can be found. Look down drains or on broken downpipes for native ferns such as Black Spleenwort *Asplenium adiantum-nigrum*, Hart’s-tongue Fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* and Wall Rue *Asplenium ruta-muraria*, often growing very happily.

Aquatic Plants

Aquatic habitats such as ponds are still a common feature of both urban and rural areas. Much altered by man and often artificial these habitats can support a suite of native plants, many of which have much wider distributions through their planting by man. A good example of this is Water Soldier *Stratiotes aloides*, probably native to East Anglia, but now widespread throughout England. It can be a prolific plant, which will take over ponds both small and large. (However, given that the native populations seem to be declining, perhaps its unnatural spread across England as a whole is not a bad thing?) Far worse and truly to be worried about, are the foreign species of plants introduced via garden ponds and fish tanks. These are some of the worst of the invasive



Crassula helmsii
Australian Stonecrop



Azolla filicioides
Water Fern

alien plant species, which without their natural control agents can literally smother all other plants. The worst offenders include Water Fern *Azolla filicioides*, Parrot's Feather *Myriophyllum aquaticum* (a relative of the native Water Milfoils) from South America), Canadian Pondweed *Elodea canadensis* and Australian Stonecrop (or New Zealand Pigmyweed) *Crassula helmsii*. The latter is perhaps the most invasive of all, and often difficult to eradicate. However the impact of all of them can be made less worse by encouraging good quantities of native plants (where appropriate), meaning there is less space for the foreigners to colonise, establish and therefore dominate.

Trees and Shrubs

Many of our attractive, species-rich habitats, such as grassland and heathland are open habitats with trees or shrubs being a potentially important but usually minor component of the habitat (in terms of area). In these circumstances trees and shrubs are often weeds, of the most persistent and difficult nature, which are kept at bay by ongoing management. Without this management, trees would be a major component of much of our lowland landscape. We have been brought up to venerate trees, especially Oaks so it often rather disconcerting to those new to conservation management, that so much effort is spent cutting them down (Oak included!).

Take a look at many tree planting schemes, and among the mix of species will be numerous alien species, as well as native species many of which are planted well outside their natural range and habitat type. Some of these can be problematic if they spread into the woods or other habitats nearby. Rhododendron, planted as cover for game birds, screening or landscaping has spread and become a major problem, often taking over the understorey of woods in acidic areas (e.g. Burnham Beeches) or other habitats (for example the cliffs on Lundy Island where it out competes the endemic Lundy Cabbage *Rhynchosinapis cheirranthos*). Sycamore *Acer pseudoplatanus* is very widely planted and naturalised – and some would say should be eradicated, while it is tolerated (even welcomed) by others. Walnut *Juglans regia* is a long established alien, which in good years provides a crop of nuts but seems to offend nobody. The British landscape has been dramatically altered in some parts by the planting of conifers from Europe or North America. The area covered is so large that in many ways they have become part of our ecology and cannot be dismissed as mere “aliens”, even on ecological grounds.



Rhododendron ponticum
Rhododendron

In maritime areas Sea Buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* (a native on the east coast of the UK) and Tamarisk *Tamarix gallica* (an alien) have been widely planted as windbreaks, being capable of withstanding salt-laden winds. Although it



Hippophae rhamnoides
Sea Buckthorn

is native, Sea Buckthorn can be a problem because of its ability to spread and impinge on “naturally” open habitats. Tamarisk, the alien species, perversely seems to cause no such problems!

Mammals

Our vascular plant flora is certainly confused, but what about other groups? The UK has relatively few mammals, naturally restricted to those that colonised before the land bridge closed at the end of the last ice age. Some of these we have already wiped out (Wolf, Beaver, Bear) and others have been pushed (for various reasons) to the farthest reaches (Wild Cat, Polecat, Otter) of the island. Only now are some of these beginning to re-establish. The Polecat has in the last few years re-established under its own steam, from its refuge in the west and occurs throughout Oxfordshire and into Berkshire.

Some of the most commonly observed mammals – Rabbit, Brown Rat, Muntjac and Fallow Deer are deliberate or accidental introductions. There are six species of deer in the UK, but only two are native, Red and Roe. The effect of this enormous number of deer on the reduced area of

woodland (especially high quality conservation woodland) is worrying. Woodland plants are being eaten off to such an extent that there have to be fears for their long term future – even unpalatable plants such as Bluebells and Herb Paris are eaten down to nothing in most years unless protected. There will be effects higher up the food chain as this damage continues. Traditional management such as coppicing is now impossible in some areas.



Oryctolagus cuniculus
Rabbit

One of the most familiar rural and urban mammals is the Grey Squirrel, an introduction from North America first released in the late 19th century which now extends over most of England and Wales and central Scotland. Only where the Grey has not established, does the native Red Squirrel still thrive (usually in areas dominated by large areas of conifer plantation). The larger Grey can outcompete the Red in the native deciduous woodlands, so it is reduced to surviving in the nutritionally poor conifer woods. There seems little chance of reversing the situation and if the Grey continues to expand the Red could be lost as a British species.

Predatory mammals have been much reduced by man, but at least one new one introduced. The North American Mink was bred for fur in commercial farms – some escaped, and others have been released. In the absence of Otters, Mink became the top predator in the river systems. Being relatively small, Mink can enter the burrows of Water Voles, which provide a convenient and easy to find meal. No other predatory mammal has ever operated in such a way in the UK. The Water Vole, once one of the most widespread mammals in the UK, has declined dramatically with pessimistic forecasts suggesting it could even become extinct. Already under pressure because of habitat loss and fragmentation, the Mink may be the death knell for the Water Vole. Now that the Otter is returning there is some sign of hope, with Mink apparently being displaced to other habitats. (There are recent Otter sightings in both Oxfordshire and Berkshire.) Unfortunately, for the majority of Water Voles this return will be too late.

There has recently been publicity about Hedgehogs introduced to a Scottish island to control pests such as slugs. Once introduced they bred very well and turned to easy food, which unfortunately included the eggs of the large number of nesting seabirds. The proposal to cull hedgehogs, an unnatural predator on the island, caused a furore. This is a very good example of how one misplaced act can wreak ecological chaos – and how the importance of such issues can be confused and diluted by other issues (in this case “cruelty to animals”), important in their own right but of less significance ecologically. Some introduced mammals have not persisted. The Coypu, a large rodent from South America bred for its fur, was accidentally introduced in the 1930’s (and became established in East Anglia and a

sewage works in Slough of all places!) After determined efforts it was eradicated (by trapping) in the early 1980's. I can remember seeing a dead animal in the winter of 1982 at Redgrave and South Lopham Fen (Norfolk / Suffolk border).

The result of all introductions is not always doom and gloom. The few Wallabies that roam the south part of the Chilterns (escapes from a private collection) do not do any (apparent) harm at the moment. However, if there were more of them and they actually acclimatised it could be a different story.

Birds

Take a walk in the countryside, and what do you see? In open countryside two of the most common birds are the Pheasant and Red-legged Partridge. Both species are aliens, maintained (often at unsustainable high densities) for only one reason: shooting. Historically, in the name of shooting all predators, potential or imagined, have been controlled, some to local extinction. To a lesser extent this control still happens today. However some shooting areas are maintained in a healthier ecological state, than the intensively farmed land around them, so there are potential benefits too.

Birds are mostly mobile species, so most changes are from natural fluctuations related to habitat changes (e.g. fluctuations in available food) in the UK or abroad. However some species have been introduced. The Little Owl is a well established bird which has apparently caused no problems. Canada Geese, another introduction, are now one of the most common birds on our rivers, and some would say are beginning to cause problems. More recently, Parakeets have become an established feature in and around London. It has been said by some that they cause problems because they have taken over the nest sites (holes in trees) used by other birds. (But, could it not be that there are actually many fewer old trees with suitable nest holes in our sanitised and safe world, kept free of dangerous old trees?)



Branta canadensis
Canada Goose

Conclusion

Most of the UK landscape is not natural. Probably all of it has been affected in some way (directly or indirectly) by our land management and other environmental practices. The species composition we have today reflects this land use. The species present, whether native or alien, also reflect what we have found to be useful or desirable, either now or in the past. There are many non-native species which have either been deliberately introduced, or found their own way into the wild (escapees or co-habitees with us).

Given the massive changes to our environment and species in the last century and before, it seems superfluous to worry about pure concepts such as native and alien, weed or useful. It is too late, to undo all the damage caused by badly judged introductions, and the unexpected side effects they have caused.

We need to accept some changes that have happened – they may not be desirable but they cannot be reversed. There is no point in trying to go back to some bygone era, for example when squirrels were only red. However, this does not mean that we should accept all the changes currently happening. Where possible the natives should be allowed to fight back, and many of them can do this best of all if we interfere less with them and where they live (though they may need a bit of a hand to start with). It would be good to have a few of our own old lost things back, once conditions are right again.

As stated in the lecture, perhaps the most alien species is ourselves, in terms of our behaviour. We seem unable to live on the earth (the only home we have) without despoiling it and potentially making it uninhabitable, for us and everything else we share it with.

SIX-SPOT BURNET MOTHS IN A TOWN GARDEN



The Wildflower Meadow

John & Margaret Notton

For many years we have been interested in living things, and especially insects. As may often be the case, our interest has progressed from collecting, to photography, and eventually to just watching and – hopefully – observing. It is surprising what can be seen in a perfectly ordinary 40x10 metre town-house garden. The garden is several hundred metres from the nearest open country. Not all of the sightings mentioned here happened this year, but some are repeated annually for our pleasure.

We have provided extra opportunities for insects by using part of our lawn as a wild flower “meadow”. Two roughly square patches, each with the largest dimension not more than six metres have become home to some surprising creatures. The grass is only cut once a year and the addition of a slowly rotting log has provided a regular, all-seasons home for frogs, for example. We have tried to provide a balance of different plants in our meadow. Some, such as Salad Burnet, have been all too successful. Ox-eye Daisy also seemed rampant initially, but is now a reasonable component. Fleabane and Field Scabious have been provided as extra nectar sources and Bird’s-foot Trefoil and Common Sorrel are potentially useful caterpillar food plants. Single plants of Meadow Sweet and Meadow Cranesbill add visual interest. In the nearby garden beds are several other more traditional nectar sources such as Marjoram, Red and white Valerian and, of course, *Buddleia davidii*. However, the difficulty this year has been to maintain the grass in any sort of condition. The relatively cool and drying weather in the spring did not help, as will be seen.

One of our success stories, already mentioned by the Recorder in the 2000 and 2001 *Naturalist*, has been the small colony of 6-Spot Burnet moths that has become established. Their bright colours make them look like little flowers in their own right as they nectar on real flowers. This year has been another good season for them, in spite of the poor grass growth alluded to earlier. Because of the wet weather in June, the larvae were somewhat later appearing on their food plant, the Bird’s-foot Trefoil. The first cocoons appeared early in July. Members will be familiar with their white or cream coloured spindle-shaped cocoons commonly attached to grass stems in real wildflower meadows around the countryside. In previous years, grass stems have been used quite freely in our meadow, but this year the grass stems have apparently been too weak, and only one larva actually used a single grass stem. As this one failed to hatch long after the rest had hatched, the cocoon was opened and we found that the larva had failed to pupate. Another larva found two grass stems in close contact and was able to bind them together for extra support. All the other cocoons we have been able to find this year used the more robust stems of Salad Burnet or Ox-eye Daisy, or else they wandered off the meadow completely and used the stems of garden plants instead. One pessimist used a 40mm galvanised steel pipe – part of our decorator’s tower – as a support!



6-Spot Burnet – larva



6-Spot Burnet
- Chrysalis

Whilst a certain amount of movement away from the food source may be normal as a dispersal mechanism, we would like to propose two possible reasons for this unusual behaviour. The first is that the larvae may have an innate ability to assess the stability of their support. Putting the cocoon reliably high up could be a protection against predation by insects and other creatures living at the roots of the plants. In other years we have found occasional 6-Spot Burnet cocoons eaten out by slugs or snails on stems bent



6-Spot Burnet on Scabious

over by the weight of water after rain. The second reason may be that the grass stems were damp when the larvae wanted to pupate. It is well known that moisture reduces the “stick-ability” of adhesives generally, which is why the instructions on the tube always require that “the surfaces to be joined must be clean and dry”. Caterpillar silk is not likely to be an exception to this rule. The alternative plants chosen by the larvae in this case all have more or less hairy stems, which would help to improve the chances of a good bond.

This year our first moth hatched on 18th July and the last recorded sighting was on the 6th August. Holidays interfered with possible sightings after this period. The daily records tot up to 39, but the largest number of individuals seen on any one day was five. On warm sunny days the moths flew freely and some dispersal was obviously occurring then. A total of 19 empty cocoons were recovered, including the failed pupa, although more could have been too well hidden to find. In addition, a cluster of yellow Braconid wasp cocoons was found on a grass stem. This was at an appropriate height above ground to suggest one more failed larva. It will be interesting to see if 18 individuals will be sufficient to sustain the colony for another year

NEW MEDITERRANEAN SNAILS ARRIVE IN BERKSHIRE

David Notton, Curator of Natural History, Reading Museum

Gardeners are advised to be on the lookout for a new snail, the Girdled Snail, *Hygromia cinctella* which is now spreading through Berkshire. The Girdled Snail, so-called because of the pale yellow line that runs around its edge, is an introduction, probably originally from the Mediterranean region.



Girdled Snails with a pound coin for scale

Girdled Snails were first recorded in Devon in the 1950's where they stayed more or less until the 1990's when widespread records were made for the rest of England and Wales, including Worcestershire in 1996, Surrey in 1998 and Cardiff and Gloucestershire in 2000. The snail's spread is thought to have been hastened by recent mild winters and by inadvertent human transportation of eggs or small snails with plants and soil. Other recent sightings near or in Berkshire include: Bicester, Oxon. 2002 (DGN), Beenham, West Berks (Mike Weideli, pers. comm.) and Crowthorne, East Berks, November 2002 (Rosemary Hill, pers. comm.). This species is likely to be under-recorded at present, and will certainly be found elsewhere in Berkshire inhabiting gardens and waste ground. The snails are most active after dark in damp weather, but can be found during the day in their hiding places, either at soil level or some distance above the ground on vegetation, walls or fences and could be found by anyone clearing gardens. Fortunately there is no evidence of Girdled Snails becoming a pest at present, at least no more so than the other smaller snails in gardens.

The Girdled Snail is easy to identify (see pictures above) it's 10-12 mm, or slightly less than half an inch across when fully grown, and as well as the yellow band mentioned above, the edge of the snail is keeled and there is only a very tiny hole (umbilicus) underneath. The most similar snail commonly found in gardens is the Strawberry Snail, *Trichia striolata*, which does not have a yellow band, has a rounded edge and has a large umbilicus. Anyone who requires confirmation, please capture your snail, and contact David Notton (contact details below). Genuine Berkshire specimens are needed for the Museum collection.

The Museum has a large shell collection including identified UK reference material available by appointment for examination by society members.

References

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VOLUNTEER AND FARMER ALLIANCE

Tony Rayner

For the past three years I have participated in this RSPB scheme. As a volunteer it is my task each year to survey the birdlife on a local farm. Farmers apply to join the scheme and the RSPB attempt to match a volunteer with each farm involved.

One key difference that distinguishes the scheme from others is that the volunteer is required to work closely with the landowner. Regular liaison with, and reporting to, the farmer provides an insight into conservation from a farming perspective. Great too to be on the spot where farming and conservation interests meet in a joint venture.

It is no part of the volunteer's brief to push environmental issues, but more to discover what the farmers want from the survey. Grey Partridges and Lapwings have so far been top of the farmers 'want to know' lists, with Magpies generally regarded as chief villains. No surprises here, but interest does extend to all species found on the farms.

An initial meeting is held with the farmer to discuss the farm layout, access, and usage of individual fields. Good preparation at this stage makes a vital difference.

The serious business of carrying out the required 3 or 4 survey visits can now begin. Having prayed for good weather, you set out at some unearthly hour – the RSPB are hugely optimistic in recommending a dawn start! In my experience a Spring morning, even at 7 a.m. can be teeth-shatteringly cold and sorting out all elements of the dawn chorus is my idea of masochistic overload. Armed with clipboard, bins and full survival gear for a six hour slog into the unknown, you are soon absorbed with the task in hand – to plot every bird and to record their various activities on the farm map.

Woe betide the surveyor concentrating wholly on the birds to the detriment of the planned route. Large featureless expanses can be especially tricky – imagine trying to plot the precise position of the Corn Bunting passing overhead when you are lost! Yet this problem pales into insignificance beside the situation that calls for full commando training. If I have one criticism of farmers, it lies in their apparent ignorance of what is involved in *walking* around their farm. Flooded gateways, wellington-sapping mud, waist high crops, and barbed wire fences pose no problem to the tractor driver – sadly the RSPB don't provide tractors.

It might come as a surprise to learn that despite everything the surveys are completed. Furthermore the number of species recorded per farm has been quite impressive, ranging from 47 to 60 for the three local farms surveyed to date. Highlights included nesting Red Kites, breeding pairs of Lapwing on two of the three farms surveyed, plenty of Skylarks, Whinchats, Yellow Wagtails, Corn Buntings, Yellowhammers, Sedge Warblers, the occasional Cuckoo and Turtle Dove, Nuthatches, Marsh Warblers and even a Wood Duck. So despite all the scare stories and statistics of falling numbers for many farmland birds, all is not yet lost. However it must be conceded that no Tree Sparrows were found on my three farms, and both House Sparrows and Starlings were scarce. The RSPB place all species in categories of conservation concern, and I find it disturbing to see that House Sparrows and Starlings are now in the top category for concern – populations of both having more than halved in the last 25 years. Even so 62% of farms surveyed up to 2001 had House Sparrows, and Starlings were found to be the most common bird.

Although the survey demands a keen focus on birds, a previously unrecorded mass of Green Hellebore *Helleborus viridis* was discovered on one of my farms. Both the farmer and BBOWT were notified.

The identity of the local farms surveyed is confidential, but suffice to say that two are north of Reading and one to the west. It might be argued that many participating farms have above average birdlife, but the scale is impressive – 850 U.K. farms surveyed in 2002. Not bad for a scheme which only began in 1999, started modestly in the Midlands Region of England, and was badly affected by Foot and Mouth in 2001. In the current year over 140 Midlands Region farms have registered for surveys, and the scheme now extends to the entire country save for the northernmost Scottish counties.



Euscorpium flavicaudis
European Scorpion

EUROPEAN SCORPION *EUSCORPIUS FLAVICAUDIS* IN OXFORDSHIRE

Rod d'Ayala

Wildlife enquiry services get lots of calls about rare and exotic sightings – Black Panthers, rare orchids in gardens, Great Crested Newts – almost invariably they turn out not to be real, or at best not verifiable. Life would certainly be more exciting if they were all genuine! In July 2002,

BBOWT received a call from a woman in Sonning Common, saying she had got, and caught, a scorpion in her garden. Despite a line of questioning designed to check and prove the identification wrong it seemed that she might just be right! So off we went to have a look.

Yes, sitting in an ice cream tub was a scorpion, approximately 4 cm. long. It looked just like the picture in the book – small and dark brown with black pincers and pale brown legs and sting. This was a harmless (to humans) European Scorpion, native to the European mainland but an introduced species in the UK. With confidence I picked it up, and transferred it to its travelling container. In doing so it stung me. This somewhat alarmed my wife and the good householder – but all was well. For the curious the sting felt just like somebody pricking you very quickly with a pin. It didn't hurt at all and produced no reaction whatsoever. (Despite trying to have some symptoms to show off, there were none!)

What do you do with a scorpion? It is not native and you can't release it into the wild, so a tank was purchased to keep it at home whilst the circumstances of its presence were investigated. Not too long after capture it (she) gave birth to about 30 very small white babies less than 1cm. long. (This explained her rather rotund condition.) The young scorpions huddled on her back for about 10 days, before leaving the safety of their mother and hiding in the bark litter in the tank. To avoid her eating all her offspring, which she would have done had she come across them, the small scorpions were separated out into their own tank.

Scorpions have no concept of a full stomach and will eat continually: it is said that they will eat until they literally burst! In captivity small European Scorpions such as this are easy to keep, by providing a regular supply of woodlice. Scorpions grab their prey with pincers, and immediately sting the struggling prey to subdue it – then eat the prey while holding it in their pincers. All that remains once the meal is over is a husk consisting of the outer skeleton. The scorpion then has a grooming session, either to clean itself, or to make sure nothing has been missed. The baby scorpions are identical in appearance and behaviour to their mother but eat very small invertebrates. When very small and still soft one of the babies was attacked (and killed) by a woodlouse, which bit off its tail (and therefore sting). Presumably the small scorpion could not have harmed the adult woodlouse, but it still triggered a defensive response. How does an Oxfordshire woodlouse know how to deal with a predator it has never seen?



Euscorpium flavicaudis
European Scorpion

On investigation, it appeared that the scorpion must have come into Britain about 18 months earlier, in packing cases from Italy (a neighbour of the finder had moved to the UK from Italy). For the captured female to be gravid, she must have had a male travelling companion. Does this mean there are a few more out there still? There are two well known established scorpion colonies in Britain – one is in Plymouth Docks and the other in Kent (also in docks) and probably others given the secretive nature of these inconspicuous animals. All these colonies have arisen from animals accidentally brought in with transported goods. Other single animals or small colonies have been found but have not persisted.

This is believed to be the first record of a scorpion being found in Oxfordshire. The nearest previous record is from Berkshire (Newbury).

Two Rare Fungi from Dry Sandford Pit BBOWT Reserve

Malcolm Storey

In Autumn 2002, I had agreed to carry out fungus survey work for BBOWT. Unfortunately, the season turned out to be very dry and I wasn't able to start until after the middle of October. By this time heavy frosts are an increasing danger and usually end the fungus season by the middle of November. (As it turned out, we had a frost-free November, and the fungi carried fruiting on until Christmas) Anyway, I visited Dry Sandford Pit BBOWT Reserve on the 23rd and 29th of October as part of the survey work. On each occasion an uncommon fungus was found.

Mycoaciella bispora (Stalp.) Erikss. & Ryvarden

Several patches of this uncommon resupinate tooth fungus were growing on a cut pole under bushes at Dry Sandford BBOWT Reserve (GR: SU467995) on 23 Oct 02. The pole was probably Alder, and was in a heap left over from building a raised walkway. It was in quite a damp location and other poles in the heap had growths of *Hypochnicium polonense* and nice fertile material of *Bulbillomyces farinosus*, both species which prefer wet habitats.

Mycoaciella bispora is a handsome tooth fungus; the fruitbody consists of evenly packed long graceful spines of a delicate shade of pale buff, hanging vertically from the undersurface of the wood. The spines are almost 1cm long, growing in patches 2-5cm in diameter. I have to admit I had difficulty identifying it and sent it off to Alick Henrici who immediately recognised it as *Mycoaciella bispora*, a species known from only a dozen or so collections in the UK. The dried material is in the Kew RBG(K) herbarium.



Mycoaciella bispora



Mycoaciella bispora - enlarged



Periconia shyamala - magnified

Periconia shyamala Roy

This was a black felty patch near the base of a dead bleached Nettle stem. Under the microscope it was composed of a mass of dark brown tree-trunks, tipped with whorls of short branches which produce round black spores: *Periconia*. This is a genus of

microfungi belonging to the "Dematiaceous Hyphomycetes". ("Hyphomycetes" is a technical term for moulds, and "Dematiaceous Hyphomycetes" are those moulds which have a bit of pigment – brown or black – somewhere.) There are several species of *Periconia*, including one or two that are very common on dead Nettle stems, but this one didn't look right. The spores were too large and although the fungus itself was black, it didn't grow from a blackened area on the surface of the stem. Again I was stumped and sent it to Paul Kirk at IMI. He identified it as *Periconia shyamala*. I had considered this species, but discounted it as it was reported on living *Manihot* (Cassava – the source of Tapioca) in the Solomon Islands, Ghana, India, New Hebrides, Sarawak, Sierra Leone, Uganda and Zambia: dead Nettle stem in England seemed an unlikely addition to this list! It has only one prior UK record which was at Slapton Lea in Devon where it was found during the extensive fungus recording of David Hawksworth and colleagues. The dried material is in the IMI herbarium.

Thanks to Alick Henrici and Paul Kirk for the identifications, BBOWT and the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for funding the work, and to BBOWT for permission to publish the above records.



Periconia shyamala
microscopy

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR BOTANY 2002

Janet Welsh

The records submitted this year are mostly from society walks and it was nice to see some new contributors.

The New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora arrived this autumn and weighed in at just under 10 pounds. It is a magnum opus of survey, acknowledging the contributions of over 1600 botanists and containing a wealth of detail, 10 km distribution maps, a description of habitat, distribution and index of change measured with reference to the previous Atlas which was organised in the 1950's and published in 1962.

As a measure of the total plant population in Britain and Ireland, we now have 1396 native species i.e. those which arrived by natural colonisation; 149 ancient introductions (e.g. the poppies and other weeds of cultivation), which were introduced by man before AD 1500; and 1402 species which have arrived since that date.

There is detailed analysis of change in relation to habitats. The lowland arable plants (e.g. Shepherd's Needle and Broad-fruited Cornsalad) show the greatest decline followed by lowland heath, calcareous grassland, mountain habitats and acid grassland. Those species with the least change come from the neutral grasslands, fens and marshes. This seems to contradict the estimates of the huge losses in neutral unimproved grasslands but it appears that species such as Great Burnet, Meadow Foxtail, Red Clover and Meadow Saxifrage are able to withstand lack of grazing and survive on field edges and verges. Species of urban habitats and improved grasslands are understandably increasing their range.

If you see anything unusual please include grid references if possible in your lists, this will make the data more helpful for any future compilation. Also it is useful to have some reference to the habitat and size of the population as this is may be relevant for less common plants.

Chromista (Algae)

Botrydium granulatum

28/09/02 Sulham Farm, on mud of dried pond in small copse just S of Sulham Woods SU649743, (MWS)



Botrydium granulatum (an alga)

Equisetopsida (Horsetails)

Equisetum fluviatile Water Horsetail

08/06/02 Ditch by small fen near Shiplake SU760775, (JW)

Appears to be locally uncommon.

Pteropsida (Ferns)

Polypodium interjectum Intermediate (or Western) Polypody

21/09/02 Yateley Common NHS walk (MKL)
A rare plant, other records have been from Eversley and Warburg.

Magnoliidae (Dicotyledons)

Ranunculaceae

Thalictrum flavum Common Meadow-rue

05/06/02 Thameside meadow at Henley (recognised through binoculars) SU771845, (MS)

08/06/02 Small area of tall fen near Shiplake SU760774, (SR/JW)

21/07/02 Wet depression near the Thames in Clifton Meadow. SU554955, (JW)

Papaveraceae

Papaver dubium Long-headed Poppy

07/08/02 Field edge near Hermitage SU503732, (MS/MB)

Most frequent on light soils, has declined generally with agricultural intensification.

Papaver argemone Prickly Poppy

07/08/02 Field edge near Hermitage SU503732, (MS/MB)

There are few recent records of this arable plant, which is susceptible to herbicides.

Urticaceae

Urtica urens Small Nettle
25/05/02 Aston Upthorpe Downs. (MB/MS)
Annual of cultivated and waste ground on light dry soils.



Papaver dubium
Long-headed Poppy

Caryophyllaceae

Cerastium arvense Field Mouse-ear
25/05/02 Frequent on the downs at Aston Upthorpe SU545827 (MS)

Cerastium semidecandrum Little Mouse-ear
40/05/02 Hitchcopse Pit Reserve, the south pit SU451995 (MWS).
An annual of dry, often acid soils, has not often been recorded in our area.

Scleranthus annuus ssp. annuus Annual Knawel
01/09/02 Greenham Common SU491649 (MWS).

A plant of disturbed sandy soil on heaths, commons and waste places, it has declined significantly according to the Atlas. Only the third entry in our records.

Stellaria palustris Marsh Stitchwort
21/09/02 Yateley Common. (MKL)
A fine plant, sadly shows a marked decline in the Atlas through loss of habitat in wet meadows.

Polygonaceae

Persicaria mitis Tasteless Water-pepper
19/09/02 Yateley Common (MKL)
A locally rare annual of wet places and cattle-trampled pastures. A comparison with the strong taste of Common Water-pepper *P. hydropiper*.

Clusiaceae

Hypericum humifusum Trailing St John's-wort
21/09/02 Wellington Country Park, car park. SU726627 (MWS)

Hypericum montanum Pale St John's-wort
07/09/02 Neglected grassland on the railway embankment at Purley SU657764 (MS)
This is locally uncommon and usually associated with old woodland.

Brassicaceae

**Bunias orientalis* Warty Cabbage
25/5/02 Aston Upthorpe Downs, edge of footpath. SU549841 (MB/MS)



Hypericum humifusum
Trailing St John's-wort

Cultivated in Britain by 1731, frequent in the early 1900s but has since declined. It is now favoured as a salad vegetable 'Turkish Rocket'.

Iberis amara Wild Candytuft
25/5/02 Bare patch by path Aston Upthorpe Downs SU544835 (MB/MS).
Now Nationally Scarce plant due to rapid decline. Virtually confined to the Berks Downs/Chilterns as a native.

Rosaceae

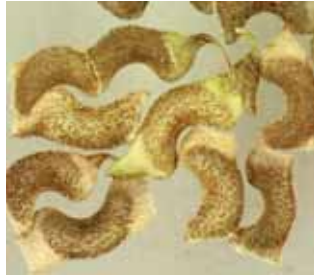
Prunus padus Bird Cherry
27/04/02 Dunstan Park, Thatcham. Well established in woodland, presumed introduction SU521683 (MWS)
A native constituent of northern, often wet woodlands and fen carr in East Anglia.



Prunus padus
Bird Cherry

Fabaceae

Hippocrepis comosa
Horseshoe Vetch
25/5/02 Aston
Upthorpe downs.
(MB)
Declinin native, on
dry calcareous
grassland. Prefers
open south facing
slopes and can
colonise bare soil.



Hippocrepis comosa
Horseshoe Vetch
(the ripe pod breaks into
horse-shoe-shaped segments
- hence the name)

Lythraceae

Lythrum portula Water-purslane
07/08/02 In a drying out pond by Oare Church
SU505740 (MS/MB).
An annual, it needs open ground to set seed.

Geraniaceae

Geranium rotundifolium Round-leaved Crane's-
bill
05/06/02 Hedgerow on the Remenham to Aston
NHS walk. (MB)
An example in the Atlas of a native species
apparently expanding its range from coastal
habitats to inland waste ground.

Apiaceae (Umbelliferae)

Oenanthe fistulosa Tubular Water-dropwort
08/06/02 Ditch by small fen near Shiplake
SU760775 (JW)
21/07/02 Wet depression in Clifton Meadow
SU554955 (JW)
The range of this species has appreciably
declined, apparently since the 1950's.

Scandix pecten-veneris Shepherd's-needle
25/5/02 'Quite a lot' by the rough ground near the
grain store, Aston Upthorpe Downs SU550844,
(GC/MS/CB).
This arable plant has declined so much it is now
Nationally Scarce.
MS recorded it previously
on the Fair Mile.

Rubiaceae

Sherardia arvensis Field
Madder
07/08/02 Field between
Hermitage and Oare.
SU508738 (MS/MB).
Few records in our area.



Sherardia arvensis Field Madder

Dipsacaceae

Succisa pratensis Devil's-bit Scabious
31/08/03 Grassland on Greenham Common
SU493648 (SR).
21/07/02 Very local near the pond in Clifton
Meadow SU554955 (JW).

Asteraceae

Achillea ptarmica Sneezewort
07/09/02 Meadow by River Thames at Purley.
SU646771 (MB/MS).
21/07/02 Wet depression near Clifton Meadow
SU554955 (JW).
Likes damp acid grassland, often an indication of
old established habitat.

Potamogetonaceae

Potamogeton polygonifolius Bog Pondweed
21/09/02 Shallow acid water in pond on Yateley
Heath, SU823596 (MKL).
Restricted distribution but may be locally
common in suitable habitats.

Lemnaceae

Lemna trisulca Ivy-leaved Duckweed
08/06/02 Ditch near Shiplake with *Lemna minor*
Common Duckweed, SU760775 (JW).
Uncommon.

Liliidae (Monocotyledons)

Cyperaceae (Sedges)

Carex nigra Common Sedge
08/06/02 Ditch margin beside tall fen near
Shiplake. SU760775
Not as common as the name suggests.

Carex panicea Carnation Sedge
25/05/02 Aston Upthorpe Downs (CB/MB/MS).

Carex distans Distant Sedge
21/09/02 Yateley Common Hants. Wet heath
near the pond at SU823596 (MKL).

A plant with two main
habitats, coastal
grasslands and wet
meadows inland on
mineral rich soils.

Poaceae (Grasses)

Agrostis curtisii Bristle
Bent
21/09/02 In profusion on
dry, acid heath on
Yateley Common.
SU831589 (MKL)

This species appears to be colonising from the south-west.

Hordeum secalinum
Meadow Barley
21/07/02 Clifton
Meadow SU554955
(JW)
Locally frequent in meadows along the Thames.



Anacamptis pyramidalis
Pyramidal Orchid

Festuca arundinaceae Tall Fescue
21/09/02 Thick sward on the central reservation on the A30 through Yateley Common SU835591 (CD)
21/05/02 Clifton Hampden Damp field by river Thames. (JW)
A vigorous tough grass, Colin Dibb tells me it was once cultivated for its chlorophyll for toothpaste manufacture.

Orchidaceae (Orchids)

Anacamptis pyramidalis Pyramidal Orchid
30/06/02 670 flowering plants on a roadside verge near Cholsey (Rd'A).
(How long did this count take Rod?)

Dactylorhiza incarnata Early Marsh Orchid
30/06/02 Three plants in garden at Cholsey SU592868 (TR)

Epipactis purpurata Violet Helleborine



Ophrys apifera
Bee Orchid

19/9/02 34 plants counted along the roadside ditch, Nippers Grove, SU682813 (JW)
2/8/02 6 plants on the roadbank in Kingwood Common SU698828 (JW)

Ophrys apifera Bee Orchid
30/06/02 51 plants, 12 flowered in garden at Cholsey SU592868 (TR)

NOTE All names are after Stace (1997).

Recent introductions are marked *

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks to the following for their contributions:-

Chris Bucke (CB), Colin Dibb (CD), Janet Welsh (JW), Michael Keith-Lucas (MKL), Martin Sell (MS), Malcolm Storey (MWS), Rod d'Ayala (Rd'A), Sally Rankin (SR), Tony Rayner (TR)

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The Flora of Berkshire

Alien Plants of the British Isles

The Flora of Oxfordshire

New Atlas of the British and Irish Flora

The New Flora of the British Isles

Scarce Plants in Britain.

THE NEW BERKSHIRE FLORA

Malcolm Storey

Prof Mick Crawley's forthcoming "Flora of Berkshire" is now with Imperial College Press undergoing the refereeing stage. Proofing will follow, so it will be possible to include records from the coming season. Mick would be pleased to receive records, especially additions to the county list for flowering plants, ferns, conifers, bryophytes, charophytes, fungi and lichens.

Prof MJ Crawley FRS, Imperial College, Silwood Park, Ascot, SL5 7PY

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR MYCOLOGY 2002

Malcolm Storey

This is my first report as Mycology Recorder for the Society, a title I shall always associate with Alan Brickstock. This year, the task is made doubly difficult by the paucity of records: not only are we missing Alan's contributions but also it was a very late fungus season.

When I first got seriously interested in fungi in the early 80's, the peak season was the two weeks: end of September/beginning of October. But the season has been getting later since then and now rarely gets going until October. In 2002 the rains didn't come until the middle of October and the season continued through November well into December. Unfortunately, the interesting species tend to be early rather than late – and by November all but the largest woodland species are buried under fallen leaves.

The rain apparently came too late for many species this year. In particular, mycorrhizal species were almost totally absent – *Russula* and *Lactarius* were found as single specimens if at all, and groups of *Cortinarius* were hardly seen. Only the late-season *Clitocybe*, *Cantharellula*, *Mycena* and *Hygrocybe* did well.

Anamorphic Fungi

Periconia shyamala Roy
29/10/02, Dry Sandford BBOWT Reserve, SU466995, on bleached dead stem of Nettle (*Urtica dioica*). See article page 21. (MWS)

Ascomycota

Dasyscyphus dumorum (Roberge ex Desm.) Massee
30/11/02, Greenham Common, SU510648, on dead bramble leaves on ground under bush. Leaf cultured in damp chamber for 10 days. The original sparse apothecia multiplied to form a nice photogenic colony. Apothecia tiny, quite tough, dark hairy, appearing greenish in some lights. (MWS)

Peziza repanda Pers.
17/2/02, Upper Basildon, SU587762, on damp mossy brickwork of garden wall. (MWS)

Basidiomycota

Ganodermatales

Ganoderma lucidum (Fr.) P. Karst Shining Bracket.
10/2/02, Frilsham Village Hall, SU547734, dead specimen in cleft in huge old fallen Beech log. Seen on same log 2/11/1997 (MWS)



Ganoderma lucidum
Shining Bracket

Ischnoderma benzoinum (Wahlenb.) P. Karst.
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627, on fallen conifer, Car Park (TVFG)

Schizophyllales

Mycoaciella bispora (Stalp.) Erikss. & Ryvarde
23/10/02, Dry Sandford BBOWT Reserve, SU467995, on decorticate pole (probably Alder) beside water. See article page 21. (MWS)

Polyporales

Faerberia carbonaria (Alb. & Schwein. ex Pers.) Pouzar
28/9/02, Fence Wood, SU515722, on bonfire site near top of hill (TVFG)



Faerberia carbonaria

Oxyporus populinus (Schumach. ex Fr.) Donk
20/10/02 Warburg Reserve, SU721879, on fallen tree, (JW).

Russulales

Lactarius vellereus (Fr.) Fr.
31/10/02, Nuney Green, SU672791, (TVFG).

Russula cyanoxantha var. *peltereaui*
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627, Car Park, (TVFG)

Russula densifolia (Secr.) Gillet
28/9/02, Fence Wood, SU57, (TVFG)

Russula parazurea J.Schaeff.
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627,
Car Park, (TVFG)

Russula subfoetens Smith ss J. Schaeffer
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627,
under Birch, Car Park (TVFG). This seems to be
the commonest ochre-coloured *Russula*.

Russula virescens (Schaeff. ex Zant.) Fr.
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627,
Car Park (TVFG).

Tricholomatales

Bolbitius reticulatus (Pers. ex Fr.) Ricken
5/10/02, Holly Wood, SU525700, on damp dead
wood (MWS)

Coprinus lagopides P. Karst.
28/9/02, Fence Wood, SU515722, on bonfire site
near top of hill (MWS)

Coprinus picaceus (Bull. ex Fr.) Gray
31/10/02, Nuney Green, SU672791, Oxford,
(TVFG).
9/11/02, Ashampstead Common, SU588751,
(TVFG).

Pleurotus dryinus (Pers. ex Fr.) P. Kumm.
5/10/02, Holly Wood, SU525700, damp wooded
hillside, on stump of same tree as 1/10/97 (MWS)

Melanotus horizontalis (Bull.) P.D.Orton
17/11/02, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, on old
ply-wood drawer in garden, Upper Bucklebury
(MWS)



Melanotus horizontalis

Asterophora lycoperdoides (Bull. ex Merat) Gray
21/9/02, Wellington Country Park, SU726627, on
this season's old *Russula*, Car Park. Parts of the
host *Russula* were still pale. (MWS)

CONTRIBUTORS

John Wheeey (JW), Malcolm Storey (MWS), Paul Cook (PEC), Rod d'Ayala (Rd'A), Thames Valley
Fungus Group (TVFG)

Thanks to BBOWT for permission to publish the records of *Mycoaciella bispora* and *Periconia shayalae*.

Clitocybe geotropa (Bull. ex St.-Amans) Quel.
17/11/02, Holly Wood, SU526696, Squat form, in
deep leaf litter, under Beech, Oak at roadside,
Holly Lane. (MWS)

A tall, elegant, late season species. This year
many were rather more squat.

Collybia racemosa (Pers. ex Fr.) Quel.
9/11/02, Ashampstead Common, SU588751,
(TVFG).

The 3rd record in our area of this Red-Databook
species. Probably more overlooked than rare.
The long, often trailing, grey stipe with side-
branches and tiny white cap is very distinctive,
but not immediately recognisable as a toadstool.

Marasmius bulliardii Quel.
9/11/02, Sulham Wood, SU647745, on fallen Oak
and Hawthorn leaves. Near bend in road. (MWS)
In wet conditions, the stipe forms small pileoli, a
bit like *Collybia racemosa*, but these are miniature
caps with differentiated cuticle.

Mycena adscendens (= *Mycena tenerrima*)
9/11/02, Ashampstead Common, SU588751,
(TVFG).

Mycena arcangeliana Bres.
20/10/02, Warburg Reserve, SU721879, on
Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) wood, (JW).

Mycena crocata (Schrader ex Fr.) P. Kumm.
31/10/02 Nuney Green, SU672791, TVFG.
9/11/02 Ashampstead Common, SU588751,
(TVFG).
20/10/02, Warburg Reserve, SU721879, on cut
Beech *Fagus sylvatica* log, (JW)

Rhodotus palmatus (Bull. ex Fr.) Maire
20/10/02, Warburg Reserve, SU721879, (Rd'A)

Hericiales

Mucronella calva var. *aggregata* (Fr.) Quelet
Pamber Forest, SU618617, on Pine (*Pinus*) bark,
30/9/02, (PEC)

Hymenochaetales

Hymenochaete corrugata (Fr.) Lev.
30/9/02, Pamber Forest, SU618617, on fallen,
dead Alder (*Alnus glutinosa*) and attached dead
Hawthorn (*Crataegus monogyna*) branch, (PEC).

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR ENTOMOLOGY and other INVERTEBRATES 2002

David G. Notton

Curator of Natural History, Reading Museum and Archive Service

Readers will note that this year's report includes all invertebrates, not just insects – thanks to Malcolm Storey for the Ash-grey Slug, the first non-insect record this year – I hope you will all be looking out for the girdled snail *Hygromia cinctella* so I can add that to next year's list. Special thanks are due to Hugh Carter for his previous stint with the 'Other Invertebrates', Hugh deserves our congratulations as he has been submitting recorder's reports for different groups since 1966!

The order of families and nomenclature used is that given in the standard Royal Entomological Society checklists supplemented by Bradley and Fletcher for the Lepidoptera. Records presented are selected and edited: full details of all records submitted are available for examination on application to the Recorder at the address above. It is encouraged that voucher specimens are retained or deposited with the Museum for critical species.

In addition to the records presented below, Berkshire moth enthusiasts are alerted to the publication of 'Moths of Bracknell' by the late M.J.Dumbleton, on the society's website www.rdnhs.org.uk Thanks are due to Malcolm for undertaking the tedious job of digitisation and to Mrs Dumbleton and Reading Museum Service for making the manuscript available. Paper copies are available from Malcolm for anyone without web access. Selected specimens from the Dumbleton Collection have been acquired by Reading Museum Service and may be examined by appointment with the Curator of Natural History.

INSECTA

Odonata

Platycnemis pennipes (Platycnemididae) White-legged Damselfly. Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02 (DGN).

Agrion splendens (Agrionidae) Banded Demoiselle. Red Cow Cottage, 1-2.vi and 29.vii.02 (TR); Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02 (DGN).



Agrion splendens
Banded Demoiselle

Anax imperator (Aeshnidae) Emperor. Red Cow Cottage, 22.v, 15.vii, 26.vii, 23.viii and 16.x.02 (TR).

Libellula depressa (Libellulidae) Broad-bodied Chaser. Red Cow Cottage, 1.vi, 26-27.vi.02 (TR).

Orthoptera

Conocephalus discolor: (Conocephalidae) Long-Winged Conehead. Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02, a female (DGN)

Lepidoptera

Hepialus humuli humuli (Hepialidae) Ghost Swift. Red Cow Cottage, between 19.vi and 13.vii.02 (TR).

Zygaena filipendulae anglicola (Zygaenidae) Six-spot Burnet. Red Cow Cottage, large numbers for the second year running, (TR).

Erynnis tages (Hesperiidae) Dingy Skipper. Red Cow Cottage, 17.v.02 (TR).

Colias croceus (Pieridae) Clouded Yellow. Red Cow Cottage, a mating pair on 15.viii.02 (TR).

Lycaena phlaeas (Lycaenidae) Small Copper. Red Cow Cottage, recorded on 12 days between 2.v and 2.vi.02 a further 40 days between 22.vii and 18.x.02, with peak count of 10 on 30.vii (TR).

Aricia agestis Brown Argus. Red Cow Cottage, recorded on 7 days between 25.v and 16.vi.02 and a further 18 days between 27.vii and 2.ix.02 with peak count of 7 on 26.viii (TR).

Celastrina argiolus Holly Blue. Red Cow Cottage, recorded on 39 days between 26.iii and 14.vi.02 and a further 17 days between 5.vii and 19.viii.02 (TR). A good year for this species.

Melanargia galathea (Satyridae) Marbled White. Red Cow Cottage, recorded on 35 days from 23.vi to 12.viii.02, with peak count of 112 on 13.vii (TR).

Drepana binaria (Drepanidae) Oak Hook-tip. Red Cow Cottage, 17-18.viii.02 (TR).

Cyclophora punctaria (Geometridae) Maiden's Blush. Red Cow Cottage, 20.viii and 26.viii.02 (TR); Upper Bucklebury, 18.v.02, in Heath trap (MWS).

Lampropteryx suffumata Water Carpet. Upper Bucklebury, 10.v.02, in Heath Trap (MWS).

Plemyria rubiginata Blue-bordered Carpet. Emmer Green, 18.vi.02, at light (JHFN).

Eupethecia venosata venosata Netted Pug. Red Cow Cottage, 6.vi.02 (TR).

Aplocera efformata Lesser Treble-bar. Red Cow Cottage, 17.viii, 23.viii, 5.ix and 17.ix.02 (TR).

Ligdia adustata Scorched Carpet. Upper Bucklebury, 4.v.02, at lighted window, in evening (MWS).

Semiothisa notata Peacock Moth. Red Cow Cottage, 14.viii and 20.viii.02 (TR).

Selenia tetralunaria Purple Thorn. Upper Bucklebury, 6.iv.02, in Heath trap (MWS).

Serraca punctinalis Pale Oak Beauty. Upper Bucklebury, 21.v.02 & 9.vi.02, in Heath trap (MWS).

Ectropis consonaria Square Spot. Upper Bucklebury, 11.v.02, in Heath Trap (MWS).

Ectropis extersaria Brindled White-spot. Upper Bucklebury, 23.v.02, in long grass near Heath trap (MWS).

Aethalura punctulata Grey Birch. Upper Bucklebury, 17-18.v.02, in Heath Trap (MWS).

Smerinthus ocellata (Sphingidae) Eyed hawk. Red Cow Cottage, 15.vi.02 (TR).

Deilephila porcellus Small Elephant Hawk. Red Cow Cottage, recorded on 11 days between 23.v and 13.vii.02, numbers possibly due to large

amounts of Ladies' Bedstraw *Galium verum* in meadow (TR).



Cyclophora punctaria Maiden's Blush



Clostera curtula Chocolate Tip

Ptilodontella cucullina (Notodontidae) Maple Prominent. Emmer Green, 18.vi.02, at light (JHFN).

Clostera curtula Chocolate Tip. Upper Bucklebury, 18.v.02, in Heath trap (MWS).

Phragmatobia fuliginosa (Arctiidae) Ruby Tiger. Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02 (DGN)

Callimorpha dominula Scarlet Tiger. Red Cow Cottage, 15.vii.02 (TR).

Ceramica pisi (Noctuidae) Broom Moth. Greenham Common, 31.viii.02 & 1.ix.02, larvae on Lesser Knapweed stem (MWS).

Xanthia citrigo Orange Sallow. Red Cow Cottage, 1.x.02 (TR).

Mormo maura Old Lady. Red Cow Cottage, 28.viii.02 (TR).

Panemeria tenebrata Small Yellow Underwing. Hockett Field, 9.v.02 (MWS).

Catacola nupta Red Underwing. Red Cow Cottage, at rest on walls 17.viii, 20.viii and 13.ix.02 (TR).

Rivula sericealis Straw Dot. Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02, in numbers resting on grass during the day (DGN).

Hypena rostralis Buttoned Snout. Red Cow Cottage, flying in the house 23.xii.02, presumably awakened from hibernation (TR). Emmer Green, 18.vi.02, at light (JHFN).

Coleoptera

Carabus auratus (Carabidae) Golden Gardener. Reading, 3.vii. 01 in urban residential area, nocturnal in dark alleyway, also resting on vertical brick wall (TDH). This colony was recorded in 1962 and is clearly well established. (Price, A. 1969. Ent. Mon. Mag. (1968) 104:229).

Enochrus isotae (Hydrophilidae). Ot Moor, 22.ii.01, in flood debris beside pond in unimproved grassland (TDH).

Aeletes atomarius (Histeridae). Burnham Beeches, 2.xii.01, extracted by Tullgren funnel from old ant nest inside fallen hollow Beech branch in deciduous woodland (TDH).

Myrmetes piceus (Histeridae). Burnham Beeches, 2.xii.01, extracted by Tullgren funnel from old ant nest inside fallen hollow Beech branch in deciduous woodland (TDH).

Leiodes litura (Leiodidae). Near Hitchcose Pit, 24.xi.01, general sweeping in copse of Elm trees. (TDH).

Platystethus nodifrons (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Ot Moor, 22.ii.01, In flood debris in ditch in area of unimproved grassland (TDH).

Euaesthetus bipunctatus (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Ot Moor, 22.ii.01, In flood debris beside pond in unimproved grassland (TDH).

Quedius brevis (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Burnham Beeches, 2.xii.01, extracted by Tullgren funnel from old ant nest in fallen hollow Beech branch, in woodland (TDH).

Leptusa ruficollis (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Pamber Forest, 22.ix.01, beating oak in Oak woodland (TDH).

Atheta (Philhygra) debilis (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Ot Moor, 22.ii.01, under bark of Willow log in water filled ditch in area of unimproved grassland (TDH).

Atheta (Anopleta) corvina (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Windsor Forest, 17.xi.01, In Beefsteak Fungus *Fistulina hepatica* on Oak tree (TDH).

Calodera uliginosa (Staphylinidae) a rove beetle. Ot Moor, 22.ii.01, in flood debris beside pond in unimproved grassland (TDH).

Lucanus cervus (Lucanidae) Stag Beetle. Purley, 26.vi.02, one female in garden (KT); Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey, 29+ individuals between 31.v and 7.viii.02, including some fighting males (TR).

Dorcus parallelipedus (Lucanidae) Lesser Stag Beetle. Red Cow Cottage, 18.vi.02 (TR).



Dorcus parallelipedus
Lesser Stag Beetle

Amphimallon solstitialis Summer Chafer. Red Cow Cottage, June-July, (TR).

Melolontha melolontha Cockchafer. Red Cow Cottage, numerous, between 24.iv and 2.vi.02, some in moth trap (TR).

Malthinus balteatus (Cantharidae) a soldier beetle. Near Gatehampton Manor, Goring, 1.vii.01, beaten from hazel at edge of Yew woodland (TDH).

Ptinus sexpunctatus (Ptinidae) Upper Bucklebury, 20.iv.02, on outside of house wall with partially eaten dead Centipede (MWS). I find this small beetle indoors nearly every spring; it is said to be associated with mining bees – we have masonry bees (MWS).



Ptinus sexpunctatus

Monotoma conicicollis (Rhizophagidae). Burnham Beeches, 2.xii.01, extracted by Tullgren funnel from old ant nest in fallen hollow Beech branch, in woodland (TDH).

Cryptamorpha desjardinsi (Silvanidae). Wyld Court, near Hampstead Norris, 6.v.01, under peeling stem sheaths of banana plant in tropical greenhouse (TDH).

Abdera quadrifasciata (Melandryidae). Basildon Park, 5.vii.01, beaten from dead branch on living Oak in deciduous wood (TDH).

Zeugophora subspinosa (Chrysomelidae) a leaf beetle. Pamber Forest, 22.ix.01, beaten from aspen in mixed deciduous wood (TDH).

Cassida prasina (Chrysomelidae) a leaf beetle. Aston Rowant NNR, 4.i.01, in moss on calcareous grassland (TDH).

Rhynchites olivaceus (Atellabidae) a weevil. Basildon Park 28.iv.01, resting on leaf of ash sapling in deciduous wood (TDH).

Apion urticarium (Apionidae) a weevil. Near Wroxhills Wood, near Goring 13.x.01, beaten from Stinging Nettles *Urtica dioica* at edge of woodland (TDH).

Apion fuscirostre (Apionidae) a weevil. Basildon Park 28.iv.01, beaten from Broom *Sarothamnus scoparius* in area of Gorse scrub in parkland (TDH).

Apion cerdo (Apionidae) a weevil. Near Ardley, Oxon 22.vi.01, obtained by general sweeping of grassland flora on limestone railway embarkment (TDH).

Magdalis barbicornis (Curculionidae) a weevil. Quarry near Ardley, Oxon 22.vi.01, beaten from willow on limestone railway embarkment (TDH).

Magdalis ruficornis (Curculionidae) a weevil. Near Ardley, Oxon 22.vi.01, beaten from hawthorn on limestone railway embarkment (TDH).

Anthonomus bituberculatus (Curculionidae) a weevil. Windsor Forest 17.xi.01, beaten from dead branch of Oak in open woodland (TDH).

Anthonomus bituberculatus (Curculionidae) a weevil. Hitchcopse Pit 24.xi.01, general beating of Oak and Hawthorn in hedge at edge of disused sand pit (TDH).

Hymenoptera

Tenthredo scrophulariae (Tenthredinidae) Figwort Sawfly. Coley Meadows, 3.viii.02, on Common Figwort, *Scrophularia nodosa* (DGN)

Vespa crabro (Vespidae) Hornet. Upper Bucklebury, 15.vi.02, in garage (MWS). For several years I thought I saw one at a distance a few times each spring, but this time I got close enough to be absolutely sure. In flight the sound they make is much more Harley-Davidson (aka lawnmower engine) than a queen wasp! (MWS).

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(JHFN) John Notton; (KHG) Ken Grinstead; (KT) Ken Thomas; (MWS) Malcolm Storey; (TDH) Tom Harrison; (TR) Tony Rayner.

Diptera

Hartigiola annulipes (Cecidomyiidae) a gall midge. Ashampstead Common, galls numerous on leaves of Beech 9.xi.02 (KHG).

Psychoda surcoufi (Psychodidae) A moth fly. Upper Bucklebury, 24.xi.02, females and males on plastic compost bins (MWS). The subgenital plate of one of the females was heart-shaped with diverging lobes and sensory tufts near base. The gonostyli of the males had the base swollen and the tip tapering to a swollen point. Apparently very rare when Freeman wrote his 1960 monograph, it is now much more common – perhaps due to the increase in plastic dustbins! (MWS).

Asilus crabroniformis (Asilidae) Hornet Robberfly. Red Cow Cottage, 68 sightings between 25.vii and 7.ix.02 (TR).

Volucella zonaria (Syrphidae) Hornet Hoverfly. Central Reading, puparia found in garden 18.vi.02, presumably having been scavenging in a wasp nest in the roof of an adjacent house, six imagines emerged 19-21.vi.02. (DN). Vouchers in Reading Museum Service collection.

Phytomyza hellebori (Agromyzidae) Hellebore leaf-mining fly. Emmer Green, 4.iv.02, leaf mines on Stinking Hellebore *Helleborus foetidus* (JHFN). Flies and mines in Reading Museum Service collection.

MOLLUSCA

Gastropoda

Limax cinereoniger (Limacidae) Ash-grey Slug. Bucklebury Lower Common, 23.iii.02, between the mounds (MWS).



Limax cinereoniger Ash-grey Slug - sole

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR VERTEBRATES 2002

Tony Rayner

Hugh Carter has been our recorder for vertebrates since the mid 1960's. Many thanks to Hugh for this remarkable contribution – a hard act to follow. It will be apparent from reading the records that follow, that a network of recorders needs to be re-established. Too high a proportion of the records are from my own patch and many of these lack specific dates – at the time it was not anticipated that I would be a recorder.

With the help of members I hope to do better in 2003. To young readers of the *Reading Naturalist* in particular, I would say it would be great to receive your notes of observations made during 2003. The following records are mine from Red Cow, Cholsey unless stated otherwise:-

PISCES

No records received.

AMPHIBIA

Bufo bufo Toad

For the first year since 1986 when my records began, there were no records.

Triturus vulgaris Smooth Newt

Present in garden ponds through the year.

Rana temporaria Frog

Just two balls of spawn produced on 11/3/02. (previous years average approx. 30 balls)
One red adult seen on 3/3/02 and again in April, Another on 9/7/02. Easily the worst recorded year for this species.
Spawning took place on 10/3/02 in a Park Lane, Tilehurst garden - this was about two weeks later than usual.(CD)

REPTILIA

Lacerta vivipara Common Lizard

One on 11/7/02, another on 28/9/02. (9 sightings in 2001, none previously since records kept from 1986)

Anguis fragilis Slow-worm

Recorded on 86 days between 24/3/02 and 21/9/02. Matings observed on 14/5/02 (from at least 11.10 to 14.40 hrs), on 15/5/02 at 15.20, on 17/5/02 at 17.15, and on 19/5/02 at 19.00. Successful breeding was assumed from obviously pregnant females re-appearing as much slimmer individuals a few days later. Also the presence of first year individuals suggested successful breeding in 2001. The maximum number of individuals seen was 5 on several dates from May to August. The first shed skin ever found on the site was on 11/6/02 under a sheet together with 4 individuals.

In a Wokingham garden (RG31) during November 2002 three were found in a compost heap in well developed tunnels about 30cm from

the surface. They were transferred to another compost heap in the same garden. (CD)

Natrix natrix Grass Snake

Recorded on 89 days between 23/3/02 and 30/9/02. Limited evidence of breeding, just a handful of newborn snakes seen. Overall the poorest year for sightings since 1994, this probably related to the crash in the Frog population on site.

In middle of Blagrove Lane, Caversham, basking in sunshine, 5/7/02, partially coiled but seemed to be 2½ to 3ft long. (VM)

CHIROPTERA

Pipistrellus pipistrellus Pipistrelle Bat

Small increase in resident population, but maximum count still only six. Also regularly seen at Cholsey Marsh.

Myotis daubentoni Daubenton's Bat

Seen and heard low over the Thames at Cholsey Marsh on 11/6/02 and 17/7/02 and at least two other occasions.

Nyctalus noctula Noctule Bat

One over Red Cow on 11/6/02 at 21.50. One seen and heard at Cholsey Marsh on 11/6/02.

Eptesicus serotinus Serotine Bat

Recorded at Cholsey Marsh in July (RT)

INSECTIVORA

Erinaceus europaeus Hedgehog

One corpse, but no live records. An unthinkable situation a few years ago.

Sorex araneus Common Shrew

Commonly seen over the site through the year. Probably a slight increase in numbers compared to previous years.

Talpa europaea Mole

Continues to be only an occasional visitor to Red Cow. Many fresh molehills on Cholsey Marsh beside the Thames on 23/12/02.

CARNIVORA

Meles meles Badger

Evidence of visits by this animal in previous years, but 2001/2 produced the first sightings on the site. Young were seen once, and heard on another occasion providing evidence of breeding nearby. It is suspected that the presence of this animal may be part of the cause for the sharp fall in Hedgehog sightings in 2002. Records as follows:- 7/11/01 adult crossing drive at 19.00 hrs.(CMTR), 8/3/02 adult male crossing drive at 23.00 hrs (Rd'A), 18/3/02 adult crossing drive (RR), 11/7/02 two cubs entering meadow at 22.00 (RR/TR), cubs heard near meadow (RR/TR) - July date not recorded.

Mustela nivalis Weasel

Freshly killed Field Voles under a sheet on 25/3/02, typical sign of a Weasel. Similar kills in 2001 including one with a Weasel caught in the act. Several sightings of 3 young in 2001.

Mustela putorius Polecat

Sightings at Nettlebed (by the garage), at Bix (by the Fox – former pub), and one dead beside the road between Streatley and Blewbury. No dates for these 2002 records. (Rd'A)

Vulpes vulpes Fox

No sightings, but plenty of evidence of regular visits.

ARTIODACTYLA

Muntiacus muntjak

Muntjac

One or two seen frequently throughout the year. Records include: one on 3/4/02 at 18.30 hrs, one on 7/5/02 at 14.00hrs, one on 6/6/02 at 12.00 hrs, another on 16/6/02 at 6.00 hrs – all just standing on the drive.



Muntiacus muntjak Muntjac - skull

One fawn raised in neighbouring Cholsey garden. My first sighting ever at Cholsey Marsh, one on 23/4/02 at mid-day beside the older scrape.

LAGOMORPHA

Lepus capensis Brown Hare

One recorded on 10/1/02 at dusk, another on 11/9/02 in mid afternoon. In the previous 8 years there have been just 4 records.

Oryctolagus cuniculus Rabbit

Nest of young discovered in old compost heap in the Spring. Otherwise very few records.

RODENTIA

Sciurus carolinensis Grey Squirrel

Common on site, but less so since protected bird feeders replaced those raided by these rodents.

Rattus norvegicus Brown Rat

Thankfully sightings this year restricted to the immediate period following harvesting on neighbouring farm.

Apodemus sylvaticus Wood Mouse

Not regularly seen, but thought to be common on the site. One nest of live young found.

Microtus agrestis Field Vole

Common again this year, several nests of live young found. Nest of young plus adults found freshly-killed on 25/3/02

Clethrionomys glareolus Bank Vole

Almost as common as *Microtus agrestis*, several nests of live young.

Arvicola terrestris Water Vole

No records despite extensive walking close to BBOWT project area near North Moreton, Oxfordshire.

I wish to thank the following contributors: Colin Dibb (CD), Chris Raper (CMTR), Rod d'Ayala (Rd'A), Ro Rayner (RR), Reg Tipping (RT) and Vivienne Murphy (VM)

THE WEATHER AT READING DURING 2002

Ken Spiers

Department of Meteorology, University of Reading

The year was a reasonably warm one, with the mean temperature being the sixth highest in the last fifteen years. The lack of any real cold weather saw the number of air frosts at their lowest since 1997 and for the first time since before 1955, no snowfall was recorded at the met-site. August was the warmest month and also the driest; it was also the sunniest of the summer months. Together with September, which was the second driest month of the year, produced a very pleasant late summer. This fine weather carried on into October, however from the 11th onwards there was a dramatic change. The rest of October was very wet, November was the wettest month of the year and December was also very wet. Once again there was flooding locally in and around the usual places. The total rainfall for the year was the highest since the year 2000 and the seventh highest since 1921. It is also a continuation of a trend of very high annual rainfall totals starting from 1998. It is worth noting that for the first time since sunshine records were first kept in 1956, April was the sunniest month of the year.

The first week of **January** saw cold, dry and sunny conditions. During this period a minimum temperature of -8.0°C was recorded; this was the lowest temperature since 1987. However, as the high pressure responsible for the cold weather moved away, it allowed more unsettled weather in from the west. From the 17th onwards every day recorded rain, very little sunshine was recorded making it the dullest January since 1996. Temperatures began to rise as the month progressed, culminating on the 29th, when a reading of 14.3°C was recorded, the highest temperature for four years.

February started very stormy and wet, with winds strong at times, with temperatures above average. A gust of 56 mph was recorded on the 2nd, the highest since 1997. At the start of the third week high pressure began to establish itself to the north of the British Isle's. This was the start of a short cool period of weather, accompanied by frosts at night and very sunny days. On the 16th 9.1 hours of sunshine was recorded, the highest value for four years. As the high pressure moved away it was replaced by more unsettled weather similar to what was experienced during the start of the month. Temperatures remained high, with the mean for the month the highest since 1961 and the fourth highest since 1921.

After a cool start to **March**, temperatures began to rise, sunshine was around average for the time of year and it was very dry. During the middle of the month it became unsettled, with depressions and associated fronts sweeping across the country. Rainfall was moderate to heavy at times, however temperatures overall remained above average. The last part of the month saw high pressure dominating, giving us dry and very sunny conditions, with night frosts. Although it was one of the cooler March months in the last ten years, the mean was still 1.2°C above the long-term average, emphasising how temperatures have increased in the last decade.

April was a very fine month, very sunny throughout, with high day-time temperatures early and late in the month. Sunshine was the main feature of the month, with over two hundred hours being recorded, the first time since 1997. It was also the sunniest April since 1984 and the third sunniest since sunshine records were first started in 1956. The 25th was the first day to record any rainfall, ending a period thirty-five days, starting on the 21st March, with only four millimetres being recorded in that time. This helped to make this month the driest since 1997.

May started very sunny and dry, with pressure rising, this produced clear periods at nighttime, giving rise to ground frosts. The second week was more unsettled and dull, with temperatures below average. It was not until the third week when the weather became more spring like, with temperatures well into the twenties. However, by the last week of the month it became extremely wet, with temperatures falling back to their early month levels. As a result of the very few warm days, the mean temperature for the month was the lowest since 1996.

June was a disappointing early summer month overall. The first half dull, temperatures below average and very wet at times and the second half dry warmer and very sunny. There was no prolonged spell of what could be classed as fine summer weather, as a result the mean temperature for the month was

the lowest since 1991. In fact it was the lowest mean temperature for any summer month (June, July and August) since the year 1991.

July started very wet and dull. Temperatures were below average, with every day recording rainfall, which merged to give longer periods of rain, heavy at times. By the 13th high pressure began to influence the weather, with temperatures rising: a dry spell lasting seventeen days started, ending on the 29th. There were some very warm days during this period, culminating on the 29th when a maximum temperature of 30.7°C was recorded. The highest temperature since July last year. The month ended with a thunderstorm on the 31st, with 30.7 mm being record. This was the third wettest July day since 1971 and helped make this July the wettest since 1991.

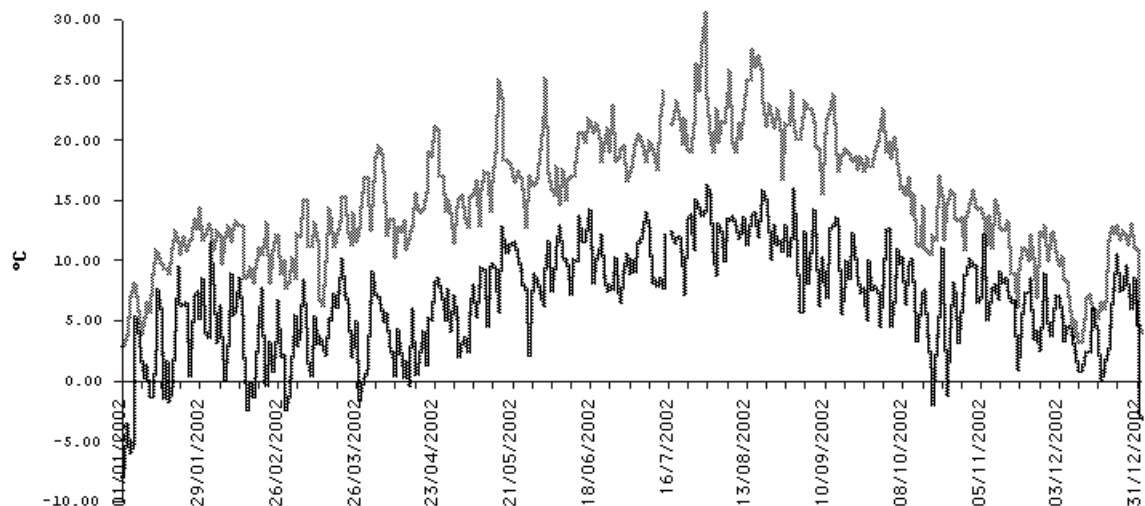
August was reasonably good summer month with plenty of warm days and very little rainfall. One disappointing feature was that sunshine levels never reached the expected values for August. It was the fourth month in a row with its total sunshine below its respective monthly average, making it the dullest August since 1999. The middle of the month was the warmest part and rainfall throughout, especially the second half, was very low. This helped to produce the driest August since 1995.

September carried on in the same vein as August, dry, sunny and warm. However, the fine weather quickly broke down and for a brief period it became very wet. All of the month's rainfall was fell between the 5th and the 9th inclusive. Apart from the brief unsettled period of weather, pressure was generally above average, with the rest of the month being dry warm and very sunny. In fact it was the sunniest September since 1971 and the driest since 1997.

October saw a continuation of the fine weather that had been a feature of September. Temperatures remained high and it was generally dry and sunny. By the 11th high pressure had moved away and unsettled conditions were established, which prevailed to the end of the month. By the middle of the month it had become very wet and during this period two air frosts were recorded: the highest number for October since 1997. The end of the month saw higher daytime temperatures with showers and bright periods. During a storm on the 26th, a wind gust of 62 mph was recorded, the highest for any October day since 1989.

The 17th of **November** saw the end of a run of twenty days with each day recording 0.2 mm or more of rainfall. During this time temperatures remained average. There were quite a few sunny days, enough to keep the running total up to average until the middle of the month. From then on it became dry and very dull, with a drop in temperatures. However, by the 20th temperatures had recovered almost to their previous levels, with more rain being recorded nearly every day. Overall it was the wettest November since 1974 and the dullest since 1994. It was only the third November in the last fifteen years to record no air frosts, as a result the mean temperature for the month was the highest since 1994 and the second highest since 1960.

Temperature: daily maxima and minima during 2002



The first four days of **December** saw showery conditions with some sunshine and temperatures around average. From the 5th pressure began to rise and it became much drier and cooler with night frosts. It was very dull during the middle of the month, with six days in a row, 12th to the 17th inclusive, not recording any sunshine. This was the longest period without any sunshine being recorded since December 2000. This resulted in December being the dulllest since 1998 and the sixth dulllest since 1956. From the 20th onwards it became very wet, culminating on the 30th with a daily total of 25.5 mm. This was the highest for any day in December since 1995 and the month itself was the wettest since 1989. However temperatures during the latter period of the month were well above average, helping to make the month's mean the highest since 1994.

DAILY WEATHER RECORDS: 2002 – UNIVERSITY OF READING (WHITEKNIGHTS)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Mean Daily Temperatures °C													
Maximum	9.1	11.1	12.1	15.1	16.6	19.1	21.4	22.3	19.7	14.8	11.9	8.6	15.2
Minimum	2.0	3.6	3.6	4.4	7.7	9.5	11.6	12.5	9.1	6.8	6.5	4.8	6.8
Mean	5.6	7.4	7.9	9.7	12.2	14.3	16.5	17.4	14.4	10.8	9.2	6.7	11.0
Range	7.1	7.5	8.5	10.7	8.9	9.6	9.8	9.8	10.6	8.0	5.4	3.8	8.3
Extreme Maximum	14.3	13.3	16.8	21.1	24.9	25.1	30.5	27.4	23.8	22.5	15.8	13.0	30.5
Date	29th	11th	29th	23rd	16th	2nd	29th	15th	13th	1st	18th	18th	29th Jul
Extreme Minimum	-8.0	-2.5	-2.4	-0.5	2.0	6.2	7.1	8.7	4.4	-2.0	0.9	-0.1	-8.0
Date	1st	15th	1st	14th	2nd	1st	22nd	2nd	30th	19th	18th	18th	1st Jan
Extreme Grass Minimum	-13.5	-7.9	-9.0	-8.5	-5.5	-1.0	-0.5	2.4	-2.5	-8.5	-3.0	-5.5	-13.5
Date	2nd	17th	27th	14th	2nd	29th	22nd	2nd	30th	19th	18th	18th	2nd Jan
Days with:													
air frost	10	4	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	1	22
ground frost	16	13	16	16	8	3	1	0	8	8	12	9	110
Hours at/below 0°C	78.0	24.0	16.0	1.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.00	0.00	6.0	0.0	0.2	125.2
Sunshine Hours													
Total	37.5	86.2	103.2	213.6	189.5	168.4	170.4	178.2	172.0	103.8	46.0	31.5	1500.3
% of possible	14.2	30.6	28.1	51.5	39.4	34.1	34.3	39.6	45.3	31.2	17.1	12.6	33.5
Daily Mean	1.2	3.1	3.3	7.12	6.1	5.6	5.5	5.8	5.7	3.4	1.5	1.0	4.1
Precipitation													
Amount in mm	60.8	69.8	42.8	34.3	62.6	46.8	74.0	21.9	26.8	89.8	141.6	118.5	789.7
Rain days	22	19	12	10	17	13	14	7	4	16	25	22	181
Maximum rain in one day													
mm	11.8	11.8	8.2	12.5	12.8	21.7	30.7	7.3	20.4	19.7	17.2	25.5	30.7
Date	26th	25th	18th	30th	13th	5th	31st	9th	9th	15th	11th	30th	31st Jul
Mean wind speed													
mph	3.9	5.6	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	XX	2.7	XX
Days with:													
snow or sleet	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
snow lying	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
fog at 09.00 GMT	57	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	5	2	16
thunder	0	1	0	1	2	0	2	2	0	1	0	0	9
hail	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Mean Pressure													
mbs	1019.4	1011.2	1018.1	1016.4	1011.9	1015.7	1015.2	1016.7	1021.4	1011.8	1005.6	1013.0	1014.7
Highest	1039.8	1035.6	1034.9	1034.0	1026.9	1028.7	1027.5	1026.2	1032.7	1030.1	1023.1	1032.5	1039.8
Date	1st	15th	24th	21st	31st	25th	14th	25th	1st	4, 28th	5th	18th	1st Jan
Lowest	992.9	989.2	995.5	995.7	994.5	999.9	994.9	1002.8	1007.8	984.3	974.8	989.7	974.8
Date	23rd	26th	18th	28th	22nd	5th	3rd	9th	8th	22nd	14th	27th	14th-Nov