

The Reading Naturalist

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THE READING NATURALIST

No. 5 for the Year 1952-53

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The Reading & District Natural History Society

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Contents

		<u>Page No.</u>
Alien Plants	Adela G. Erith	1
An Introduction to the Chiltern Dew-Ponds	P. Hanney	4
Meteorological Data for 1952	M. Parry	8
Extracts from the Annual Reports of the Honorary Recorders		
Botany	Kathleen I. Butler	9
Entomology	L.H. Williams	11
Ornithology	E.V. Watson	12

Editorial

Mr. L. H. Williams last year relinquished the post of Editor of this Journal, which he has held, alone or jointly with Mr. Betts, since its foundation.

It is therefore fitting that this number should open with an expression of gratitude for his work and the care and time he has bestowed on it during the past four years.

Mr. Parry has again kindly supplied the meteorological data for the local records, and to him and all our other contributors we offer our warmest thanks.

The original purpose of the publication was to preserve the annual local records in a permanent form. Such lists can be of great use, and Members are strongly urged to co-operate in making ours as complete as possible by sending their records to the appropriate Recorders, whose addresses appear below.

Enid M. Nelmes.

Editor.

Honorary Recorders

Botany:	Miss K.I. Butler
Entomology:	L.H. Williams, B.Sc.
Geology:	Prof. H.L. Hawkins, D.Sc., F.R.S., F.G.S.,
Ornithology:	Dr. E.V. Watson

Alien Plants

By Adela G. Erith, B.Sc., Ph.D

The meaning of the word 'alien' when used with reference to botany, is given in the Oxford English Dictionary as "a plant originally introduced from other countries", and S.T. Dunn, in the introduction to his "Alien Flora of Britain" published in 1905, states that "the term 'alien' is used to designate any species which, though now spontaneous, originated in Britain through human agency".

Dunn also remarks that these plants are frequently called 'introduced plants', and this designation is usually employed in Floras of the British Isles.

Thus, in a very recent Flora, one notices that many of the plant names are preceded by an asterisk, this sign indicating that the species in question are 'introduced', and distinguishing them, from the rest of the species which are considered as native.

The descriptions of these introduced species are followed by such remarks as:- a casual; a casual of waste and arable land; a garden-escape on waste ground near houses; spreading rapidly as a weed of arable land; completely naturalised in woods and waste shady places; completely naturalised on river banks.

All such plants are aliens, but some of them, especially those which occur near docks, in railway yards, and on rubbish tips, only maintain themselves by frequent re-introduction, whereas others have found the conditions of the country of their adoption so congenial that they have become well established and now occur in natural or semi-natural communities.

Many have been so successful in withstanding the efforts of the agriculturist to eradicate them that they have become some of the worst weeds of cultivated land.

It is difficult to obtain definite information as to the manner in which many of the alien plants of this country actually arrived here. Some like the wallflower-Cheiranthus cheiri L. which is now well established on walls throughout most of Great Britain, were undoubtedly introduced as cultivated plants a great many years ago. Others of rather more recent introduction have arrived as seeds in packing materials, in imported hay, and more frequently as impurities in foreign seeds of crop plants, the latest arrivals having come in during the last war with the 'lease-lend' crop seeds from the U.S.A.

Among aliens which occur in the neighbourhood of Reading may be mentioned the following:-

Cardaria draba (L) Desv. (Lepidium Draba L.) - Hoary Pepperwort
Coronopus didymus (L) Sm. - Lesser Swine-cress
Sisymbrium orientale L. - Eastern Rocket
Conringia orientalis (L) Dum. (Erysimum orientale (L) Cr., non Mill.)
- Hare's-ear.
Impatiens capensis Meerburgh (I. biflora Walt.) - Orange Balsam
Impatiens parviflora DC. Small Balsam
Calytonia perfoliata Willd.
Claytonia alsinoides Sims.
Tetragonolobus maritimus (L) Roth. (Lotus siliquosus L).
Senecio squalidus L - Oxford Ragwort.
Matricaria matricarioides (Less.) Porter - Rayless Mayweed.
Erigeron canadensis L. - Canadian Fleabane.
Galinsoga parviflora Cav. Gallant Soldier
Galinsoga ciliata (Rafn.) Blake
Symphytum peregrinum Ledeb. - Blue Comfrey.
Spartina alterniflora Lois.

The native homes of these plants are in various countries of Europe Asia, and North and South America, and while there are records of the date and manner of introduction of some of them, the method of arrival of others is a matter of conjecture.

Probably the best known of our local aliens is Senecio squalidus a native of Sicily and S. Italy. This plant was first recorded for Great Britain in 1794 growing on walls at Oxford, and was probably an escape from the Oxford Botanic Garden. During the nineteenth century it spread to several other counties and is now recorded in 62% of English counties.

Another alien which is spreading rapidly is Matricaria matricarioides. This plant is probably a native of N.E. Asia but is established on the Pacific coast of N. America. It was first recorded at Kew in 1878 and was recorded again in E. England in 1900. During this century it has spread with phenomenal rapidity over the greater part of the British Isles and is particularly abundant on paths and all situations subjected to much trampling, provided they are exposed to sunlight.

Cardaria draba has spread throughout the country with almost equal rapidity during the last fifty years and is at present conspicuous alongside the railway track and the main road from Reading to London. It is a native of S.E. Europe and W. Asia and its seeds are said to have been introduced to a place near Ramsgate in 1809, in the contents of the beds of troops returning from the Walcheren expedition.

Another curious method of introduction was that of the Canadian Fleabane, a N. American species which appeared in Europe about 280 years ago when, according to tradition, its seeds dropped out of the stuffed skin of a bird. It arrived in Great Britain about 20 years later and spread so rapidly that it is now a familiar plant in many parts of the country and was recorded on 40% of the bombed areas in London.

A more recent arrival is Galinsoga parviflora of Peru which was first recorded as a garden weed at Richmond in 1806. It had been cultivated in Kew gardens in 1796; it spread from there, and has now become well established as a weed of arable land in the South of England.

The closely related species Galinsoga ciliata is of even more recent introduction and has been recognised as a casual in S. England and S. Wales. In 1951, however, it was recorded near Henley as the dominant weed in a field where a crop had failed.

Coronopus didymus which is probably native only in S. America has become widespread, especially in S. England, as a weed of cultivated and waste ground and is often observed growing on gravel paths in gardens near Reading.

Impatiens capensis, a native of eastern N. America from Newfoundland to Saskatchewan, Florida and Nebraska, has become completely naturalised on river banks in 21 counties of the British Isles and is especially abundant on the banks of the Thames, Loddon and Kennett.

Its near relative I. parviflora of Siberia and Turkestan is now naturalised in woods and waste shady places in 36 counties mainly in S. and E. England, and occurs in a few localities near Reading.

Claytonia perfoliata from Pacific N. America and Cuba is recorded for 57 counties on cultivated and waste ground, particularly on light sandy soils, and is quite a familiar plant in Reading and the surrounding country.

The related species C. alsinoides, also a native of Pacific N. America is not quite as widespread but has been recorded for 51 counties in England, also for Donegal. It occurs in damp woods and shaded stream-sides usually on sandy soil, and I have observed it flourishing as a weed in at least one Berkshire garden.

Spartina alternifolia a native of N. America does not occur in the immediate vicinity of Reading but is especially interesting because a few years after its appearance on the S. Coast in 1829, it hybridised with the native S. maritima to give S. townsendii which was first reported from Southampton Water in 1870.

The latter remarkable hybrid has spread with extraordinary rapidity and is now abundant in muddy estuaries and salt marshes in many parts of the country and has been of great importance in stabilising mobile mud. Its alien parent, however, does not appear to have spread outside Southampton water where it has become naturalised on the mud-flats.

Space does not permit details of the other species listed above but it is interesting to note that only two of them viz: Senecio squalidus and Claytonia perfoliata are mentioned in "A List of the Flowering Plants, Ferns, etc., of the Country round Reading, Compiled by Members of the Reading Natural History Society" in 1900.

An Introduction to the Chiltern Dew-ponds

By P. Hanney

Most of the Chiltern Hills have dew-ponds on or near their summits. The ponds were constructed to provide water for sheep and cattle before piped water was laid on, but nowadays only a few are still employed for this purpose, and most are being used as rubbish pits. The ponds were neatly constructed, a square hole being dug out of the chalk and a sloping bank built around it. They were made waterproof by lining the hole with successive layers of straw and crumbled chalk. Contrary to popular belief, the amount of dew collected by a dew-pond is insignificant, and it depends for its replenishment upon rain and mist. The wide, sloping banks provide a large catchment area whilst the small surface area of the water allows relatively little evaporation to take place.

One might think that a dew-pond could maintain only a small animal population, owing to its isolated position and the fact that it nearly dries up during the summer. In the following paragraphs, it is hoped to give a brief survey of some animals that do occur and of the rate at which they have colonised an isolated pond. To obtain some idea of how quickly this can happen, two ponds of different ages were studied. These ponds are in similar situations, about two miles from each other, and about a mile from a small swift-flowing stream from which many of the colonising organisms must have originated. The ponds are each about ten yards square, on a chalky sub-soil, and fed entirely by rain water. They are very slightly alkaline, with a pH of 7.4. One pond was dug in 1914 and was initially filled with water from the stream; the other was made at some time during the last century and is now quite mature. Since the initial filling, new species of flightless organisms were probably introduced by cattle and birds; of the latter, ducks and lapwings may play an important part.

Plants.

The only aquatic plants occurring in the newer pond are the moss, Hypnum aduncum, which forms a thick carpet in the shallow water, and one or two small watercress plants. In the older pond, however, we have, besides the moss, watercress, water buttercup, and a stonewort (Chara) in the deeper parts of the pond. During the summer, both ponds are covered with the filamentous green algae, Spirogyra and Zygnema.

Animals1. Types well represented in both ponds.

Four species of amphibians breed in the ponds. They are the common frog and the crested, smooth and palmate newts. The frogs lay their eggs early in the year, usually in March, and their tadpoles have metamorphosed into frogs before the majority of the newt tadpoles have emerged. Throughout the spring, a surprisingly large number of newts colonise the pond. In May, I made a rough census of the three kinds occurring in one pond. Working with a small hand net, 235 newts were caught in one and a half hours. There must have been about 1,000 newts in this small pond. Of the newts collected, 56 per cent. were smooth, 41 per cent. palmate, and 5 per cent. crested. No account was taken of the tadpoles or eggs. When the hot weather comes, the newts must leave the ponds; an hour's search in early July revealed only six crested newts and one smooth newt. During the winter, crested newts have been found hibernating beneath fallen posts a few yards from the pond, but I have never found the winter quarters of the other species. It has been said that newts have a marked tendency to walk downhill. I have tested this statement on several occasions by placing newts on either side of the pond banks, a few inches below the summit, but out of sight of the water; they always walked down the slope. The question arises as to why the ponds do not become overcrowded. It is my belief that the more newts there are breeding in a pond, the more remote must be their hibernating quarters, so that many of them fail to find their way back to the pond in the following spring.

During the summer months, various kinds of fly larvae live in the ponds; they are especially numerous during hot weather, when the water is quite foul. The most conspicuous are those of the sub-family Stratiomyinae, which are rather like miniature cigars and vary from half an inch to two inches in length, according to species. These curious creatures possess no limbs, but they can move about the bottom of the pond by digging the head in the mud and hauling up the body behind and swim by violently jerking the body. They are usually to be seen suspended from the surface of the water by a rosette of branched filaments round the tail. These filaments entrap bubbles of air, from which the larva obtains its oxygen supply. The pupa is formed inside the larval skin, which floats on the surface of the pond, looking like a piece of dead sedge. This lifeless appearance may help to protect it from predators such as birds and water-beetles. After about three weeks, the fly emerges from the pupal case. Emergence can be studied in an aquarium by keeping the pupa in a fairly dark place for about three weeks, then exposing it to a bright light. The fly takes about a minute to emerge, and then crawls to the side of the vessel; after a further two minutes, its wings are properly expanded and ready for flight. The smaller pupae will develop into small black flies (Odontomyia) during May and June. The large yellow and black "soldier flies" (Stratiomys) emerge later, during July and August.

Other common fly larvae are those of the drone fly (Eristalis) and crane flies of the genus Ptychoptera. The Eristalis larva, or "rat-tailed maggot", must be familiar to those who have a small fish-pond in their garden. Its body is dirty white in colour and it possesses a telescopic "tail", which is about four inches long when extended and has eight unwettable hairs surrounding the tip. The Ptychoptera larva is very similar in appearance, but may be distinguished by its distinct head and the two short auxiliary breathing filaments on either side of the "tail". The pupa makes no use of this long "tail", but has developed a pair of breathing tubes on the thorax - very similar to those of the mosquito pupa. In Ptychoptera, however, the right one grows out to a considerable length and its wall swells out into a number of small bladders, which ensures that the breathing tube always floats on the surface. The telescopic "tail" of these two larvae may be compared with the "Snort" device used on modern submarines, both being used for obtaining a fresh supply of air.

The only other conspicuous fly larvae to be found in the dew-ponds are those of horse flies (Tabanidae). These are maggots about half an inch long and lacking the "tail" of the preceding types. When fully grown, they leave the water and pupate a few inches below the ground.

2. Orders absent or poorly represented.

This group includes those animals which are entirely aquatic throughout their life history and which occur in isolated ponds mainly through the activities of birds and cattle. Water snails are very scarce in dew-ponds. In one of those under consideration, only tiny bivalves occur; these are the fresh-water clams, Sphaerium Lacustre and Pisidium. In the other, only a small species of Planorbis (P. crista), about $\frac{1}{8}$ in. in diameter, has so far been found.

There appear to be only three kinds of fresh-water worm present. One of these, Lumbriculus, is about two inches long and very thin. It easily breaks into fragments when roughly handled, and each fragment is able to develop into a new individual; these worms apparently never reproduce by laying eggs. Another worm, Eiseniella, is much stouter and very similar to the ordinary earthworm, but the hinder part of its body differs in being square in cross section. It is not nearly so common as the previous species. Both occur amongst the submerged moss near the edge of the pond. Members of the family, Tubificidae, are common during the hottest months of the year, when they occur in enormous numbers in the mud around the edges of the pond, giving it a rusty appearance. Only one leech has been found to date; this is Helobdella stagnalis, which feeds on small invertebrates.

Two species of caddis flies have been found; they are Limnephilus vittatus and Leptocerus aterrimus. The adults of the former are rather drab brown in colour, but the others are jet black with very long antennae and are known to the fly-fisherman as the "Black Silverhorn". The larval cases are horn-shaped structures about half an inch in length.

To identify the species, the larvae must be taken home and the adults examined when they emerge, for the larval cases of the two species are quite indistinguishable. In the dew-ponds, both larvae feed on the aquatic moss; they are also common in Burghfield pond, where they feed upon scirpus fluitans. The adult caddis begin to emerge during May. The pupa first emerges from the larval case and usually climbs out of the water; the caddis fly itself then emerges from the pupal skin. I was fortunate in being able to observe the emergence of Leptocerus. The pupa was walking about at the bottom of the aquarium when discovered. It was brought to the surface of the water, where it rested only on the surface film, and the adult fly emerged in a couple of seconds:

3. Orders which are better represented in the older pond.

The two orders of insects which are better represented in the older pond than in the new are beetles and bugs. Owing to difficulties in identification, an attempt to make a complete list of the species has not proceeded very far. Nevertheless, even the casual observer would notice that very few of the larger water-beetles occur in the new pond, although in the old one they are exceedingly common. The large species of Dytiscidae that are common in the old pond include Colymbetes fuscus, Acilius sulcatus, Dytiscus marginalis and Ilybius fuliginosus. Of these, only a few odd specimens of the last two have ever been found in the new pond. The commonest beetle in the new pond during the summer is Hyphydrus ovatus, which has been found in all the dew-ponds examined. It is a small species and can easily be recognised by its red colouring and convex shape. Another interesting beetle which occurs in both ponds is Helochares lividus -- a small greenish beetle which has longer palps than antennae. The female is interesting in that she carries about with her a cocoon of eggs attached to the underside of the abdomen.

At least two species of water-bug are absent from the new pond but common in the old. They are the water scorpion (Nepa cinerea) and the bug, Naucoris. The reason for their absence from one pond is most probably the shortage of plants, for although both creature are carnivorous, their eggs are always laid in holes pierced in the leaves or stems of aquatic plants.

In the preceding account, only a few of the larger water creatures have been referred to; the microscopic fauna and dragon-flies and may-flies, although abundant, have not been mentioned. Nevertheless, it is hoped that some idea has been given of the enormous field of study even a small pond provides for the naturalist, whatever his particular branch.

Weather Records for 1952

Data supplied by M. Parry

All data were recorded at Reading University Meteorological Station except those for sunshine, which were recorded at Sutton's Seed Trial Grounds. The temperature and rainfall averages refer to the periods 1900-1935 and 1800-1915, respectively.

Mr. Parry would be glad to contact any persons in the Reading district who are interested in weather recording.

		Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	June	July	Aug	Spt	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Mean Daily Temperature °F	Max	43.3	44.9	50.9	60.1	66.8	69.3	73.6	70.8	61.3	55.5	45.4	43.0	57.1
	Min	33.3	33.2	39.8	42.2	49.4	50.6	55.5	55.0	45.5	42.7	34.8	32.1	42.8
	Mean	38.3	39.1	45.3	51.1	58.1	59.9	64.5	62.9	53.4	49.1	40.1	37.5	49.9
Extreme Temperatures °F	E.Max	53	54	60	74	82	84	91	77	71	60	58	52	91
	Date	15	29	8	18,19	18	29	1	6,27,29	1	4,6,25	10	22,23	July-1st
	E.Min	20	27	30	29	41	42	44	49	35	30	23	23	20
	Date	27	5,16	15,27,28 29,30	3	7,13	8	16	17,22,29	19	11,12,15	25	7	Jan-27
Days with Frost		11	10	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	3	7	15	52
Days with Ground Frost		20	20	7	6	0	0	0	0	3	7	16	25	104
Sunshine Hours	Sum	78.6	72.5	87.5	144.4	183.1	207.8	197.7	191.2	145.5	95.0	67.2	60.5	1531.0
	% Poss	31	25	24	35	38	42	40	42	38	29	25	25	34
	Daily Mean	2.54	2.50	2.82	4.81	5.92	6.93	6.38	6.17	4.85	3.06	2.24	1.95	4.19
Precipitation ins	Amount	1.81	0.65	2.33	1.40	3.42	1.34	0.40	2.36	2.58	3.69	2.96	2.50	25.44
	Rain Days	19	8	19	15	14	8	6	15	17	16	15	20	172
	Max. Rain in 1 Day	0.28	0.24	0.41	0.26	1.28	0.42	0.15	0.63	1.05	0.83	0.66	0.58	1.28
	Date	1,30	10	29	22	19	8	11	8	30	12	29	18	May-19
	Snow or Sleet Days	8	6	5	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	27
	Days Snow Lying	4	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	10
AVERAGES														
Mean Daily Temperature °F	Max	45.7	46.1	50.6	55.5	63.7	68.1	71.4	70.5	66.0	58.1	49.4	45.9	57.5
	Min	34.2	33.8	35.1	38.2	44.6	49.2	52.8	52.3	48.2	43.1	36.9	35.4	42.0
	Mean	39.7	39.9	42.9	46.9	54.1	58.7	62.1	61.4	57.1	50.6	43.1	40.7	49.7
Precipitation	Amount	1.90	1.64	1.71	1.46	1.65	1.95	2.03	2.09	1.70	2.98	2.30	2.59	24.0
	Rain Days	15	13	13	12	10	10	12	13	11	15	15	15	153
Thunderstorm Activity	Days of Thunder	0	0	0	3	3	0	1	4	0	0	0	0	11
	Days of Hail	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	3

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Botany for 1951-52

By Kathleen I. Butler

Feeling its ignorance of that part of Berkshire east of Reading, the Committee arranged an excursion to the National Trust Property of Maidenhead Thicket, where, on June 7th, several uncommon species were discovered. The wide grassy tracks traversing the Thicket yielded an abundance of Lithospermum officinale (Common Gromwell). Intensive research is being made into the medicinal properties of this interesting plant. Ophioglossum vulgatum (Adder's Tongue), along the damp woodland paths, adds yet another record of this unique-looking fern to the Flora of Berkshire. Lathyrus nissolia (Grass Vetchling), was found growing on a high bank near the main London road. This is only the second record by the Society of the Grass Vetchling, which was last seen in 1945, growing near Wargrave.

On the Society's excursion to the Lambourn Downs on August 3rd, the uncommon Symphytum tuberosum (Tuberous comfrey) was seen growing on a steep roadside bank at Kingston Lisle.

Ashridge Wood was visited on June 2nd, by Mrs. Simonds and Miss Cobb, who reported that, in spite of extensive felling of trees in 1949, the uncommon Ornithogalum pyrenaicum (Spiked Star of Bethlehem) is maintaining its position among the coppiced hazel, and was also observed in a small wood some distance away.

Among the usual riverside plants observed on the Pangbourne outing on September 10th, was one of the more uncommon species of Rumex, R. maritimus (Golder Dock).

At the Fungus Foray at Kingwood Common on October 4th, fresh areas were explored and special mention must be made of Corprinus picaceus (Magpie Coprinus), new to the district, and of Hypholoma cotonea, which Dr. F.B. Hora had not seen before in England.

The following more uncommon plants have been noted by members during the year.

Thesium humifusum (Bastard Toadflax), located on the Moultsford Downs in 1949, was seen this year by Mrs. Simmonds on a slope near Gatehampton in Oxfordshire. Druce records it for Caversham and Goring along the Grim's Dyke.

Myosurus minimus (Mouse-tail) was found by Ann Duncombe in a field at Wokingham.

Potentilla argentea (Hoary Potentilla), first recorded from a gravel pit near Nuffield in 1946, was found by Mrs. Simmonds in another gravel-pit between Sonning Common and the Peppard Road. This species is chiefly distinguished from P. reptans by its five-petalled flowers and the white down which covers its leaves and stems.

Trifolium striatum (Knotted Clover). Ranikhet Camp, Tilehurst. Owing to its small size and prostrate habit, this species has often been overlooked, but each year seems to add a fresh locality. A further finding at Maidenhead Thicket makes about six recordings in the past few years.

Pyrola minor (Common Wintergreen). Miss J. Watson has found a colony of at least 40 flowering plants flourishing among Sweet-Chestnut scrub in East Berks.

Turritis glabra (Tower Mustard), despite road-widening operations, is persisting on a dry bank in Coleman's Moor Lane.

Centaurea solstitialis (Yellow Star Thistle). Discovered by Miss J. Sumner among lucerne at Coldharbour Farm, near Whitchurch.

Smyrniurn olusatrum (Alexanders). Mrs. Simmonds reports that, besides flourishing in its old haunt along the Bath Road near Southcote Lane, this plant is extending its range to the railway bank in Berkeley Avenue.

Dianthus armeria (Deptford Pink), described in Druce's Flora of Berks. as "one of our very local species" and recorded in our 1900 local Flora, has been observed in a lane at Tilehurst by Miss J. M. Watson.

Juncus tenuis (Thin Rush). An uncommon species becoming more frequent, especially along damp cart tracks where its mucilaginous seeds have been carried by cart wheels. Mrs. Simmonds has found it in woods between Wokingham and Crowthorne.

The year 1952 has not been particularly good for our local Orchids. Aceras anthropophorum (Man Orchid), recorded for many years now on a chalk slope near Ipsden, was not seen there this year. Anxious to verify the rumour that Orchis simia (Monkey Orchid), which was destroyed by the plough in 1950, had been found growing among the trees at the top of the ill-fated slope, four members visited the area on June 9th, but could find nothing, even after a most intensive search. Another serious loss is that of Herminium monorchis (Musk Orchid). Ever since 1942, when four plants were discovered on a small slope in Oxfordshire, records have been made of its increase, but unfortunately it too has fallen a victim to the plough, and its place taken by Buckwheat.

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Entomology for 1951-52

By L.H. Williams, B.Sc.

LEPIDOPTERA

Herse convolvuli (Convolvulus Hawk moth). 1 brought into Reading Museum on August 15th.

Dicycla oo (Heart Moth). Tilehurst, June; Sunninghill, June (var. renago).

Odontosia carmelita (Scarce Prominent). 1 Ascot, April 14th; 1 Burghfield, April 27th (Brian Baker).

Eulia formosana. 1 Tilehurst, August (Brian Baker)

COLEOPTERA

Opilo mollis. Sunninghill, May. (J. Riley)

Malachius marginellus. Sunninghill, May. (J. Riley)

ORTHOPTERA

Tetrix subulatum. This species must previously have been overlooked as it has been found not only at Pamber Forest (1951 Report), but also at Ascot, Tidmarsh, and in several places in the Thames and Kennet meadows.

ODONATA

Agrion virgo. Near Sunninghill, by shady ditches.

Cordulegaster annulatus (boltonii). Near Sunninghill.

Both these species are very local in Berkshire as they both require swiftly flowing streams in their nymphal stages.

HEMIPTERA--HOMOPTERA

Ledra aurita. Pamber Forest. (Brian Baker).

Extracts from the Recorder's Report for Ornithology for 1951-52

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

(Period under consideration: Oct. 17th 1951 - end of Oct. 1952)

The Recorder wishes to acknowledge his indebtedness to Dr. C.C. Balch and Mr. C.E. Douglas, Editors of the Reading Ornithological Club Report for 1951 and to numerous other members of the R.O.C. in the compilation of the notes that follow.

1. Winter Gulls. There is no specific record of numbers on the scale of the previous 12-month period. Ten Lesser Black-backed Gulls were noted at Manor Farm on Nov. 25th, 1951 - a comparatively late date and an unusually large number. Two Greater Black-backed Gulls were observed going S.W. over Leighton Park School on Nov. 23rd.

2. Winter Duck. The most remarkable record for the period under review is that of a Ferruginous Duck (White-eyed Pochard) observed by Mr. J.E.G. Sutton at Burghfield gravel pit on October 25th, 1952. During the winter of 1951-52 the following species of duck were observed in the Reading area:

Common Scoter (1 record)	Shoveler (common)
Gadwall (1 record)	Smew (a few records)
Goldeneye (a few records)	Teal (common)
Mallard (abundant)	Tufted duck (common)
Pintail (a few records)	Wigeon (common)
Pochard (common)	

3. Winter Finches and other winter movements. (a) Winter Finches. The ordinary winter flocks of the common species were observed. Two records of rather greater interest were: one Siskin at Leighton Park on Nov. 22nd. and one Brambling at Jackson's Lane, Caversham on April 26th. (b) Other Winter Movements. The flocking of Lapwings, and with them Golden Plovers (in hard weather) is an annual feature in this district. Dr. C.C. Balch's estimated figure of 20,000 Lapwings in fields between Calcot and Aldermaston in early December is however noteworthy, as are the records of at least 100 Golden Plovers west of Theale in December and January.

Fieldfares and Redwings are with us each winter, but October 1951 is notable for the exceptional diurnal movements of Redwings noted at Leighton Park School (mainly in a westerly direction); whilst 4 Fieldfares seen at Sonning gravel pit on April 15th, mark a fairly late date for this species.

An early arrival for the new winter was a Fieldfare observed by the Rev. S.E. Chavasse of Ufton Nervet (and reported by Mrs. Simmonds) on Sept. 30th, 1952.

4. Spring arrival of migrants. Mild weather in March brought an early spring and Dr. Balch recorded the Chiff chaff at Shinfield on March 10th. On March 16th, the Recorder, together with several members of the Nat. Hist. Society, heard this species at Colemansmoor. On March 24th, Mr. H.A. Thompson recorded the Wryneck at Woodley and two days later Dr. Balch saw Sand Martins at Bearwood and 3 male Wheatears at Shinfield.

Very cold weather at the end of March produced a set-back and the April arrivals were not on the whole particularly early. Reference to the R.O.C. Report for 1952 will show dates for most species appreciably earlier than those given by the Recorder in his Report. The latter, based mainly on his own notes, were:

April 9th. Willow Warbler at Caversham.
April 10th. Swallow, Blackcap.
April 15th. Whitethroat - seen in several places;
Nightingale.
April 24th. Sedge Warbler and Yellow wagtail at
Sonning (Dr. Balch had recorded the
former on April 9th. and Mr. J.P.G.
Trower the latter on April 7th).
April 26th. Tree pipit (seen by Mr. N.G.B. Jones
as early as April 2nd).
April 28th. Garden Warbler; Turtle Dove.

The Spotted Flycatcher appeared to reach the University Grounds on May 13th, but was noted in Reading on May 2nd. by Mr. R.M. Palmer.

5. Spring Passage of Waders and Terns. Apart from the occurrence of Whimbrel and Curlew at Burghfield gravel pit, and one record of a Ringed Plover at the same place, the Spring of 1952 was not a notable one for the passage of Waders in this district. Burghfield gravel pit is well watched by Messrs. K.E.L. Simmons, C.E. Douglas, C.E. Signal, and others, and few birds can pass without attracting the attention of an observer. I am indebted to the above ornithologists for these records of spring Wader passage.

The recorder was fortunate in being among the small party who saw both Black Tern and Little Tern at Burghfield on April 29th. Two Black Terns were seen by Mr. Douglas at Theale on May 3rd., but after that no more. Thus the passage was over earlier than usual. There were records of one Common Tern over the Burghfield pit on May 1st. and one Arctic Tern at Aldermaston on May 4th, in addition to several observations that could not be attributed definitely to one or other of these two species.

6. Breeding Records. The Recorder was privileged to witness the feeding of young Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers in a nest in Eastern Avenue, Reading, on June 5th, 1952. He also learnt with satisfaction of the successful breeding of the Wryneck once again at Caversham. Mr. Simmons reports that the Heronry at Coley Park showed an increase to 15 nests in 1952.

The Tufted duck, which is a regular breeding species at Cranemoor Lake, Englefield, and at Aldermaston, is recorded by Mr. Douglas as nesting for the first time at Theale. The Grey Wagtail is known to have bred at certain points on the Kennet-Avon canal.

1952 was particularly notable for the fact that the Little Ringed Plover - our rarest local breeding species - was shown to be increasing its range within the Reading district during that season. Young were successfully reared by at least two pairs.

7. Departure of regular summer visitors. It will be recalled that September 1952 was exceptionally cold, and the general lack of late records of summer visitors suggests that these weather conditions hastened the departure of the migrants. Mr. C.J.R. Thorne's record of a Swallow on November 4th. (published in the R.O.C. Report) stood out from the rest. Apart from this, only Chiffchaff, Sedge Warbler, Sand Martin and House Martin appeared to remain into October.

Mr. C.E. Douglas in the R.O.C. Report (No. 6) for 1952 rightly suggests that while the inclement weather prevailed it had the reverse effect - i.e. of holding up migratory movement, so that one must suppose that a mass exodus followed the return of more normal conditions: for the fact remains that only 5 species appeared (from R.O.C. records) to survive into October in 1952, as against 8 in 1949, 7 in 1950 and 8 in 1951.

Perhaps of greater general interest are the remarkable gatherings of Swallows and of House Martins which were noticed in various places during this autumn. Mr. Douglas records how, one day in mid-September "large numbers of House Martins congregated round a house in Pangbourne some entering it, others crowding together in sheltered corners in a semi-torpid state; later several were found dead". Mrs. M.A. Edwards sent the Recorder a graphic account of one of the more familiar pre-migration gatherings of Swallows which she witnessed at a farm pond somewhat outside our area "At about 5 p.m. on the 23rd August I was surprised to see Swallows from every direction in batches of about 200, wheeling, hovering, dipping and skimming over the duck pond. Half an hour later there was not one to be seen. There must have been at least 2,000 as the sky seemed almost black with them".

8. Autumn passage of Waders and Terns. The July-August period in 1952 produced an unusual "crop" of relatively uncommon passage Waders - chiefly at Burghfield and Aldermaston gravel pits. The records from Mr. Douglas include the following five species:

Dunlin	Ringed Plover
Greenshank	Ruff
Wood Sandpiper	

In addition, the Green Sandpiper was in the district throughout the late summer and autumn and the Common Sandpiper, as usual, was plentiful.

Black Terns on the return passage were met with on August 7th. (Messrs. Bignal and Palmer) August 19th (Mr. Douglas) and September 10th (Messrs. Simmons and Sutton). All were single birds at Burghfield gravel pit. The few records of autumn Common or Arctic Terns were not identified specifically.

9. Various passage movements, rare visitors etc. Mr. W.A. Smallcombe reported that a male Corncrake had regrettably been shot at Manor Farm in October 1951. Miss R. Gault and Miss A. Duncombe watched a Black Redstart on Messrs. Sutton's Trial Grounds between Dec. 28th 1951 and Jan. 12th 1952.

A drake Garganey was seen by Dr. C.C. Balch and others at Bearwood on April 2nd., and a remarkable "out-of-season" duck record was that of a Common Scoter at Burghfield on July 5th. (Messrs. Douglas and Simmons).

The Spring of 1952 was distinguished by a record of a Hoopoe in a garden at Basildon. The bird was observed on April 21st. by Col. Prattley who knew the species well in India. A White Wagtail was identified by Messrs. Simmons and Palmer at Burghfield on April 25th.

Mr. Simmons had excellent views of a Black-necked Grebe at Burghfield on Oct. 5th 1952.

The year under review was thus a successful one from the standpoint of the occurrence of rarities.

10. Concluding Remarks. The Recorder said it was desirable that more records should come from Nat.Hist. Soc. members. He emphasised the need for a more precise knowledge of the status of a number of species which, whilst not very common, were by no means rarities in this district. Such were:

Lesser Whitethroat	Woodlark
Red legged Partridge	Redpoll
Willow Tit	Hawfinch

It was possible that further study might show some of these to be much commoner, others much rarer, than was at present supposed.