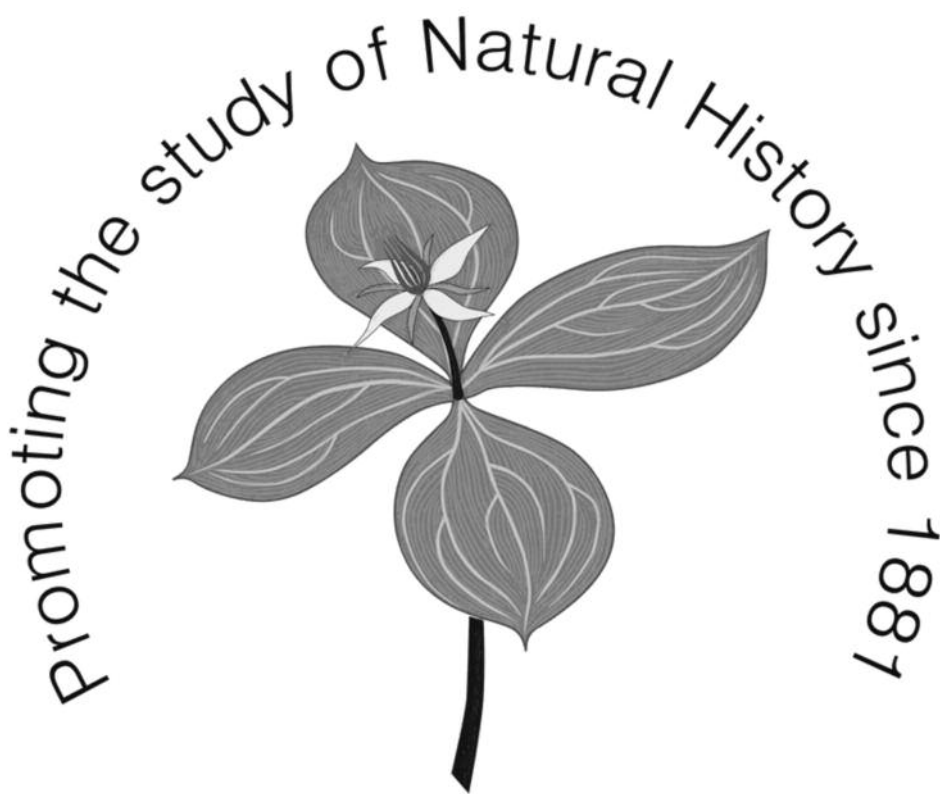


The Reading Naturalist

No. 74



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Report for 2021

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THE READING NATURALIST

No 74 for the year 2021

**The Journal of the
Reading and District Natural History Society**

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Editor's Note:

My special thanks to all the contributors for their determined efforts in meeting the deadlines whilst carrying on with their busy lives. The Honorary Recorders do a fantastic job with their respective taxa, as well as the many who produce the reports of the walks, excursions and meetings, articles and help with the incredible task of validating and proof reading, in particular Julia Cooper, Jan Haseler and Sarah White without whom the task of producing The Naturalist would be impossible.

PLEASE PLEASE PLEASE can I ask more of the membership to write down their observations, pop them on the taxa report spreadsheets and send them/email them to the appropriate recorder? WE NEED YOUR OBSERVATIONS to record the wildlife of the local area and we need your data.

I am very keen for and would greatly welcome your articles and photographs of all your interesting walks and trips, ongoing studies and discoveries, whether they are near or far and submit them for publication here.

Ken White (Hon. Editor) email your articles and photos to: white.zoothera@gmail.com

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Presidential Musings by Tricia Marcousé

It is the end of a second weird Covid-19 year, which started and finished on Zoom for this Society. We provided an almost full programme for members during the year thanks to the huge efforts of committee members and others to organise and reorganise according to latest government guidance. Special thanks go to Fiona Brown and Jan Haseler who organised and reorganised walks and talks according to government guidelines.

We started the 2021 programme of talks on Zoom and continued this way through to the AGM. The walk programme was heavily affected by Covid with cancellations during the first quarter and then restrictions to six people in a group and the necessity to book. Many of our walk leaders offered to provide two separate walks on the day or a second walk leader took a group so that a reasonable number of our members could join.

Our crystal ball during the summer said that Covid numbers seemed fairly stable and we could resume talks in Pangbourne village hall; but a couple of Zoom talks were arranged for the winter programme to ensure that those of our members who were still isolating could take part. October began with a good audience for Matthew Oates' good news story about increasing numbers of Purple Emperor butterfly, followed by Stephen Powles' Tawny Owl talk on Zoom with equally good numbers.

We had fewer people attending the talk on ground beetles by Chris Foster, and for Rob Stallard's photographic enticements to local walks. By the end of November, it was obvious that numbers attending talks in person were dwindling, the news was full of vaccine boosters and the Omicron variant, and the committee had to rethink again. Dr Brian Ferry's talk on plant communities of the Canary Islands was held at Pangbourne in early December, but was poorly attended, and the Christmas Party and photographic competition went onto Zoom for the second year running.

Now for the extra thank you components. Laurie Haseler has been running our annual photo competition for many many years, both developing the rules and sacrificing his eating, chatting and laughing time at the Christmas party to get the photos set up, catalogued and ranked to announce the winners. He had hoped to handover the process this year and just be a helping hand in the background, and I'd planned the big thank you at the Christmas party. No such luck as the photographic competition had to move online at the last moment, but a huge thank you to him here. He and Rob Stallard had to hustle to get the electronic system functioning at short notice for the new crop of photographs this year. It wasn't a total surprise to find that, again, Ken White had taken the overall prize for best photograph in the annual competition, but we had a much larger number of members whose photos reached first and runner-up positions in the different categories this year, and these gems can be seen in this Naturalist thanks to our brilliant editor, Ken White.

The final mega thank you goes to Rob Stallard who created and despatched the monthly newsletter that kept members informed about changes to our programme, provided many additional events to entertain them, gave us superb photos, and persuaded others to provide monthly inputs.

I'll end with natural history high spots for the year: Storks seen flying overhead to the west of Reading, the Newbury Peregrines having another successful year, a new pair of Peregrines roosting on University buildings at Whiteknights and, most extraordinary of all, a Kingfisher snaffling fish in a garden pond!

Membership 2021 by Norman Hall & Ian Duddle

Paid up Membership figures as they stand as at the end of December 2021

Single members	77
Family/Couples	41 (x2)
Honorary members	7
<hr/>	
Total	166

of whom we welcomed 14 as new members to the group:

Liz Butcher	Belinda Garner
Catherine Harris	John Manners
Wendy Rooke	Angela & Philip Snowling
Alison & David Tipping	Jim Wills
Prashni Naidoo & Anton De Swardt	
Richard & Diana Wingfield	

Members' Observations 2021 by Julia Cooper & Rob Stallard

19th January

Lorna Woolhouse - a Firecrest in Checkendon on 10/01/21. It seemed to have no fear of her and she watched it darting around a Holly hedge for about 10 minutes. Lorna managed to take a photo which shows the distinctive eye stripes.

Ken White - in their garden at Plastow Green and on local walks:

20/12/20, a Bumblebee on flowering *Lonicera fragrantissima*.

21/12/20, a Song Thrush singing all day and nearly every day since, as well as Robin and Woodpigeon.

25/12/21, the 2 adult Newbury Peregrines Mrs Newbury and Black 69 in the town centre.

26/12/21, 16 birds per minute visiting a sunflower seed dispenser.

30/12/21, 3 Bullfinches eating *Prunus cerasifera* buds in a boundary hedge.

02/01/21, 270 Jackdaws and 35 Rooks flying out from a roost in Ram Alley at Ashford Hill.

08/01/21, 6 Golden Plovers roosting in the middle of a winter cereal field.

15/01/21, a Fox circling a Hare in the middle of a field but not chasing it.

17/01/21, a fine, sunny day - 6 Buzzards thermalling high over the garden in territory disputes, and a Bumblebee on the flowering *Lonicera fragrantissima*. Also on Sunday, a leucistic Blackbird, which was 90% white, with a bit of black on the tail and ends of primaries, in a garden in Plastow Green only 300 metres from Ken's original sighting on 17/10/19. Sarah saw it last winter as well, Ken is amazed by its survival skills.

Ian Duddle - in their Tilehurst garden in the rain:

13/01/21, a Redwing bathing in one birdbath and a Blackbird in another; and a Magpie collecting

twigs for a nest in one of the Corsican Pines beyond the back garden on 16/01/21 and 17/01/21.

2nd February

Ken White - recent highlights from Plastow Green:

21/01/21, a Blackbird started singing at 7am and each morning since he has started earlier; this morning he was singing by 6.35am.

31/01/21, a Woodlark singing over the barley stubble field; and the Newbury BT resident pair of Peregrines B69 and Mrs N were on St Joseph's church bell tower in the town centre.

02/02/21, Sarah saw 95 Fieldfares on a barley stubble field with Skylarks singing overhead. Song Thrush, Blackbird, Robin, Chaffinch, Great Tit, Dunnock and even a Wren are now singing in the garden.

Jan Haseler - the first Frog of the year spotted in their Tilehurst garden pond on 29/01/21.

Dick Croker - sent a report to the January newsletter of a vixen which visited his Tilehurst garden in the day from 07/11/20 to 10/11/20. He saw a Fox in the road outside his house nearly every day in January.

Ian Duddle – in their Tilehurst garden:

02/02/21, a hen Blackcap washing in the birdbath was chased off by a Dunnock. The Blackcap returned when the Dunnock had finished and a Chaffinch came soon afterwards. During the past week a Jay was digging in the garden, presumably for acorns it had buried in the autumn.

Katie Jenks – over the last 2 weeks, approx. 500 Wood Pigeons flying to Sulham Woods in the last hour of the day.

Tricia Marcousé – a Dormouse was seen in Bugs Bottom, Caversham during the day, a first sighting for many decades.

16th February

Jan Haseler - 4 Roe Deer at the edge of the field above Sulham Woods on the south side of Sulham Hill on 11/02/21. They were in an area sown with a bird-feeding mixture where we saw 2 Roe Deer on Rob's walk in September, and comprised 2 females and 2 males. The males had velvet-covered antlers.

In their Tilehurst garden yesterday (15/02/21) a Blackcap singing its heart out in the hedge. At least 2 Blackcaps are over-wintering in the garden, at least 1 male and 1 female. They like the ivy berries and also the hanging fat.

Ian Duddle - all in their Tilehurst back garden:

03/02/21, 7 Redwings feeding on the lawn, and 4 rooting through leaves underneath trees on 11/02/21.

09/02/21, a male Blackcap in the beech hedge.

10/02/21, 20 Lapwings flying overhead towards Purley.

13/02/21, a female Blackcap in a tall hazel, and a Redwing near the beech hedge chased away by the resident hen Blackbird.

14/02/21, a Song Thrush near the beech hedge chased away by the hen Blackbird, and later feeding on the garage roof.

A male Blackcap in a lilac bush today.

Andy and Julia Robertson - a Redwing on 13/02/21 and 14/02/21, not seen before in their Tilehurst garden.

Ken White - sightings from Plastow Green:

03/02/21, 2 Ravens in conifers.

07/02/21, a Woodlark singing on the ground in the barley stubble field.

12/02/21, Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on an Oak tree.

15/02/21, a Woodlark singing from Sycamore tree in the garden, MP3 recording made.

16/02/21, Newbury BT male Peregrine Black 69 checking out the nestbox on the BT building, seen via the newly reinstated nest camera.

2nd March

Jan Haseler - Some of the larger suckering Elms along Nunhide Lane at Sulham were red with flowers on Friday 26/02/21.

Ian Duddle - in their Tilehurst garden:

21/02/21, a pregnant Frog clambering over wood pile.

22/02/21, a pair of Nuthatches rootling through wood chippings, possibly collecting nesting material.
23/02/21, a Red Admiral and female Brimstone; and a Robin collecting nesting material and possibly nest building in a hazel stump in the front garden.
25/02/21, a pair of Goldcrests and a Nuthatch in a Yew tree.
27/02/21, 2 bats over pine trees beyond the back garden, and 2 Stag Beetle larvae dug up in an old tree stump (reburied to same depth).
02/03/21, a Song Thrush eating snails.

Rachel Woolnough - a Bullfinch in an apple tree at the bottom of their garden in Burghfield Common on 10/02/21.

Ken White – at Plastow Green:

19/02/21, 180 Fieldfares and 45 Redwings singing loudly from treetops.
23/02/21, a Barn Owl flew past the house down the hedgerow at 6:30am.
27/02/21, a Pipistrelle-sized bat seen flying around the house by Sarah at 6pm.
28/02/21, 3 Woodlarks seen on local barley stubble field.
The Newbury BT Peregrines were seen mating in the town centre on 21/02/21, male Black 69 seen scraping the gravel in the nest box on 25/02/21 and female Mrs Newbury finally joined Black 69 in the nest box on 01/03/21.

Sally Rankin – a Sparrowhawk in her garden in Henley this afternoon.

Jane Sellwood – Toads have begun migrating to the breeding lake at Farley Hill, helped by the toad patrollers.

16th March

Jan Haseler reported a mating pair of Peregrines on the old gasometer next to the Kennet at the back of Newtown Primary School in Reading on 06/03/21. Local activists have managed to stop the gasometer from being demolished until the breeding season is over.
The first frogspawn in the pond in their Tilehurst garden on 01/03/21. Since then, about 50 frogs have been very busily filling the extremely small pond with an excessive amount of frogspawn.

Maria Newham - 3 male and 1 female Mandarin Duck on Emmer Green pond on 10/01/21.
A Kingfisher (very dark bottle green) in a ditch behind Caversham Laundry at Christchurch Meadows, on 31/01/21. The colour of the Kingfisher suggested it may have been a juvenile. Maria saw another Kingfisher in the same place in April last year.
In her garden in Lower Caversham, a Blackcap on 10/02/21 and a male Brimstone butterfly on 20/02/21.

Ian Duddle - Six 7-spot Ladybirds hibernating in old teasel seedheads in their Tilehurst garden on 09/03/21.

Ken White – at Plastow Green:

2 Siskins joined Goldfinches and Greenfinches on feeders on 06/03/21 and every day since.
12/03/21, 3 Hares on stubble field, some chasing seen.
13/03/21, a Barn Owl flew past the bedroom window at 6am, the second time seen this year.
16/03/21, 8 Magpies in dispute in neighbour's garden.

Jenny Greenham - 2 hen Pheasants sparring in their back garden in Hampstead Norreys on 14/03/21. The Pheasants were sparring about a metre off the ground and had their tail feathers twisted to one side, similar to Grouse sparring. Two other hen Pheasants were watching but lost interest.
On 13/03/21 a Red Kite landed in their back garden twice under a medium sized plum tree which has hanging bird food feeders but nothing on the ground, only about 5m from their kitchen. Both times it flew off without anything in its talons.

Fiona Brown - a Great White Egret west of Theale on 01/03/21.

Sheelagh Hill - a Great White Egret on the way to Sonning from Binfield Heath on 14/03/21.

Tricia Marcousé - from 13/03/21 to 15/03/21, a Carrion Crow learning new behaviour: breaking off 30-50cm dead twigs from the tips of branches of Ash trees affected with Ash Dieback (It was *Chalara fraxinea*, and is now *Hymenocyphus fraxineus*).

Alan Parfitt - a Glossy Ibis at Otmoor RSPB reserve today (16/03/21). The Ibis is a southern Mediterranean bird which is spreading northwards. Many Chiffchaffs have arrived over the last 2 weeks.

5th October

Ken White – sightings in their garden at Plastow Green and nearby:

03/09/21, a Hornet Hoverfly *Volucella zonaria* nectaring on Japanese Anemones.

20/09/21, Pinocchio Hoverflies *Rhingia campestris* nectaring on Buddleja and Verbena in the garden.

22/09/21, Sarah saw the first Ivy Bees of the year nectaring on ivy, also 8 species of butterfly seen in the garden and 2 others nearby, and Great Pied Hoverflies *Volucella pellucens* in the garden.

30/09/21, a Wheatear female/juvenile in a nearby barley stubble field.

Ken and Sarah confirmed that the Newbury Peregrines B69 and Mrs N successfully fledged 3 juveniles at Newbury BT. They comprised two males and one female and all three were blue colour-ringed, each with their own unique code. They gradually left of their own accord in August, and the youngest juvenile was last seen on 05/09/21; since then B69 & Mrs N have continued to occupy the BT building and some of the nearby rooftops. Ken and Sarah also saw 2 Great White Egrets flying along the Kennet near BT on 25/09/21.

Alan Parfitt – a Common Crane chick fledged at RSPB Otmoor this summer, the first for 500 years. Parents and chick have now migrated back to the Somerset levels to overwinter.

Ian Duddle – a wary juvenile Green Woodpecker eating ants on their Tilehurst lawn for over an hour on 23/09/21, the only time observed this year, and a Red Admiral there on 04/10/21.

Roger Kemp - on a white wall at home in the Vale of Aylesbury in early September, a moth first identified as a Red Underwing but might have been the much rarer migrant Rosy Underwing – a photo had been sent for ID. (Update - the identification of the moth has not been confirmed. When possible Roger hopes to compare the photo with specimens at the NHM in London but because the Rosy Underwing is so rare it is more likely to be Red.)

Ann Booth – a Hummingbird Hawk Moth on Blackcurrant Sage in their garden in Earley this week.

Jan Haseler – several small Waxcaps in their Tilehurst lawn including green Parrot Waxcaps, conical Blackening Waxcaps and an unidentified orange-red one.

Andy Bolton – a Buttoned Snout moth ready to hibernate in their garage at Axmansford – a rare sighting.

19th October

Ken and Sarah White at Plastow Green:

06/10/21, a Brimstone flying around the garden.

16/10/21, a Red Admiral sunning itself on brickwork and 3 Redwings on Holly berries in the garden.

2 Bullfinches in the garden hedgerow on 17/10/21 after most of the verges and hedgerows have been smashed by tractor flails.

18/10/21, a Muntjac eating apples on the back lawn mid-morning.

Jan Haseler – our walk at Sulham on 17/10/21 was very productive with many fungi in good condition. These included Porcelain fungus, Yellow Stainer, Spiny Puffball, Magpie Inkcap and Collared Earthstar and also the slime moulds Wolf's Milk and Dog Vomit.

Tricia Marcousé – at Thatcham Discovery Centre on 12/10, Egyptian Geese with chicks, the adults were hissing at any people or birds which came near their brood. In her garden in Earley, Wrens collecting spiders.

2nd November

Ken White – in or near their garden in Plastow Green:

22/10/21, 3 Roe Deer in a nearby field.

23/10/21, 2 Foxes in superb full winter coats playing on the edge of nearby woodland.

24/10/21, 4 Red Admirals basking in sunshine.

28/10/21, a drunken Hornet on windfall apples.

30/10/21, 2 Red Admirals and 1 Comma basking in sunshine and visiting windfall apples.

01/11/21, 12 Golden Plovers lifted off an adjacent field and flew over their house, and nearby a Raven calling from treetops.

A Blackbird singing from garden hedgerows for the last week at dusk.

02/11/21, a Woodcock flushed from nearby woodland edge at dawn (06.40).

Ken reported that a new adult pair of unringed adult Peregrines have taken up residence on the Reading

University campus. Our speaker Chris Foster commented that Peregrines had been seen there earlier in the year.

Red Admirals were also observed in Tilehurst on 01/11/21 by Ian Duddle and recently in Earley by Tricia Marcousé.

Jon Cole – a nationally rare small beetle *Teredus cylindricus* at Dinton Pastures 2 weeks ago. The beetle is dependent on dead wood and has been found in Windsor Forest.



16th November

Ken and Sarah White in their garden and around Plastow Green:

04/11/21, 20 Fieldfares coming in to roost in hedgerow trees.

12/11/21, a newly fledged Woodpigeon.

13/11/21, Honey Bees on Mahonia.

14/11/21, a *Bombus terrestris* also on Mahonia, and a Mistle Thrush in full song.

16/11/21, a Muntjac in the back garden at 12 noon.

Teredus cylindricus at Dinton Pastures
October 2021 Photo © Jon Cole

Jan Haseler – on our fungus foray at Paices Wood, Aldermaston, we found an unusual bracket fungus on a fallen birch trunk. Our guest leader Mike Harrison subsequently identified it as the rare Red-belted Bracket *Fomitopsis pinicola*.

Dick Croker – Red Admirals in his Tilehurst garden recently, and a Vole between 1.30 and 4.30 pm in the last few days.

Marion Venners – a Barn Owl flew over the road near Blewbury on her way to Pangbourne this evening (16/11/21).

Liz Butcher – in her Southend Bradfield garden, Hedgehogs are just hibernating. Until September she saw 3 males fighting over the females, then a female and 2 young were coming and now only the young ones. Liz hopes they are large enough to survive the winter.

Inge Beck – brought a specimen of the shrub Dead Man's Fingers *Decaisnea fargesii*, to compare with the similarly named fungus *Xylaria polymorpha* which Inge had mentioned on her recent walk.

7th December

Jan Haseler – recently spotted the black club-shaped fruiting bodies of an Earth Tongue hidden in the grass of the lawn in their Tilehurst garden, where the more colourful Waxcap fungi were found back in the autumn; this was Jan's first sighting there of this Ascomycete fungus which was identified by Sue White as *Geoglossum fallax*.

Jerry Welsh – 3 Giant Puffballs in their Sonning Common garden recently, and on their way to Pangbourne this evening, 2 Fallow Deer crossing the road at Gallowstree Common and a Fox by the side of the road.

David Owens – a Great White Egret at Lavell's Lake, Dinton Pastures in late November and also a Little Egret, Gadwall, Shoveler, Tufted Ducks and Lapwing there, and a Little Egret on Whiteknights Lake. In the late afternoon on 02/12/21 at Lea Farm Lake, several individual flocks of 10-20 Ring-necked Parakeets each arrived and perched noisily in one tree before heading towards Dinton Pastures.

Tricia Marcousé – a pair of Muntjac Deer were seen in the small open area between Napier Road and Kings Meadow.

21st December

Liz Butcher - Honeybees taking small amounts of white pollen into their hive in her Southend Bradfield garden on 16/12/21. Liz has had no sightings of hedgehogs in the garden since her report of 16/11/21.

A Kingfisher visited her neighbour's pond in November. It cleared out all the fish over several days and hasn't been seen since. They live about a mile away from the river Pang.

Ken White -

04/12/21, Norwegian colour-ringed Black-headed Gull "Green JOL1" has reappeared on the Wharf in

Newbury for the 3rd winter running.
 And in Plastow Green
 08/12/21, a Barn Owl departing from a local barn.
 20/12/21, 4 Ravens flying high over their garden.
 21/12/21, 80 Fieldfares in a nearby field.

Grahame Hawker – a Herald Moth found hibernating in the spare bedroom of their house in Brimpton Common recently. Two Ring-necked Parakeets had been seen on a bird feeder in Earley.

Tom Walker – a Ring-necked Parakeet for 15 minutes on the bird table in his Reading garden (near the Royal Berks Hospital.)

Lesley Hawker – White Storks, probably from the Knepp Estate, seen flying over Brimpton Common 3 times this year, always in a clear blue sky on a still day.



Norwegian-ringed Black-headed Gull
 'Green JOL1', visited Newbury Wharf
 for the 3rd consecutive winter
 photo © Ken White (14/11/19)

Excursions 2021 by Jan Haseler, Fiona Cummins and Norman Hall

Covid-19 lockdown restrictions meant that there were no field excursions in the first three months of 2021. But at the end of March, the 'rule of 6' for outdoor events was reinstated and the programme of walks resumed.

On **Saturday 10 April**, volunteer warden Roger Dobbs led a walk at BBOWT's **Bowdown Woods** reserve, with Jan Haseler taking a second group round as well. On a cold, grey morning, the walk started out along a track across the Bomb Site. Dense blossom covered the Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* thicket next to the track; Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita* and Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* were heard and a Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo* drifted overhead. To the left of the track is a grassy area which is kept open by mowing. A distinctive moss, with bright reddish-orange flower-like structures on the tips of the shoots (spore producing Sporophytes), was found on the path. Sean O'Leary identified it from a photograph as the male form of Juniper Haircap *Polytrichum juniperinum*. The walk continued through an adjoining open scrubby area, with Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Gorse *Ulex europaeus*, Bramble and encroaching birch. Roger explained that various grazing regimes, with cattle and ponies, had been tried to control the scrub, but the animals ate the grass and ignored the woody material, so now it is managed by cutting. There was abundant Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia*, a small Evergreen Oak *Quercus ilex* was inspected and a Slow-worm *Anguis fragilis* was found under a metal sheet. The route led back onto the track round the Bomb Site. Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* was abundant here, leaves of Pignut *Conopodium majus* were found, the first Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* were coming into flower and there were Wood Anemones *Anemone nemorosa* and a few plants of Solomon's-seal *Polygonatum multiflorum*. The track went past the ammunition storage areas, where high banks between the bays were intended to limit the extent of potential accidents. The next path led down to an open grassy area, the former site of a shooting range. It is mown occasionally and drifts of Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* can be seen here in early summer. The vertical sandy slope above the former target area is a good place to look for solitary bees. At the far side of the clearing is a pond where newts are sometimes seen. The walk continued down a steep south-facing cleared ride. A vole was spotted amongst a pile of logs and Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana* and Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides* were seen on the way down.

The path crossed the stream at the bottom of the valley and then climbed up onto the next ridge, where Roger showed the group a newly created coppice clearing. Thin flexible stems had been left on the Hazel *Corylus avellana* stumps. These would then be bent over and buried a few metres from the parent stool to try to increase the density of Hazel within the plot. Roger pointed out the contrast between the dry coppiced area on the ridge, with its ground cover of Bluebells and Yellow Archangel *Lamiasstrum galeobdolon* and standards of oak *Quercus* and Ash *Fraxinus excelsior*, and the damp stream valley beyond with tall Alders *Alnus glutinosa* and no Bluebells. The group re-traced its steps and then continued along the cleared area below the power lines. There were rosettes of Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* and, in the wetter patches, big clumps of Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*. A single clump of Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris* was found in a particularly wet spot. Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos*, Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis*, Nuthatch, Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*, Raven *Corvus corax* and a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major*

were heard. Roger commented that the ride under the power lines is a good place to see Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* butterflies in summer. At one point, another power line comes in at right angles. With the extra light here, this is the only place along the power line ride where Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus* butterflies are recorded. Roger then led the group back across the stream and into an area of Hazel coppice on the south-facing hillside which is being managed for Dormice *Muscardinus avellanarius*. The area had not been coppiced for about 70 years. It was divided into four plots with a single plot being coppiced in each of 2011, 2015 and 2019. The last section will be coppiced in about 3 years. The objective is to rejuvenate the Hazel coppice for Dormice with minimal disturbance to them. Each plot has a collection of Dormouse boxes which are strapped to Hazels with the entrance hole up against the tree trunk. On the walk back to the path, a few plants of Alternate-leaved Golden Saxifrage *Chrysosplenium alternifolium* were found amongst the longer grass and nettles *Urtica dioica* on the bank of the stream. They had larger flowers than the much more widespread Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage, and a single leaf on a longer stem. The route then led steeply up the south-facing side of the valley and past several mature Beech *Fagus sylvatica* trees. A few flowering plants of Hairy Wood-rush *Luzula pilosa* were found beside the path. The final section of the walk followed the Bomb Site track back to the car park.

Sally Rankin led two walks on the sunny day of **Saturday 24 April**, one in the morning and one in the afternoon, starting from the Green in **Nettlebed** to look at the marshland, ponds, heathland and geological sites on the Common. In addition, three more members joined Sally on the pre-walk earlier in the week. Sally gave a brief history of the Common which is part of the Nettlebed Estate and belongs to the Fleming family. She pointed out that the undulating landscape of mixed woodland, heathland and marshland derives from the excavations made by brick-makers, the only visual sign now being the single remaining kiln in the centre of Nettlebed. The group set off down a lane fringed with mainly wild flowers including Cowslip *Primula veris* and the first of a number of patches of Wood-sorrel seen during the walk. There were numerous ponds to be seen, including one formerly used as the drinking supply for Nettlebed village. Sally also pointed out at least one sink hole in the area. As the group walked through the area a variety of birdsong was heard including Robin *Erithacus rubecula*, Wren, Chiffchaff, Great Tit *Parus major*, Blackbird *Turdus merula* and Blackcap. A Stock Dove *Columba oenas* perched on a telegraph wire. (Other birds heard or seen on the pre-walk were Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris*, Nuthatch, Song Thrush, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*, Marsh Tit *Poecile palustris*, Pied Wagtail *Motacilla alba*, Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus*, Dunnock *Prunella modularis*, Coal Tit *Periparus ater*, Willow Warbler *Phylloscopus trochilus*, Buzzard, Red Kite *Milvus milvus*, Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* and Lesser Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos minor*, the latter seen by only one member).

On a bank at the end of the lane a remarkable number of Colt's-foot *Tussilago farfara* were growing. Other plants seen around here were Wood Sedge *Carex sylvatica*, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea* and the garden escape variegated form of Yellow Archangel. Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*, Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni* and Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria* butterflies were spotted and the call of a Green Woodpecker was heard in the distance. Sally led the group to a small area of the wood which had survived as heathland covered with Heather as it was formerly the site of a Scout Camp. Birch and Rowan *Sorbus aucuparia* seedlings were flourishing. The walk continued to Windmill Hill, the highest point in the district but no longer the site of a mill, and the group then entered an area of marshland scattered with small trees and pools. It would have been too wet to walk through had it not been for the recent dry spell. Sally pointed out the leaves of Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula*, not yet in flower. At one of the larger pools the group observed a bird which was identified as a female Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs* behaving in 'flycatcher' fashion. Returning to dry woodland, a pair of noisy Jays *Garrulus glandarius* flew ahead and a few plants of Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant* were observed. The group walked past an active Badger *Meles meles* sett and then spent several minutes watching a Great Spotted Woodpecker foraging among the trees. Sally explained that the Thames formerly ran through the area with large numbers of rounded stones as the evidence for this. The final part of the walk led through another marshy area where Sally drew attention to Sphagnum Moss, a rarity in Oxfordshire. A pair of Mandarin Ducks *Aix galericulata* was spotted on one of the larger pools and a male Siskin *Carduelis spinus* flew down to drink at the edge. What was thought to be Blinks *Montia fontana* was found on the edge of the recreation ground and was confirmed on the second walk.

Sunday 2 May was International Dawn Chorus Day and at 6am, 8 members met at the car park of the Rowbarge

at **Woolhampton** for two socially distanced walks, led by Sarah and Ken White. The temperature was 1°C and there was a ground frost, with clouds of mist over the fields and gravel pits. Blackbird, Goldfinch and Great Spotted Woodpecker were heard while the groups were gathering in the car park. The walks started out westwards along the adjacent track and soon Wren, Dunnock and Cetti's Warbler *Cettia cetti*, with its exploding call, were heard and a Muntjac deer *Muntiacus reevesi* was spotted in the adjacent field. The route then turned left along the footpath to the Rowney's Predator Lake gravel pit. Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis* was in flower beside the path. Several recently arrived Garden Warblers *Sylvia borin* were singing loudly as they established their territories. Sarah compared the deeper pitched song of the Garden Warbler to the cello, with the higher pitched song of the Blackcap being like the violin. Long-tailed Tits *Aegithalos caudatus* moved through the bankside willows and Chiffchaff was heard. Skylarks *Alauda arvensis* sang from high over the grassy field to the left of the path and the first of two male Mandarin ducks flew in. On the lake were a pair of Greylag Geese *Anser anser* with 6 tiny goslings, together with Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Coot *Fulica atra*, Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula* and Mallard. There was a brief diversion along a footpath across the grassy field to another track, where newly arrived Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* were both heard and seen, together with more Garden Warblers. The seedheads of Colt's-foot were providing abundant food for birds such as Goldfinch. Continuing round the lake, a female Reed Bunting *Emberiza schoeniclus* and Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* were added to the list of sightings. Three Common Terns *Sterna hirundo* were displaying around a raft which was being occupied by two Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*. A Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus scirpaceus*, with its rhythmic unmusical song, was singing from the bankside vegetation. The walkers looked into the edge of the dense reedbed of the conservation area, but turned back to avoid disturbing a nesting Mute Swan *Cygnus olor*. More Reed Warblers were singing here. The route continued along the track back to the River Kennet. A Song Thrush was singing from the top of a tree and both Blackcap and Garden Warbler were singing, giving a welcome opportunity to compare their songs. Despite having a reputation for skulking, the Garden Warbler was in plain sight, singing from a prominent perch near the top of the tree. Several Wrens called loudly from the undergrowth.

The next viewpoint was at the northern shore of the gravel pit. Two Oystercatchers *Haematopus ostralegus* flew in to a small island, a pair of Great Crested Grebes were displaying and several Gadwall *Anas strepera* were seen. The stout wire fence beside the track to the canal enabled a Coot to nest in safety close to the path. The walk continued back along the towpath of the Kennet and Avon canal, where Greater Pond Sedge *Carex riparia*, American Land-cress *Barbarea verna* and Butterbur *Petasites hybridus* were seen. Large Bitter-cress *Cardamine amara* and Hart's-tongue Fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* were growing on the lock gate and a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* perched on the other side of the canal. A Mistle Thrush was gathering food in its bill in the field next to the pub and a pair of Pied Wagtails were nesting near the pub kitchen. A Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* with insects in its beak flew under the swing bridge over the road, where it appeared to have a nest on the moving part of the lock gate. More Whitethroats were singing in the scrubby field on the other side of the road and an obliging Sedge Warbler *Acrocephalus schoenobaenus* showed its prominent eye stripe as it sang from the top of the vegetation. Back in the car park, a Chaffinch was singing and a Nuthatch called.

Following on from Jim Asher's excellent January talk to the Society about **Aston Upthorpe Downs**, Jan and Laurie Haseler led a walk there on **Saturday 22 May**. The recent relaxation of the rules for outdoor gatherings meant that it was no longer necessary to find extra leaders and put on extra walks for the 11 members who attended. It was a cloudy morning but the gales of the previous day had died down. While members gathered at the grain dryer, nesting Swallows *Hirundo rustica* flew into the building and a Corn Bunting *Emberiza calandra* sang, first from a wire and then from the top of a Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna* bush. The group set off up the track towards Juniper Valley, diverting after a short distance onto the adjacent strip of access land which includes two legs of the Aston Upthorpe butterfly transect. It is sheltered with herb-rich turf and, in sunny weather, would have been a good place to find species such as Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae* and Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages* - but under cloudy skies, only a single Green Carpet *Colostygia pectinataria* moth was seen. Flowers seen here included Chalk Milkwort *Polygala calcarea*, Cowslip and Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor*. The walk continued into Juniper Valley, which unfortunately is not in a particularly good condition at present. Many Juniper *Juniperus communis* bushes dot the valley sides, but they are not regenerating and the valley is seriously over-grazed by Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*. The good news is that the charity Plantlife has recently secured funding to help restore the valley, by putting up rabbit-proof fencing, controlling Rabbit numbers and reintroducing limited

grazing by sheep. Part way up the steep valley side is the Pasqueflower enclosure, which is protected by rabbit-proof fencing. Inside were Cowslips, Chalk Milkwort and the feathery seed-heads of Pasqueflowers *Pulsatilla vulgaris*, contrasting with the short, flower-free turf on the outside. Nearby, Plantlife staff and volunteers had recently found about 50 leaf rosettes of Field Fleawort *Tephrosia integrifolia*. Also seen here were leaf rosettes of Hoary Plantain *Plantago media*. A Barberry *Berberis vulgaris* bush with yellow flowers was sprawling amongst the mixed scrub and Juniper.

Returning to the main track, the walk continued uphill. Skylarks sang overhead and there were flowers on the Wayfaring-trees *Viburnum lantana*. Turning off along Grim's Ditch, the next track led to Oven Bottom, another area of open access land. Rabbit grazing is under control here and the chalk grassland is in superb condition. On the valley sides were sheets of dark blue Chalk Milkwort and golden yellow Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* and Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* was in flower on some of the ant hills. A total of 18 tiny Burnt Orchids *Neotinea ustulata* were found, some singly, some in clusters of up to 4 flower heads. As each was found, it was marked with a cane to protect against accidental trampling. Then higher up the valley side, two flower stems of Field Fleawort were found. One was about 18cm tall with two flower heads, the other was shorter with a single flower head. Then the sun came out and butterflies started to appear. Two Marsh Fritillaries *Euphydryas aurinia* were controversial sightings. Several years ago, the colony at Seven Barrows failed and the species was thought to be locally extinct. But in 2020, it started to be widely reported across the region, including from Juniper Valley and Oven Bottom, perhaps as the result of unofficial releases. Also seen were several Dingy Skipper and Small Heath butterflies *Coenonympha pamphilus*, together with both male and female Common Heath moths *Ematurga atomaria*, a Fox Moth *Macrolethylaea rubi* and a Common Swift moth *Korscheltellus lupulina*. On the walk back to the start, Musk Thistle *Carduus nutans* was spotted in an adjacent field and a Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca* was singing from a flowering Hawthorn next to the track.

John Lerpiniere led a walk to **Miram's Copse**, starting from the Black Barn at Rushall Manor Farm, **Bradfield**, on the morning of **Saturday 5 June**. Also on the walk was John Bishop, who manages the woodlands. Swallows were flying round the farm buildings and a Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella* sang from a nearby hedgerow. The 15-strong group set out in warm sunshine along the track which leads through Rushall Copse and Long Copse. Bush Vetch *Vicia sepium*, Greater Stitchwort and Cow Parsley *Anthriscus sylvestris* were in flower at the side of the track. Entering the woodland, it was a shock to see leafless trees, particularly Hazel and oak, making it seem more like February than June. There were caterpillars everywhere – dangling down from long threads and feeding on the remains of leaves. The small green specimens were thought to be Winter Moth *Operophtera brumata* caterpillars, while the larger dark ones with yellow markings and a brown face were Mottled Umber *Erannis defoliaria*, whose Latin name hints at its potentially devastating effect on woodland. A female Brimstone flew along the track, and Speckled Wood, Green-veined White *Pieris napi* and both male and female Orange-tip butterflies were also seen. The track ran briefly alongside the edge of the wood and a Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* was glimpsed at the far side of the adjacent field. Common Figwort *Scrophularia nodosa*, Yellow Pimpernel *Lysimachia nemorum*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea*, Woodruff *Galium odoratum* and shiny-leaved Black Bryony *Tamus communis* were noted. A big flock of crows flew up noisily from the woodland floor ahead. A track with Wood Spurge flowering in its wide margins led up through Miram's Copse. Wood Spurge is the larval food plant of the Drab Looper *Minoa murinata*, a Nationally Scarce little day-flying moth, which has one of its strongholds in the Pang Valley woodlands. Careful searching revealed several specimens of the little Yellow-barred Long-horn moth *Nemophora degeerella* but no Drab Loopers, so the search continued in a side ride which also had wide sunny margins with Wood Spurge. This search was more successful, and several little twinkling gold specimens were spotted, flying in the sunshine. John successfully netted one, so that people could have a closer look at a moth whose distinguishing feature is its complete absence of distinguishing features. In total, five Drab Loopers were counted in Miram's Copse. Square-stalked St John's-wort *Hypericum tetrapterum* was found at the edge of the adjacent ditch, with Tutsan *Hypericum androsaemum* growing on the bank above. A prostate plant with tiny white flowers and square stems was identified as Bog Stitchwort *Stellaria alsine*.

John Bishop then led some of the group to the edge of the woodland where there is a large swallow-hole. The fields below are on the Chalk, while the woods are on the Lambeth Beds and the swallow-hole is just above the geological boundary. The group then reassembled at the edge of Long Copse. A little way back from the track was an impressive patch of about 50 Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula*, with most a little past their best, but some still at their peak. The walk continued up along the edge of a fenced-in coppice plot. After cutting, the

regrowth had initially been badly damaged by browsing deer, which had allowed more light to get in, which in turn had led to a surge of Wood Spurge. This proved to be the best place for Drab Loopers, with 15 seen.

Also seen here were Silver-ground Carpet moth *Xanthorhoe montanata* and Blood-vein moth *Timandra comae*. A corrugated metal sheet at the top of the plot was lifted carefully. Underneath were a family of about 6 shrews and a young Common Toad *Bufo bufo*. The shrews were small with relatively long tails and were thought to be Pygmy Shrews *Sorex minutus*. Returning to the main track, the group walked back to the Black Barn. A Whitethroat was seen in a bush at the side of the path near the end of the walk.

Jan Haseler led 19 members on a walk at **Silchester Common** on the sunny morning of **Saturday 26 June**. The walk started from the Impstone Road car park and headed out across the Common, where Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis* and mats of Heath Bedstraw *Galium saxatile* were flowering in gaps between the Gorse bushes. An old wood bank had an interesting collection of trees, including several Wild Service-trees *Sorbus torminalis* on which the chunky berries were beginning to form. Sessile Oaks *Quercus petraea*, with stalked leaves, were growing next to Pedunculate Oaks *Q. robur*, with virtually stalkless leaves. Bilberry *Vaccinium myrtillus* and Common Cow-wheat *Melampyrum arvense* were seen on the opposite side of the track. The path led down to a shallow valley where a small stream trickled through an area of mire. Tormentil *Potentilla erecta*, Cross-leaved Heath *Erica tetralix* and several Heath Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza maculata* were in flower on the bank and there were more Heath Spotted-orchids further into the mire, together with Common Cottongrass *Eriophorum angustifolium*, flowering Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum* and the grey-green leaves of Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*. A newt, probably Palmate *Triturus helveticus*, vanished into a tussock of grass and a male Broad-bodied Chaser *Libellula depressa* flew across the bog. On the other side of valley, the path climbed up onto a drier area of heath, where Bell Heather *Erica cinerea* was in flower.

Turning northwards, the walk continued into an open area of heathland where significant effort has been put into clearing Gorse, scraping bare areas and constructing sheltering banks. Heath Groundsel *Senecio sylvaticus* was found on one bare sandy patch, while an adjacent patch had clumps of Sand Spurrey *Spergularia rubra* with tiny pink flowers. Lousewort *Pedicularis sylvatica*, Heath Milkwort *Polygala serpyllifolia* and Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella* were growing in the short turf. Slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum* was in flower on the side of a bank and Trailing St John's-wort *H. humifusum* was found on another scraped area. An Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* flew past and a Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* was seen. Then the first Silver-studded Blue butterflies *Plebejus argus* appeared. The majority of the twenty or so butterflies were blue males, but a few brown females were also seen. They were fairly easy to spot, flying low over the heather and not flying far before settling again. At the peak of the flight season, much higher numbers could be expected here, but following a long cold and wet spring, the start of the flight season had been delayed and appeared to be only just getting under way. A pair of Stonechats *Saxicola torquata* called from the top of Gorse bushes and a Common Heath moth was spotted down in the heather. The walk continued southwards across the heathland to a spot where the track ran along the edge of a high bank above an extensive area of mire. Lily-of-the-valley *Convallaria majalis* and Wood Horsetail *Equisetum sylvaticum* were found here. The first edition of the Reading Naturalist, published in 1949, describes this patch of Lily-of-the-valley. Then, as now, it did not appear to produce any flowers, but the plants have proved remarkably persistent. Down in the mire, pink flowers of Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* were draped across several of the tussocks of vegetation. The final section of the walk was through the woodland to the south of the heathy section of the Common in an unsuccessful search for White Admiral *Limenitis camilla* or Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies. Due to the late season, they did not appear to be on the wing yet. As on several other field excursions, the woods showed some signs of caterpillar damage, but a new growth of Honeysuckle leaves seemed to be escaping further destruction. Male Fern *Dryopteris filix-mas*, more Common Cow-wheat and more Wild Service-trees were noted on the walk back to the car park.

Sarah White led 11 members on an all-day visit to **Martin Down National Nature Reserve**, between Salisbury and Blandford, on **Saturday 10 July**. After a damp start, the clouds gradually thinned and eventually the sun came through. Songs of Yellowhammer and Whitethroat were heard as the group started out along a track which led through a band of scrub, before opening out onto a vast expanse of chalk grassland. The grassland was coloured by the white of Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Common Valerian *Valeriana officinalis* and Yarrow *Achillea millefolium*, the yellow of Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor*, and the purple of knapweeds, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*. Common Spotted-orchids and Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis* dotted the turf and there was

a continuous background chorus of Skylark and Corn Bunting song. Next to the track were a series of high banks, the remains of wartime earthworks. These were covered with flowers, including Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus*, Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*, Salad Burnet and Common Gromwell *Lithospermum officinale*. Large flocks of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina* and Starlings *Sturnus vulgaris* were seen. Beyond the wartime earthworks was a scraped area with very short turf, where the tiny yellow-green flowers of Bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum* were found, together with the leaves of Horseshoe Vetch and twisted tufts of Dwarf Sedge *Carex humilis*, a local rarity.

A sharp-eyed observer spotted a tiny Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, then gradually more and more specimens were found. The walk continued along Bokerley Dyke, a Bronze or Early Iron Age bank and ditch. A Corn Bunting sang from a bush on top of the Dyke, and then, further on, a Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata* darted out and back from the edge of the trees beyond the Dyke in its characteristic fly-catching flight. The walk continued across open grassland past the first Chalk Fragrant Orchids *Gymnadenia conopsea*. Then the sun came out and butterflies started to appear – Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*, Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*, Small Heath and large numbers of Dark Green Fritillary *Argynnis aglaja*. A larval web on a bush next to the path was home to caterpillars of the Small Eggar moth *Eriogaster lanestris* moth. According to the Hantsmoths website, Martin Down is the last remaining Hampshire location for this nationally scarce moth. Its numbers have been drastically reduced by severe trimming of hedgerows during the larval season. While lunch was being consumed beside one of the grassy tracks, a Small Blue butterfly *Cupido minimus* butterfly landed on Sarah's hand, attracted by the traces left by her lunchtime orange. It then moved its way around the group, perching on one person's boot and another's shirt. Several large patches of Kidney Vetch *Anthyllis vulneraria*, the caterpillar food-plant of the Small Blue, were found nearby.

The route led back up to a shorter-turfed section of Bokerley Dyke. In an adjoining patch of scrub were the remains of three Greater Butterfly-orchids *Platanthera chlorantha* and a Common Twayblade *Neottia ovata*. Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule* and mats of Common Rock-rose were seen at the side of the track as it climbed steeply up to the top of the slope near Grim's Ditch. There was a fine display of Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* and a Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* plant, not yet in flower, was found beside the path. Acid-loving plants started to appear, including Gorse, Heath Groundsel, Sheep's Sorrel and Heath Bedstraw. One of the small metallic green Forester moths was resting on a Small Scabious flower head. Martin Down is the sole remaining location in South Hampshire for the Forester *Adscita statites*, whose larval foodplant is Sheep's Sorrel. Bullfinches *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* called from deep within the scrub, then a Tawny Owl *Strix aluco* was heard. A narrow path led through a strip of woodland and back out to the top of the grassland, giving extensive views across the reserve. Some of the surrounding farmland has been converted back from arable to grass. Below, a male Stonechat on top of a scrubby bush had food in its bill. A little further on, several plants of Round-headed Rampion *Phyteuma orbiculare* were just coming into flower and there were a few specimens of Hairy St-John's-wort *Hypericum hirsutum*, with unhealthy-looking yellowish green leaves. On the walk back to the start, a distant Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* was seen and a brown spike of Knapweed Broomrape *Orobanche elatior* was found beside the path. Back at the car park, a Yellowhammer was having a bath in a puddle. Dark clouds were gathering, but the torrential rain held off for long enough for everyone to get under cover.

Chris Ash and Sheelagh Hill led 11 members on a walk at **Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve on Saturday 17 July**. The walk started at the northern end of the reserve, where the Ridgeway crosses the A40. It was a hot afternoon, with the temperature forecast to rise to 27 °C, but the Beech trees which line the Ridgeway provided welcome shade. A Hornbeam *Carpinus betulus* at the side of the track dangled abundant seeds and a Green-veined White butterfly landed on the track in front of the group, presumably to take up moisture or nutrients. Dusky purple flowers of Meadow Crane's-bill *Geranium pratense* were seen a gateway which led into an area of flower-rich grassland. Plants here included Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Greater Knapweed *C. scabiosa*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, Small Scabious, Wild Carrot *Daucus carota*, Quaking Grass *Briza media*, Oxeye Daisy *Leucanthemum vulgare*, Lady's Bedstraw, Squinancywort, Salad Burnet, Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus*, Wild Mignonette *Reseda lutea*, Wild Marjoram *Origanum vulgare*, Dwarf Thistle, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Common Rock-rose, Pyramidal Orchid and Yellow Rattle.

It was interesting to compare the plant list with the sightings at Martin Down on the previous week's outing.

Dropwort was much harder to find at Aston Rowant, while Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata* and Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens* were more widespread. Big orange Dark Green Fritillary butterflies flew powerfully above the grassland and there were good numbers of pale Chalkhill Blues *Polyommatus coridon*. Commonest butterfly of the afternoon was the Marbled White, while other sightings included Meadow Brown, Small Heath and Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas*. A Six-spot Burnet *Zygaena filipendulae* moth was found on a Greater Knapweed flower and grasshoppers provided a quiet background chorus. The path led under a spreading Whitebeam *Sorbus aria* tree which offered welcome shade. Its still-green clusters of berries promised an abundant harvest for the birds in a few months' time. The noise of the motorway increased until the path dipped down into a sheltered sunken trackway, which is a good place to find butterflies in windy weather. Following a steep scramble back up the side of the track, the heat of the afternoon prompted a leisurely stroll back towards the start. Just before reaching the Ridgeway, another track, edged on one side by berry laden bushes of Spindle *Euonymus europaeus* and Purging Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica*, led back around the edge of the reserve. Common Valerian, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis* and a white specimen of Clustered Bellflower were in flower on the verge, while in the middle of the trackway were white-flowered specimens of Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris*. In the field to the right were several big multi-stemmed Whitebeam and Beech trees, while further up the hillside, a Raven was being mobbed by Red Kites.

Rob Stallard led a well-attended walk around the **Pangbourne meadows** on **Sunday 1 August**. It was a grey but bright morning, and the clouds thinned as the walk progressed. 16 members gathered at the east side of the village, where the A329 crosses the Sulham Brook. Looking down from the bridge, the water level was low and the stream bed was choked with Fool's Water-cress *Apium nodiflorum* and Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*. The walk started out north-eastwards towards the railway line. There was a wide flowery margin at the edge of the field, between the footpath and the stream. Plants seen here included Meadowsweet *Filipendula ulmaria*, Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum*, Hemp Agrimony *Eupatorium cannabinum*, Common Comfrey *Symphytum officinale*, Wild Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, Common Mallow *Malva sylvestris*, Welled Thistle *Carduus crispus*, Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre*, Creeping Thistle *C. arvense*, Black Horehound *Ballota nigra*, Curled Dock *Rumex crispus* and Red Bartsia *Odontites vernus*. Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus* was the most abundant butterfly, with further sightings of Small White *Pieris rapae*, Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*, Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Peacock *Aglais io* and Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta*, plus several Silver-Y *Autographa gamma* moths. The route continued along a short stretch of lane, where Vervain *Verbena officinalis* and Old Man's Beard *Clematis vitalba* were seen, under the railway and out into the fields to the north. Following the stream, further sightings included Purple Loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria*, the unrelated Yellow Loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris*, Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*, Tufted Vetch *Vicia cracca*, Meadow Vetchling *Lathyrus pratensis*, Orange Balsam *Impatiens capensis*, Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Marsh Woundwort *Stachys palustris*, Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* and Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris*, together with a Roesel's Bush-cricket *Metrioptera roeselii*. On reaching the River Thames, there was a brief diversion eastwards to look at Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, Water Forget-me-not *Myosotis scorpioides*, Bulrush *Typha latifolia* and a mystery plant which Rob suggested might be the North American Beggarticks *Bidens frondosa*. Rob pointed out the outflow location of the pipeline from AWE Aldermaston. Retracing their steps, the group then turned round and headed upstream along the Thames Path towards Pangbourne. Sightings along this stretch included Yellow Water-lily *Nuphar lutea*, Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica*, Common Valerian, Meadow Crane's-bill, Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica*, Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*, Square-stalked St John's-wort, Skullcap *Scutellaria galericulata* and Stone Parsley *Sison amomum*. Rob pointed out the non-stinging form of nettle, with longer, narrower leaves than the stinging variety. Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* was added to the butterfly list here.

The next section of the walk led through the centre of Pangbourne, southwards along The Moors and out onto the Pang Meadows, where the sky darkened and rain began to fall. The waters of the River Pang were clear and fast-flowing over a gravel bed, very different from the sluggish waters of the Sulham Brook. Black and yellow caterpillars of the Cinnabar moth *Tyria jacobaeae* were feeding on ragwort plants. Enormous leaves of a row of plants at the riverside were thought to be Giant Butterbur *Petasites japonicus*. The route then led eastwards across the meadows, where Lady's Bedstraw and Lesser Stitchwort *Stellaria graminea* were seen. Musk Thistle and a Pyramidal Orchid had also been found here on the pre-walk. Then the path crossed onto a gravel terrace and the plants changed, with Harebell, Tormantil, Sheep's Sorrel and Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* amongst the sightings. After crossing another field, the route turned back northwards along Sulham Lane and followed the Sulham Brook back

to the start. A Blackcap chacked loudly from a Hawthorn bush, a Grey Heron was seen beside the stream and the rain finally stopped.

Julia Cooper and Ian Duddle led 7 members on a walk in the north-west section of the extensive **Chobham Common National Nature Reserve** on **Saturday 21 August**. It was a grey morning, with occasional light rain. Abundant Common Stork's-bill *Erodium cicutarium* and Lesser Swine-cress *Coronopus didymus* were seen in the car park, with a large and very hairy Fox Moth caterpillar found nearby. The Common was looking at its best, with extensive areas of flowering heather and large expanses of dark purplish-brown Purple Moor-grass *Molinia caerulea*. Setting out north-eastwards, Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* and Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria* were found next to the track and the first of a number of Grayling *Hipparchia semele* butterflies was disturbed. A little further on, all three species of heather (Bell Heather, Cross-leaved Heath and Ling) were found in flower together, with Dwarf Gorse nearby. Turning left at a ride junction, Heath Groundsel and Sheep's Sorrel were seen. A little further on, Petty Whin *Genista anglica*, with spines and grey-green leaves, was found. The route passed a number of ponds. Brown China-mark moths *Elophila nymphaeata* were found near the first. The leaves of Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* could be seen in the next slightly larger water-body. Several Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine* seed-heads were found nearby and there was plentiful Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* on the other side of the path. A Great Spotted Woodpecker called from the top of a nearby Silver Birch *Betula pendula*. The walk continued down to an area of mire beside the Reading to Waterloo railway line, which marks the northern boundary of the reserve. Tiny white flower spikes were growing up from Round-leaved Sundew *Drosera rotundifolia* plants and the seed heads of Bog Asphodel were seen. In a particularly wet area of the mire were four large yellowish-green Pitcher Plants *Sarracenia flava*. The route then led back up onto a ridge with views across a valley to the appropriately named Burnt Hill in the north-west corner of the reserve. This was the location of a serious fire the previous August. The vegetation had mostly grown back and the burnt area looked predominantly green, but blackened tree trunks still delineated the fire area. Several clumps of Goldenrod *Solidago virgaurea* were found beside the track and a selection of fungi were seen, including Blusher *Amanita rubescens*, Tawny Grisette *Amanita fulva* and Common Earthball *Scleroderma citrinum*. Also seen during the morning's walk were Ochre Brittlegill *Russula ochroleuca* and a number of unidentified reddish Brittlegill species. The track led to a monument to Queen Victoria. A Common Lizard and a Wasp Spider *Argiope bruennichi* were spotted amongst the Bracken on the north slope below the monument. In a damper area further down the slope, Heath Milkwort and Devil's-bit Scabious were in flower. Nearby were about 20 Marsh Gentian *Gentiana pneumonanthe* flowers. They were growing at the edge of the fire-damaged area and it was speculated that the burning of some of the dense Purple Moor-grass may have been beneficial for the gentians. The track led past a tree-lined pond where Trifid Bur-marigold *Bidens tripartita*, Gypsywort and Tufted Forget-me-not *Myosotis laxa* were found. Then in the final stretch back to the car park, a running Roe Deer was seen.

Conditions on the night of **Saturday 4 September** were ideal for the annual mothing night, which was held this year at BBOWT's **Hartslock Nature Reserve** near Goring. It was a warm, still, overcast night, dry apart from a brief sharp shower at about 2am. The event was organised by Norman Hall, ably assisted by Paul Black. Norman ran his lights in the lower field, near the entrance to the reserve, while Paul's lights were up in the top field. While Paul was setting up his moth traps, he spotted a Common Toad on the open hillside, on the path up the steep slope below his traps. Both Norman and Paul stayed at the reserve overnight. A few members came to see the traps in action on the Saturday evening, while others, including two 8-year old girls, came to inspect the catch next morning. Norman commented that he had met 4-year olds in the past who had competed to put moths into glass tubes, but that this was the first time that he had watched 8-year olds competing to carefully remove moths from the tubes and let them fly away unharmed. An amazing total of 110 species were identified, of which 90 were macro-moths, 11 were pyralid moths and 9 were micro-moths. Paul commented that his Hartslock catch had more species in a single night than he had ever seen anywhere in the whole of September before. His catch included over 1000 individual moths. Highlight of the night was a Dark Crimson Underwing *Catocala sponsa*. This is a large and spectacular moth which was new to the reserve and new to all the moth-trappers present. Until about three years ago, the only nearby breeding colonies of this moth were in a few areas of mature oak woodland in Hampshire and Wiltshire. It was otherwise known as a very rare migrant. Since then, it has been reported in small but increasing numbers. Other spectacular new species included two big Clifden Nonpareils *C. fraxini*, with striking blue hindwings, and four Jersey Tigers *Callimorpha dominula*, with black and white striped forewings and red hindwings. Less welcome newcomers were Oak Processionary Moth *Thaumetopoea proces-*

sionea and Gypsy Moth *Lymantria dispar*, both of which are considered to be pest species. In addition to the five species mentioned above, a further five species were new for the reserve – Currant Pug *Eupithecia assimolata*, Sharp-angled Peacock *Macaria alternata*, Dotted Rustic *Rhyacia simulans*, Pinion-streaked Snout *Schranksia costaestrigalis* and *Eudonia palida*.

The Society's previous moth-trapping events at Hartslock had always been in high summer, so there were a number of late summer and autumn species which we had not seen there before. These included Red Underwing *Catocala nupta*, Old Lady *Mormo maura*, Autumnal Rustic *Eugnorisma glareosa*, Feathered Gothic *Tholera decimalis* and Black Rustic *Aporophyla nigra*. Eleven specimens of Chalk Carpet *Scotopteryx bipunctaria*, a Nationally Scarce moth of chalk and limestone grassland which we have found previously at Hartslock, were trapped. Wood Carpet *Epirrhoe rivata* is another uncommon moth which we have found at Hartslock previously. It is difficult to separate from Common Carpet *E. alternata*, but both species were present in the catch and it was possible to see them side-by-side and note the subtle differences. Several species had unusually high counts, including 24 Hedge Rustics *Tholera cespitis* and 71 White-points *Mythimna albipuncta*, a moth which was formerly considered to be a rare migrant but which is now breeding regularly in our area.

Adrian Lawson led 21 members on a walk around **Southcote and Coley Meadows** on the warm and sunny morning of **Sunday 27 September**. The walk started out southwards from the end of Circuit Lane along a track across Southcote Meadows. Adrian pointed out that at that point, the valley of the Kennet is about 6km wide, stretching from Southcote south to Grazeley, but as the river approaches Reading town centre, it narrows down to just hundreds of metres. This section of the meadows is not grazed and trees and bushes are gradually encroaching. Several Cetti's Warblers called from deep in the vegetation, a Chiffchaff was seen and a Buzzard circled overhead. The walk continued to Southcote Mill, over the narrow Milkmaid's Bridge across the Kennet and Avon Canal and into an area of restored gravel pits on the south side of the river. The path led through an area of dense Alder growth, then out onto an open meadow which had originally been sown with a wildflower mixture. But because regular cutting had ceased, vigorous grasses are taking over and a thicket of Ash seedlings, now alas mostly suffering from Ash Dieback *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*, has appeared. Only Common Fleabane, Square-stalked St John's-wort and Bristly Ox-tongue *Helminthotheca echioides* flowers were still holding their own. The walk continued to the edge of a lake, the easternmost gravel pit of a chain which stretches on either side of the M4 to beyond Theale. One of these lakes is famous for being home to one of Britain's biggest freshwater fish, the Burghfield Common Carp *Cyprino carpio*. The walkers then headed back through more restored but neglected meadows towards the river. Two Great Spotted Woodpeckers were seen on a wooden telegraph pole and the distinctive call of a Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* alerted Adrian to its presence as it flew overhead.

The next section of the walk was downstream along the towpath to a distinctive zig-zag weir where the river dropped down at the top of Fobney Island, while the canal continued at a higher level. Growing on the weir were Water Forget-me-not, Water Figwort and Water-cress *Rorippa nasturtium-aquaticum*. A Comma butterfly was sunning itself on a nearby bramble bush and several Speckled Wood butterflies were seen. In the original plans, it had been intended that Fobney Island would have more bare gravel habitats, but water levels have been lower than envisaged. Piles of cut and raked vegetation marked where the ground had recently been cleared. Sneezewort was found in an area of longer vegetation by the track, while in a wet area near Fobney Lock, Creeping-Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, Purple Loosestrife, Orange Balsam and Hemp Agrimony were seen. After re-crossing the canal, the route followed a damp path beside the old Fobney pumping station and alongside Thames Water's treatment works. When their systems are flushed, water flows over the footpath and into the fields of Fobney Marsh. Some of the drains have been blocked, so this area of Coley Meadows is gradually becoming wetter. It is lightly grazed by cattle in summer. Further into the meadows was a pool with a Grey Heron standing to one side and a Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* moving along the far edge. The starry white flowers of Water Chickweed *Myosoton aquaticum* were found beside the path here. The group then retraced their steps for a short distance, before following another footpath northwards across a drier section of the meadows. It ran past a solitary Oak and led to a long wooded hedgerow which was growing on a raised bank between two ditches. Adrian suggested that it might be a path made by the monks of Reading Abbey, giving access to the vast area of marshland, where waterfowl could be trapped for food. From the next field, an interesting collection of trees could be seen. An enormous stump marked the location of a big old Black Poplar *Populus nigra* which had blown down in a recent winter storm. A halo of new growth showed that the tree had

survived the fall. Nearby was an enormous Crack Willow *Salix fragilis* which had fallen and regenerated a number of times, getting bigger each time. Several big old London Planes *Platanus occidentalis x orientalis* marked the historic boundary of the grounds of Coley Park. A contemporary picture shows that they must have been planted very soon after their first introduction to Britain in the 17th century. The final part of the walk was along the Holy Brook, up onto the line of a dismantled railway, along a track next to the main west coast railway line and back to the start.

David Owens led a walk round the northern section of **Sulham Woods** on **Saturday 16 October**. Starting from Beech Road, Purley, 16 members set off up a footpath towards the woods. First sighting was a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, which flew across the grassy field to the right of the path. The route led through a gap in the hedge on the left into a stony stubble field. In the distance, a bank of mist rose above the field and Skylarks sang overhead. Plants found here included Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis*, Field Pansy *Viola arvensis*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*, Common Figwort, Common Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris* and Common Poppy *Papaver rhoeas*. The walk continued into Mosshall Wood, the northern sector of Sulham Woods. Beside the track are two big chalk pits, and overhanging the edge of one of them was the trunk of a fallen Beech tree on which were growing many tufts of glossy white Porcelain Fungus *Oudemansiella mucida*. The route then led in an anti-clockwise direction along the track which runs around the edge of the woods. In the north-west corner, on bare ground below big Beeches, were a number of Helleborine plants. This is a spot where Narrow-lipped Helleborines *Epipactis muelleri* are regularly found in flower in July. A number of plant spikes, with the seed heads grazed off, did indeed have long narrow leaves arranged in two opposite ranks, as is the case for the Narrow-lipped Helleborine. But the two biggest plant spikes, with their seed heads intact, had their leaves arranged spirally up the stem, as found on the Broad-leaved Helleborine. A little further on, under the trees beside the path, was a line of white fungi which coloured yellow when scratched, revealing their identity as the poisonous Yellow Stainer *Agaricus xanthodermus*. Bright red berries of Black Bryony scrambled through the vegetation at the side of the path, while nearby, pink Spindle berries showed no sign of their orange seeds yet. The leaves on the trees were still mostly green, with just a few Sycamores *Acer pseudoplatanus* and the odd branch of Beech showing autumn colours. Around the base of one stump were dense tufts of Glistening Inkcap *Coprinellus micaceus*. On another stump were pink blobs of Wolf's Milk *Lycogala terrestre* slime mould, while on a rotten fallen branch nearby were the white dots of another slime mould. Jelly Ear *Auricularia auricula-judae* fungus was found on a dead branch and Yellow Stagshorn *Calocera viscosa* was seen on a fallen trunk. White leaves and red berries on the ground betrayed the presence of Whitebeam trees. The walk continued southwards along the bottom strip of woodland to a cluster of Wild Service-trees, with one big tree and a number of smaller suckering trees. The big tree had purplish-brown berries. David compared the alternate leaves and berries of the Wild Service-trees with the opposite leaves and winged seeds of the superficially similar Field Maple *Acer campestre* and Sycamore. Around a fallen trunk higher up the slope were tufts of a chunky-stemmed yellow fungus which was later identified as Spectacular Rustgill *Gymnopilus junonius*.

The group then retraced their steps for some distance before climbing uphill towards the conifer plantation at the top of the woods. Fly Agaric *Amanita muscaria* fungi were found near the base of a Birch tree, with a pink Rosy Bonnet *Mycena rosea* fungus nearby. At the side of the path were two Spiny Puffballs *Lycoperdon echinatum*, with many Common Puffballs *L. perlatum* in rings and lines further on beneath the conifers. A tuft of the creamy Upright Coral *Ramaria stricta* fungus was growing on a stump by the gate where the path led out into another stubble field. Two Roe Deer were grazing in the distance in the next field and the distinctive seed heads of Fool's Parsley *Aethusa cynapium* were noted amongst the stubble. The route then turned north along a narrow strip of woodland where there were many Field Maples. An apple tree beside the path had a heavy crop of sour green fruit. The next path ran eastwards along the southern boundary of Mosshall Wood, where a big patch of Butchers Broom *Ruscus aculeatus*, with red berries and tiny creamy-white flowers, was inspected. Nearby were four Collared Earthstars *Geastrum triplex* and two Magpie Inkcaps *Coprinopsis picaceus*. Tall larches *Larix* tower high above this part of the wood. David had used an inclinometer to estimate their height at about 33 metres. The path then led past the chalk pits at the entrance to the wood, out onto an area of grass where an unexpected sighting was a Cowslip in flower, and into the final strip of woodland. The view from a seat at the edge of the wood looked up the Thames Valley towards the hills on the National Trust land at Streatley. The final stretch of footpath then led back to Beech Road.

Remembrance Sunday was an appropriate day to remember two former leaders of the Society's fungus forays,

Mike Waterman and Gordon Crutchfield, who had recently passed away. We were very grateful that Mike Harrison of the Thames Valley Fungus Group had kindly offered to lead this year's fungus walk at **Paices Wood Country Park, Aldermaston** on the morning of **Sunday 14 November**. 18 members attended. The grass around the car park area had been cut recently, which was a shame, because on a pre-walk earlier in the week, there had been significantly more fungi here. Despite this, a number of different species were found.

An ivory-coloured Deceiver *Laccaria laccata* had widely-spaced pink gills. Orange rust on the underside of a Colt's-foot leaf was *Coleosporium tussilaginis*. Bald Inkcap *Parasola leiocephala* had a grooved cap with a brown centre, Glistening Inkcap had a brown grooved cylindrical cap and Common Inkcap *Coprinopsis atramentaria* had an ivory-coloured ovoid cap. The latter species contains antabuse, which gives particularly unpleasant symptoms if consumed at the same time as alcohol. Towards the edge of the grassland, under a group of trees, were a number of specimens of the brownish-lilac Wood Blewit *Lepista nuda*. Then a single specimen of Yellow Fieldcap *Bolbitius titubans* was found.

The walk continued into a section of the woods which was dominated by Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa*. Another Deceiver, this time a quite different-looking brown specimen, was found and an Amethyst Deceiver *Laccaria amethystina* was seen nearby. Candlesnuff Fungus *Xylaria hypoxylon* was growing on a dead stump and a number of Bonnet fungi were found on mossy branches of dead wood. A tuft of Milking Bonnet *Mycena galopus* exuded a white liquid when the stem was broken, while the stem of the Snapping Bonnet *M. vitilis* made an audible snapping sound when broken. Hairy Curtain Crust *Stereum hirsutum* was found on a fallen tree and Sulphur Tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* was growing at the base of a nearby stump. A number of different bracket fungi were compared. The whitish pores on the underside of a Blushing Bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa* on birch bruised a reddish colour, while the white pores of Lumpy Bracket *Trametes gibbosa* were slot-shaped and larger than those of Turkeytail *T. versicolor*. High overhead, two Nuthatches called from the tops of the trees. Further along the path was an impressive line of the large Trooping Funnel *Infundibulicybe geotropa*. A particularly productive fallen tree nearby was home to Smoky Bracket *Bjerkandera adusta* with a dark grey pore surface, Bitter Oysterling *Panellus stipticus* with an eccentric stem, Veiled Oyster *Pleurotus dryinus* and a few brown specimens of Pedicel Cup *Peziza micropus*. Honey Fungus *Armillaria mellea* nearby had a distinctive ring and a parasitic fungus on its base. A tuft of the Clustered Bonnet *Mycena inclinata* was found on a mossy stump, while another clump was infected by the fine hairs of Bonnet Mould *Spinellus fusiger*. A piece of rotting bark had the small orange blobs of a slime mould. Down amongst the leaf litter on the other side of track were Russet Toughshank *Collybia dryophila* and two more brittlegills, the yellow Ochre Brittlegill *Russula ochroleuca* and a purple specimen. A fallen birch trunk nearby was host to a mystery bracket fungus. Its upper surface was glossy, with a dark reddish-brown base, surrounded by concentric yellow-orange grooves and with a pale outer margin. The pores on the underside were white. Mike returned the next day to take photographs and was able to confirm its identity as Red-belted Bracket *Fomitopsis pinicola*. There are only 49 records on the national database, with central southern England as its core area. On the walk back, *Plicatura crispa*, a small bracket-shaped fungus with gill-like folds on the underside, was found. Wet Rot *Coniophora puteana* was spreading across a dead stump. A Blackening Brittlegill *Russula nigricans*, with a dirty ivory cap and relatively large, chunky gills, was cut in half. The exposed stem turned slowly red and would eventually turn black. A drop of milk from a Birch Milkcap *Lactarius tabidus* was transferred to a white tissue, where it slowly turned yellow. Finally, a specimen of Scurfy Twiglet *Tubaria furfuracea* was found underneath a willow in the car park.

Professor Peter Worsley led a walk attended by 21 members on the morning of **Saturday 4 December** to look at the geology of **Nettlebed Common**. It was a sunny morning but there was a bitterly cold wind. Peter started by handing out maps of the Common, with dark orange for the Lambeth Beds, surrounded by a halo of a lighter brown for Clay-with-flints and with fingers of light green for the dry valleys of the underlying Chalk. At the centre of the Common were several small pink patches representing London Clay on top of the Lambeth Beds. He then showed a larger-scale geological map of the Chilterns, showing the south-west to north-east line of the Chiltern escarpment and the areas of Lambeth Beds and Clay-with-flints on the dip slope. The walk started out in an easterly direction, until Peter turned right into a pathless stretch of woodland, heading for a deep fenced-off hole. The hole was deep with straight sides and was formed about 8 years ago when a section of old Chalk mine collapsed. The Common used to be a hive of industry, with its brick and tile works. Brick making requires clay, together with smaller amounts of chalk and wood. Clean chalk is required, which is why it was mined, rather than collected from the surface. The hole was described as a 'crown hole'. Returning to the road, the map

showed it marked the boundary between the Chalk on the right and the Lambeth Beds on the left. The route then turned left along a narrow path through woodland which led to the next hole. This was much wider and shallower than the previous hole. There were no obvious entry or exit channels for surface water and Peter suggested that this might be another case of mining subsidence. However, one of the members who does a lot of conservation work on the Common commented that the flooded clay pits higher up the hill regularly overflow over the disputed area. The third hole which Peter pointed out was much more likely to be a swallow hole. Two channels led into the double hole and another channel drained it, so surface water would have been available to trigger its growth. Continuing north-westwards, the next track had a drop of about 4 metres on its right hand side to the top of the area where material for the old Soundess kiln had been extracted. The track continued to the house called Magpies, which was situated at the boundary between the Lambeth Beds and the Chalk. Wide views opened up across the open farmland on the Chalk and a dry valley led north-eastwards from the property. This would have been carved out by surface meltwater at the start of a warmer interglacial period when the normally permeable Chalk would have been rendered impermeable by permafrost.

Next stop was Priests Hill, where Gorse and Heather mark out the acid soils of an area of gravel. Peter strongly disagreed with the interpretation of the geological history of the site as presented on the information board by the Chilterns Conservation Board. According to the sign, the gravel was the highest and oldest of the Thames gravels, laid down 2 million years ago when the Thames flowed to the north of the Chilterns, entering the North Sea near Ipswich. In a later glacial period when ice sheets blocked its course, the Thames cut through the Goring Gap, 150 metres lower than Priest Hill. Peter commented that it was improbable that there should only be a single site for these gravels, so high above and far away from any other Thames gravel deposits. He said that they were more likely to be Tertiary gravels, part of the Lambeth Beds. He also said that the Thames was unlikely ever to have flowed there. Instead, it had remained near its current location, but that as erosion gradually removed materials from its course, the land slowly rose. The river cut its way more deeply through the Goring Gap as the ground around rose and the river maintained its level. Nearby, a pit had been dug to investigate the soil profile. Organic deposits had been found which had a pollen spectrum unique to the area. Peter suggested that they came from the surface of an area of subsidence in an interglacial period about 2 million years ago. The walk then continued through an intensively mined landscape. Peter pointed out a bed of pebbles. These were rounded, indicating that they had been on a beach at some point, and showed 'chatter' marks – zig-zag lines characteristic of beach pebbles. Amongst the flint pebbles were a few rounded quartzite stones. Peter said that these were Tertiary layers. The walk continued to Windmill Hill, the highest point in the south-western Chilterns. It is capped by London Clay, laid down about 50 million years ago. Final stop was the Green, where two puddingstones can be seen on the grass next to the bus shelter. These are a conglomerate of rounded flint pebbles within a sandstone matrix. They had formerly been in the courtyard of the Bull Inn in the High Street, where they had been used as mounting blocks, but had since been relocated to their current position. Once again, Peter disagreed with the information on the adjacent sign board. According to the sign, the puddingstones formed a layer between the Lambeth Beds and the London Clay and had been formed about 50 million years ago in desert conditions when flash floods carried pebbles and sand into river channels. Wind blew quartz dust into the cracks between the sand grains and then night time dew moistened the quartz and encouraged quartz crystals to grow, cementing the blocks together. Freeze-thaw of the ice ages then broke up the blocks and moved them around. According to Peter, the puddingstones formed as lenses within the Lambeth Beds. They formed beneath river beds in a hot, arid environment. Silica dissolved in the water crystallised out as water percolated upwards and evaporated, filling the cavities between the pebbles and cementing them together. They were broken up by more recent erosion.

Mid-week Walks 2021 by Jan Haseler

Covid-19 lockdown regulations at the beginning of 2021 meant that the January and February mid-week walks had to be cancelled.

To satisfy pent-up demand, the March mid-week walk at **Greys Green** (northwest of Henley-on-Thames) organised by Sally Rankin, took place a record-breaking four times with a total of 17 participants. There were two walks on each of **Tuesday 30 and Wednesday 31 March**, with Sally leading the first walk each day and Jan and Jerry Welsh leading the second. The Tuesday was the second hottest March day ever, with the morning

temperature rising to 20°C. Continuous but thinning cloud cover on the Wednesday kept the temperature lower. The route started out around the village cricket pitch and into the wood to the north. Beside the path was a large area covered in daffodils. Some were large and looked like garden escapes, but others were smaller, with the typical pale tepals and narrow yellow trumpet of the Wild Daffodil. Brimstone and Peacock butterflies were seen here. Nuthatch, Stock Dove and Chiffchaff were calling, and from further away, a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker was heard. The footpath led steeply down through the wood and across a grassy field to Rocky Lane. The roadside banks were yellow with Lesser Celandines. Amongst them were pale purple Early Dog-violets. Blackcap and Mistle Thrush were singing and a Green Woodpecker called. After a short distance along the lane, the next footpath turned left up across another grassy field and into Sam's Wood. A clump of white Sweet Violets was found near the entrance to the wood and further on was a small patch of Wild Daffodils. Bluebell leaves carpeted the woodland floor and amongst them were the first blue flower spikes. The leaves of Woodruff were noted beside the path. On the approach to Shepherd's Green, the sustained trill of a Firecrest was heard coming from a tall group of conifers a little way back from the path. The footpath crossed the village green and continued towards Satwell. There followed a short diversion, with the owner's permission, to the edge of an area of private woodland, where there was a wonderful display of Wild Daffodils. Some were growing strongly on the edge of the grassy field beside the wood. The rest were dotted amongst the dense cover of Bluebell leaves within the wood.

A Bee-fly was spotted here. The walk continued into Padnell's Wood, where logs delineated the footpath to protect the Bluebells from trampling and another patch of Wild Daffodils was admired. A Chaffinch was remarkably camouflaged by the leaves on the woodland floor. The next section of the route led back along Rocky Lane. White Sweet Violets grew in profusion on the roadside banks and Barren Strawberry was also in flower. A Goldcrest called, with its song clearly different from that of the earlier Firecrest. Further on, there was a pond beside the lane. One section of bank was purple with Early Dog-violets, while another section was carpeted with Primroses. The next footpath led down through Overland's Wood, where the leaves of Goldilocks Buttercup were found beside the path. One group also found Wood Anemone and Moschatel here. The first Bulbous Buttercups of the year were in flower in the grassy field beyond the wood. A Brimstone, several Peacock butterflies and a pair of Pied Wagtails were spotted on the open village green at Shepherd's Green. Several clumps of Orpine were found beside the track which led back to Greys Green just before it entered Sam's Wood, then another Firecrest was heard from the trees next to the footpath along the edge of the wood. Finally, bright blue Common Field-speedwell flowers and abundant Field Wood-rush were dotted amongst the grass of the cricket pitch at Greys Green.

Fiona Brown led a circular walk on the morning of **Wednesday 21 April**, starting from the Michael's Field recreation ground in **Hannington** near Kingsclere. Jan Haseler led a second group and two more members had joined the pre-walk a few days before. It was a repeat of a walk which had taken place the previous July, when it had been generally agreed that the area deserved a second visit when the spring woodland flowers would be at their best. After the pre-walk, Fiona had spotted a female Ring Ouzel on the football field adjacent to the car park. Much to everyone's delight, it was still present on the Wednesday morning – though rather distant on the far side of the field. Also seen here was a significantly larger Mistle Thrush. It was a grey morning with a cold north-easterly wind, but as the day progressed, the cloud thinned and the sun appeared.

The walkers set out north-eastwards along a fenced-off track between a grassy field and a field of winter wheat. Skylarks sang loudly overhead and occasionally dropped down into the wheat crop and several Linnets were also seen. The walk then continued south-eastwards on a track which led along the edge of Gaston Wood. The woodland floor was covered by a dense carpet of Bluebell leaves but there were few flowers to be seen. The next section of track cut through a stretch of woodland, where flowers included Wood Anemone, Wood-sorrel, Moschatel, Greater Stitchwort, Solomon's-seal and both Common and Early Dog-violet. Blackcaps were singing in the background. The track continued beside a field which had been planted with a mixture of clovers and vetches. Sun Spurge and Field Madder were found in the field margin and two Hares ran across the far side of the field. A shrew was heard, squeaking and moving about in the undergrowth beside the track to Balstone Farm. The walk continued southwards along a quiet lane towards Ibworth. Blackthorn blossom was densely white in the hedgerows, the first flowers of Wayfaring-tree were seen and there was an attractive line of cherry trees, covered in blossom, which had been planted as a memorial.

The next section of the route followed a sunken trackway down through a narrow belt of woodland. At first, the ground cover was dominated by Dog's Mercury, with abundant Early Dog-violet along the lower bank. Then Wood Anemone, Yellow Archangel, dense patches of Pignut, Solomon's-seal and Moschatel began to appear, although surprisingly there were very few Bluebells. Towards the bottom of the hill, there were extensive excavations of the Chalk, presumably by Badgers. The walk continued along a footpath through Warren Bottom Copse. To the right of the path, the woodland floor was white with drifts of Wood Anemones with a few spikes of Solomon's-seal. There were more Early Dog-violets, a few Primroses and a sparse covering of Bluebells. This prompted a debate as to why Bluebells were dominant in some of the woods and copses but scarce or absent in others. The age of the woodlands and their history of grazing or trampling by animals were considered. The path led to the wide ride with fine chalk grassland which had been the high-point of the previous summer's walk. Cowslips were plentiful and the turf was dotted with Hairy Violets. These had blunt sepals while the Dog-violets of the woodland had had pointed sepals. The Cowslips were being visited by Dark-edged Bee-flies and a selection of bees. An attractive ginger and black bee was later identified from a photograph as a Red-tailed Mason Bee. Several Yellowhammers were feeding on grain spilled from pheasant feeders. The final part of the walk was a long slow climb along a footpath beside big arable fields. A dense blue carpet of fully-out Bluebells covered the ground in a small copse next to the path and two Marsh Tits worked busily through the tops of a small copse-edge tree. Brimstone and Orange-tip butterflies were patrolling along the sheltered woodland edge in the strengthening sunshine and Peacocks were basking on the ground. Several Small Tortoiseshells and a single Green-veined White were also seen. A Kestrel circled over the field to the south. The path led through an open gateway into the last of the big arable fields, where four Wheatears were flitting around on the bare ploughed area between the path and the crop. The path led back to Hannington, where many of the group stayed for lunch in the garden of The Vine pub.

Rob Stallard led a circular walk round **Newtown and Burghclere Commons** and **Herbert Plantation** south of Newbury on the morning of **Wednesday 19 May**. The walk was attended by nine members, with another six joining Rob on the pre-walk earlier in the week. This was a new venue for the Society. Meeting point was the car park at the junction of Jonathan Hill and Well Street in Newtown, to the south of Newbury. The walk started and ended in sunshine, with variable amounts of cloud in between. The route led out through woodland of predominantly oak, birch and pine. Bilberry was abundant on the woodland floor and some of the plants had pink flowers. There were also clumps of Common Cow-wheat. The path led out into a heathy clearing with Heather, Gorse and Dwarf Gorse, before dropping down into a wooded stream valley. Wood Horsetail, with its branched 'branches', was found on the wettest parts of the stream bank, together with Marsh-marigold, Ramsons and the invasive Skunk Cabbage *Lysichiton americanus* (a member of the Arum family Araceae). Continuing up through the wooded valley side, the path led to a clearing where parasitic Purple Toothwort was growing under a big Holly. There was no sign of its host plants, which are Alder, poplar and willow. Other flowers seen nearby included Wood-sorrel, Solomon's-seal and Pink Purslane. The route then led across a grassy field where Pignut was in flower. Cuckooflower, Marsh Thistle and sheets of Ramsons were flowering in a damp corner of the field. Tufts of Purple Moor-grass and the leaves of Heath Bedstraw were noted in an open stretch of the Common, with Sheep's Sorrel, Germander Speedwell and a basking Peacock butterfly seen in the cleared area below a power line. The walk continued along Sheepwash Lane and over a footbridge next to a ford. Three-nerved Sandwort, Wild Strawberry, Alder Buckthorn and a Red Admiral butterfly were seen here.

The next section of the walk crossed an open area of Burghclere Common and led into Herbert Plantation. The plantation is a Local Nature Reserve managed by Hampshire Countryside Service. It was planted with spruce in the 1920s. This has since been felled and it is now managed for wildlife. The marshier areas have been left untouched and some notable trees are scattered through the woodland. Sightings here included Wood Spurge, Solomon's-seal, Yellow Pimpernel, Sanicle, Red Campion, Wood Speedwell, Bugle, Common Dog-violet, Wood Sage, Heath Speedwell, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Scaly Male-fern, Wood and Remote Sedge, Hairy Wood-rush, Guelder-rose, Norway Maple, Wild Privet and a Brimstone butterfly. Many small Alder Beetles were seen on assorted vegetation. An interesting collection of trees were growing on an old wood bank. An unfamiliar whitebeam was later identified as *Sorbus x hybrida*, a new record for the area. There was an enormous multi-stemmed oak and another big oak of wide-girth. The exposed roots indicated that the bank was older than the trees. A short diversion led to an area of mire where rosettes of sparsely spotted leaves were thought to belong to Heath Spotted-orchid. Small bright yellow globes of the Bog Beacon fungus *Mitrula paludosa* were found in

shallow pools of water. The walk continued to an area of wet Alder carr woodland next to a stream at the eastern edge of the plantation. The vegetation was dominated by big clumps of Greater Tussock-sedge and Hemlock Water-dropwort, but closer investigation also revealed small plants of Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage. The next track led back up to an open area of Newtown Common. Both Ling and Cross-leaved Heath were found, together with Heath Milkwort and Tormantil. A Green Tiger Beetle was found beside the path. More leaf rosettes of Heath Spotted-orchid were growing in a damp area next to a stream which crosses the common and there was more of the Bog Beacon fungus. Climbing back up to drier heathland, scattered Rowan trees were in flower, a Garden Warbler sang from a dense stand of birch and three Brimstones flew in the strengthening sunshine. Finally, while heading back along the track to the car park, 3 attractive yellow-flowered Azaleas were inspected.

Fiona Cummins led a walk which started from the Butchers Arms at **Sonning Common** on **Wednesday 23 June**. It was a pleasantly warm sunny morning and Swifts flew overhead as the 14 walkers gathered in the pub car park. After a brief stretch along the road, the route led north-eastwards across a grassy field where Meadow Brown butterflies were on the wing and into Spring Wood. The wood is named after a bricked-in spring, decorated by a plaque with a stone carving of an elephant. Two common molluscs, the Round Snail *Discus rotundatus* and the Moss Snail *Cochlicopa lubrica*, were observed on the underside of a dead log. Another shell, the Kentish Snail *Monacha cantiana*, was abundant on grass and other vegetation throughout much of the walk. The footpath led steeply down beneath Beech trees, then crossed the steep grassy field of Stony Bottom, where a number of Small Heaths and a single Red Admiral butterfly were seen. The path emerged at Rotherfield Peppard church. Hedgerow Crane's-bill was in flower by the churchyard wall and a Pied Wagtail flew between the graves. The next footpath led across a grassy paddock to the golf course. A Swallow flew over the field and a flock of Starlings flew down from the adjacent hedgerow. The track across the golf course led through woodland. Flowers seen beside the path included Common Spotted-orchid, Goat's-beard, Agrimony and Perforate St John's-wort, while butterflies included Speckled Wood, Ringlet and a fresh male Large Skipper. The route then continued up through woodland to Crosslanes near Rotherfield Greys. Many of the path-side trees, including Hazel and Sycamore, showed the same signs of defoliation by a plague of caterpillars which had been noted three weeks earlier on the walk to Miram's Copse at Bradfield. But the trees here had since put on a fresh growth of leaves which had so far escaped devastation by the caterpillars. At Crosslanes, a Slow-worm was found under a sheet of wood in front of the derelict White Cottage.

The walk continued along a track which led to the top of Flowercroft Wood. Flowering Honeysuckle draped the trees and birdsong echoed through the woods, particularly the songs of Blackbird and Blackcap. A dead Fox was lying on the path, attended by a cloud of insects. Wood Melick and Wood Millet, two ancient woodland indicator grasses, were found beside the track and there were a number of big clumps of Spurge-laurel. The path led out onto the open Chalk grassland of Kent's Hill. Pyramidal Orchids dotted the turf and butterflies flying in the sunshine included Marbled White, Large Skipper, Meadow Brown and Small Heath. At the bottom of the clearing, a narrow path wound downwards through dense Dogwood scrub. A pair of Bullfinches called but remained hidden. Seeds on a White Helleborine spike and a flowering Common Twayblade were noted. The next path followed the wide ride up the dry valley at the bottom of Flowercroft Wood. Again, flowering Honeysuckle was abundant, but there was no sign yet of the White Admirals which can be seen here later in the summer. At the edge of the wood, the next track turned westwards along the edge of a field where the grass had recently been cut and wrapped up in big plastic bales. A Musk Thistle and a Mother Shipton moth were amongst the sightings in the field margin. The walk continued up the hill to Blounts Farm. A Whitethroat called from the hedge and a tiny Nettle-tap moth was resting, appropriately, on a nettle leaf. A colourful ditch and bank beside the farm had abundant Fox-and-cubs, together with Scarlet Pimpernel and a few flower spikes of Dark Mullein. The final section of the route was a short stretch back along the road to the pub, where some of the group stayed for lunch.

Sally Rankin led a walk, attended by 15 members, at **Kingwood Common**, north-west of Peppard Common on the morning of **Wednesday 21 July**. The temperature was in the high 20s, but fortunately there was welcome shade for much of the walk. Sally helped to write the management plan for the site back in 1995 and this was used to secure Countryside Stewardship funding. Subsequent funding has come from the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment. The Common nowadays is dominated by oak and birch woodland, but historic photographs show it as much more open. The walk started out along a concrete path, a legacy from its wartime use, first as a

prisoner of war camp, then as a camp for Polish refugees. The path led to an open glade, with Ling, which was not yet in flower, and Bell Heather, which was already flowering. Acid soils with heather are rare in Oxfordshire. Slender St John's-wort was also seen here. Continuing along woodland paths, the route led along the back of the garden at Great David's, where several large Small-leaved Lime trees were growing along the boundary. A brief diversion led to the roadside at Barn's Farm, where there was a big patch of Broad-leaved Helleborines. Many plants had had their flowers browsed off by deer, but there were still a few flowering specimens. The route then led into the woodland of Burnt Platt, where a White Admiral butterfly was seen.

The path led out onto a wide Forestry Commission ride. Plants at the side of the track included Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil, Vervain, Common Spotted-orchid and Perforate St John's-wort. A large cleared area beside the track, bordered by a dead hedge, is being managed as a refuge for amphibians and reptiles. The Green Gym have recently been pulling Bracken and removing brambles from around the heather plants, and the plan is to use a brush-cutter to clear the remaining Bracken. Turning round and heading back down the ride, the group were rewarded with excellent views of what were probably two different White Admirals, perching obligingly on the vegetation next to the track. A wider clearing next to the track had Corn Mint, Musk Mallow, Centaury, Eyebright and Hairy St John's-wort. The track led to a path junction where the only Wild Service-tree on the Nettlebed Commons is to be found. It had several suckering specimens around its base. Yellow Pimpernel was seen beside the next path, which led through Grayhorne Plantation. The route then led southwards alongside the massive deer fence which protects Oveys Wood. Continuing into Greatbottom Wood, there were some interesting plant finds, including Yellow Bird's-nest, Green-flowered Helleborine and several specimens of Bird's-nest Orchid which were well past their best. A Common Toad was spotted at the bottom corner of the wood. The route back to the start led through Littlebottom Wood, up the lane to Peppard Hill and back across the south-east corner of Kingwood Common, passing another glade with heather on the way. Some of the group then continued to the Cherry Tree pub at Stoke Row for lunch.

Fiona Brown led a circular walk, starting from the car park next to the Stag and Huntsman pub in **Hambleden**, north-east of Henley-on-Thames, on the morning of **Wednesday 18 August**. 16 members started out southwards along a series of tracks through farmland. Some of the hedges had recently been trimmed, but the uncut ones had a selection of berries, including Elder, Dogwood and Blackberry. The next footpath climbed up through woodland, passing several Spurge-laurel bushes. A Speckled Wood butterfly was seen here and a Raven was heard. The path emerged into a field which had been planted with a bird or insect seed mix. The dominant colours were blue from Flax, white and yellow. Other arable plants here included Common Field-speedwell, Chicory, Field Madder, Field Pansy, Sun Spurge, Scarlet Pimpernel, Black Nightshade and Common Poppy. Of particular interest was Field Woundwort *Stachys arvensis*, described in 'A Checklist of the Plants of Buckinghamshire' by Maycock and Woods, (2005) as Near Threatened and very rare in cultivated fields in the south of the county. Tiny plants of Swine-cress were found in a gateway. After a short stretch along a lane, where Field Scabious was seen on the bank, the route continued across more arable fields. Corn Mint and Bugloss were found in the field margin, together with a Common Blue and a Small Copper butterfly. After another short stretch of road, the next footpath led across a grassy sheep pasture with distant views to the south. The route then dropped steeply down through Beech woodland. Three Roe Deer were disturbed at the top of the wood. The path led down to the wide flowery ride which runs along the bottom of the valley in Heath Wood. Red Admirals and Silver-washed Fritillaries were nectaring on tall Hemp Agrimony flowers, a Green-veined White was feeding on Marjoram and other butterflies included Brimstone, Peacock, Comma and Gatekeeper. Flowers included Vervain, Common Toadflax, Red Bartsia, Wild Basil and Ploughman's-spikenard. Several caterpillars of the nationally scarce Striped Lychnis moth *Shargacuculia lychnitis* were found on flower spikes of Dark Mullein. The return route climbed steeply out of Heath Wood, then followed the Chiltern Way back to Hambleden. Further sightings on the walk back included Nettle-leaved Bellflower and tall spikes of Weld. Some of the group then stayed for lunch in the garden of the Stag and Huntsman.

Maria Newham led 22 members on a walk which started from the Maltsters Arms at **Rotherfield Greys**, on **Wednesday 15 September**. It was a mild grey day, but as the morning progressed, the clouds thinned and the sun broke through. The walk started out north-eastwards along a footpath which led down into a valley through chalk grassland. A large mixed flock of Swallows and House Martins was flying across the adjacent fields and several Small Heath butterflies were roosting on grass stems. Flowers seen here included Field Scabious, Greater Knapweed, Agrimony, Marjoram, Wild Basil, Wall Lettuce and Wild Mignonette. A female Kestrel flew into an oak

tree at the bottom of the valley. After a brief dog-leg along the valley bottom, the route continued up the opposite grassy slope. Ivy Bees and a Red Admiral butterfly were nectaring on Ivy flowers in the hedge. There were several rosettes of Woolly Thistle, with their distinctive 3-dimensional leaf structure, and both flowers and the round seed heads of Goat's-beard were seen. Further out in the field, a Wheatear perched on a clump of thistles. Several Meadow Brown butterflies were on the wing, including a pale, almost bald, specimen. Leaves of Stinking Hellebore were noted at the edge of a fenced-off chalk pit at the top of the hill. After a short stretch of lane, the next footpath led across a stubble field. Sightings here included Field Pansy, Common Poppy, Black Nightshade, Swine-cress, Small Nettle and Scarlet Pimpernel, together with a flock of Linnets, a Buzzard and a Raven. There were a number of Robin's Pincushions in a stretch of hedge. The next section of the walk was through Lambridge Wood, where several large yellow slugs and a glossy black Dor Beetle were seen. The footpath led to the lane which borders the north-west edge of the wood. A few darkening spikes of Yellow Bird's-nest and seed-heads of Green-flowered Helleborine were growing up out of the leaf litter. The next footpath continued through woodland on the other side of the lane, before dropping down towards the National Trust's Greys Court. Two Commas were feeding on ripe Blackberries in the hedge and a worn Common Blue butterfly flew round the flower head of a Common Ragwort plant. The route followed the roadway past the house and then dropped down through woodland to Rocky Lane, before climbing back up, first through a grassy field, then more steeply through woodland to the cricket pitch at Rotherfield Greys. The walk continued along the Chiltern Way, passing through an area of woodland where yellow Chicken-of-the woods and the dark fingers of a fungus which was tentatively identified as *Xylaria longipes* were found on stumps by the more observant members at the back of the group. The next track ran south-eastwards between high hedges, before the final footpath led back across a grassy field to the church at Rotherfield Greys. Most of the group then stayed for lunch at the Maltster's Arms.

Inge Beck led a walk at **Marlow Common** on the morning of **Wednesday 20 October**. Meeting place for the 12 walkers was the junction of the Chiltern Way and a minor road across the Common. A tree stump by the car park was covered with Glistening Inkcaps, while across the road, a Cep was spotted and a Shrew darted into a hole in a stump. The walk started out across the north-west corner of Pullingshill Wood, which is owned by the Woodland Trust. The next section of the route was through Marlow Common North, which is managed by the Chiltern Society. A pale yellow flower of Small Balsam was noted near the entrance to the wood. The track led to a grassy clearing where Heather is being encouraged to spread. A tree stump here was covered with pale green Cladonia lichens, together with the Jelly Rot fungus. This part of the Common was formerly open heathland but is now mainly covered by oak and birch woodland. Continuing along a track across the Common, an unusual find was Parasitic Bolete, growing with Common Earthball. The track led to a large clay pit which formerly supplied materials for the local brick and tile industry. Several large specimens of the Purple Brittlegill were found here. Not far away, another grassy clearing had more Heather and a Sweet Chestnut tree, with a Mirabelle Plum tree nearby. Continuing along the track, Fly Agaric fungi were found growing under birch. After crossing a lane, the route led back onto Marlow Common and past Monks Corner, an Arts and Crafts style house which was built for Conrad Dressler, a sculptor and the producer of Medmenham Ware. Glazed terracotta panels decorate the side of the house and there is an unusual metal weather vane in the shape of a ship. Jerome K. Jerome lived at Monks Corner for about 10 years. The track led to the large wood bank which separates Greater Marlow from Medmenham. A number of purple Amethyst Deceiver fungi were found in the ditch beside the bank. This part of the walk was through Beech woodland. The sun came out and the fallen leaves, sparkling after overnight rain, gleamed in the sunlight. Most of the leaves in the canopy were still green. This section of the route followed the Chiltern Way as it led into the privately-owned Davenport Wood, where there were a lot of young Beech trees. The next footpath turned back towards Marlow Common, and then on to Hollowhill Wood, which is managed, together with Hog Wood, by BBOWT. It forms part of the Hollowhill and Pullingshill Woods SSSI. Most of Hollowhill Wood is covered with Beech woodland. At the top part of the site, where a former conifer plantation was clear-felled, a number of acid-loving plants have germinated from dormant seed, indicating that this part of the wood was formerly open heathland. A search in a clearing here revealed Heath Speedwell, Slender St John's-wort and Pill Sedge, plus several specimens of Red Cracking Bolete. The walk continued back through Beech woodland on the top of the plateau. The stem of a specimen of Saffron-drop Bonnet exuded drops of a yellow-staining liquid. The wood extended westwards down the steep sides of a dry valley, but the route kept to the plateau at the top. Next, several specimens of Magpie Inkcap were found. The final section of the walk was back through Pullingshill Wood, where there are 1400 metres of First World War trenches. These were originally 2 metres deep and wide and built in a zig-zag arrangement. This section of wood was formerly open heathland but

is now mainly covered in birches. Afterwards, most of the walkers went to The Old Belle at Hurley for lunch and heavy showers, which had been threatened by the weather forecast for earlier in the day, finally arrived.

Marion Venners led a walk at **Aldworth** on the morning of **Wednesday 17 November**. The sun was shining brightly and the Beech trees were a glorious shade of orange. 13 members gathered at St Mary's Church, where white Snowy Waxcaps were found in the closely mown grass. A Yew in the churchyard had a sign stating that it was at least a thousand years old. An old hollow trunk was all that remained of the original tree, but a new tree had grown up from the roots and was covered in berries. Inside the church were stone effigies, dating from the 14th Century, of various members of the de la Beche family. First World War poet Laurence Binyon is buried in the churchyard. The walk started out along a track which led westwards between high hedges towards the hamlet of Pibworth. The northern hedge was particularly species-rich, with oak, elm, Field Maple, Holly, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Hazel and Dogwood. The girth of an enormous old oak was measured as 5.2 metres, suggesting an age of about 250 years. A Brimstone butterfly flew across the track in the sunshine. The next footpath led back through open fields towards the church. There were a number of flowering Hogweed plants and almost all had an attendant Yellow Dung Fly. The next track led first north-west then north. Two Pied Wagtails were flitting across the roof of an adjacent farmhouse. A field next to the track had an interesting species mix, with various clovers, including Crimson Clover, plus vetches and Field Woundwort. Continuing along the track, Skylarks sang overhead and flowers seen included Greater Knapweed and Prickly Sow-thistle. After a short distance along a lane, the next path led to Streatley Warren. The view to the east opened up, extending across the valley of the Thames towards the higher ground around Hailey and Ipsden. An enormous flock of Starlings took to the air. The land at Streatley Warren is marked on the Ordnance Survey map as Open Access land. On an earlier visit to the area in 2015, signs had indicated that access was not permitted between March and September, to protect breeding Stone Curlews. But on the pre-walk, the walkers had been turned away by a farm worker, who said it was currently closed for pheasant shooting. Instead, the walk continued along footpaths that skirted round the access land and round Bower Farm. The next section of the walk was round the margin of a stubble field with an interesting collection of arable weeds, including both Round-leaved and Sharp-leaved Fluellen, Dwarf Spurge and Small Toadflax. The path then crossed another less-interesting stubble field before emerging near the Bell Inn at Aldworth. At the centre of the village is the roofed-in well. It is 113 metres deep and has been capped. Most of the group walked back to the church, before driving to the Four Points for lunch. The two members who had parked originally at the pub were rewarded on their walk back by the discovery of a large bracket fungus, about 50 cm in diameter, which was growing near the base of a healthy-looking oak behind the hedge. It exuded glistening reddish drops of liquid and was subsequently identified as Oak Bracket.

Sally Rankin led a circular walk, attended by 14 members, on **Wednesday 15 December**, starting from the Flowerpot Hotel at **Aston**, to the north-east of Henley-on-Thames. It was a mild, cloudy morning, with the temperature rising from 12 °C to 13 °C during the walk. After a short stretch along Aston Lane, the route led eastwards along a footpath across farmland, part of the Berkshire section of the Chiltern Way. The ground dropped away steeply to the north, with extensive views across the valley of the Thames to the wooded hills of the Chilterns. White Dead-nettle was in flower beside the path, there were pink berries on the Spindle and a Robin was singing in a nearby copse. The walk continued down Remenham Church Lane towards the village. A Kestrel was spotted, perched in a tree in an adjoining field. Despite the strength of recent gales, there were still a surprising number of leaves on some of the trees, including a Hazel and a Wych Elm. A Redwing and a female Chaffinch were seen in a big Yew in the churchyard of St Nicholas Church in Remenham. More Redwings and a chacking Fieldfare were calling from the tops of the big Lime trees on the other side of the lane. Ivy-leaved Toadflax was in flower on an old flint wall and Hart's-tongue Fern was growing at the base of one of the stone tombs. In one of the adjoining gardens, a Mistle Thrush was perched below a big clump of Mistletoe, protecting its winter berry supplies. Pellitory-of-the-wall was growing along the base of the wall at the side of the quiet lane which led down towards the river. The next section of the walk followed the Thames Path northwards along the river bank towards Temple Island. The river was busy with rowers, which meant that, apart from a couple of Mallards, there were few water birds to be seen. A big flock of geese were grazing in the grassy pasture to the right of the path. They were mostly Canada Geese, plus a few Greylag and Egyptian Geese. A Buzzard perched in the top of a tree. Scentless Mayweed was in flower beside the path, while on the river bank, flowering Hogweed and Wild Angelica were seen. A Pied Wagtail fed busily on the lawn on Temple Island. In a patch of reeds next to a bankside Alder, a male Stonechat was flying up from and returning to its perch, while the female was spotted on the wire fence on the other side of the

path. Further downstream, a moored pontoon and barge marked the location of bank restoration work. Gulls were flying above the water at the approach to Hambleden Lock. Most were Black-headed Gulls, with white wing tips, but there were also several Common Gulls, with white mirror-marks on black wing-tips. Below the weir at Hambleden Mill, there were no rowers to disturb the birds and here a Great Crested Grebe and several Grey Herons were seen. After a short stretch along the river bank, the final section of the route followed Aston Lane back to the village. There were still a few withered black berries on an Alder Buckthorn bush at the side of the lane. In an adjoining field, a flock of Goldfinches twittered as they fed busily at the top of a tall tree, while a flock of Fieldfares perched at the top of an adjacent tree. Most of the group stayed for lunch at the Flowerpot Hotel. Amazingly for mid-December, this was eaten in the garden, which was thought to be the safest place at a time of rapidly-increasing numbers of cases of the newly-arrived Omicron variant of the Covid virus.

Indoor Meetings 2021

Reports by Brian Ferry, Chris Foster, Jan Haseler, Tricia Marcousé, Rob Stallard, Rachel Woolnough & Ken White

19 January 2021

What's up on the Downs? by Dr Jim Asher (Butterfly Conservation)

Dr Jim Asher is a Vice-President and former Chair of Butterfly Conservation nationally and also the Butterfly Recorder for Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. He is one of the founder members of the Aston Upthorpe butterfly transect, which has been running continuously since 1993. Aston Upthorpe Downs are south of Didcot on the north side of the Berkshire Downs.

Each winter, Jim organises conservation work parties, clearing scrub and opening up the transect route. The transect runs along a valley which leads southwards up into the Downs, with Langdon Wood on the east side and a more open herb-rich area, sheltered by trees and scrub, to the west. The route continues to Juniper Valley, a steep-sided valley of rich chalk grassland, with dense Juniper cover on the west side and scattered Juniper bushes on the east side. Rare plants in Juniper Valley include the tiny Burnt Orchid and Frog Orchid, and Pasqueflowers, which are protected from grazing rabbits inside fenced-off enclosures. 34 species of butterfly have been recorded over the last 30 years, with 31 still present and 3 locally extinct. Wall Brown was last recorded in 1993, Silver-spotted Skipper was last seen in 2009 (three years of sheep grazing at the wrong time of year are thought to have been responsible for its loss) and Duke of Burgundy was last recorded in 2011. The list includes Marbled White, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Small Heath, Grizzled and Dingy Skipper, Green Hairstreak, Chalkhill and Adonis Blue, Dark Green Fritillary and the occasional migrant Clouded Yellow in late summer.

Jim next described some of the site management challenges. There are too many Rabbits grazing in Juniper Valley and their burrows are damaging the soil structure. Caterpillars of the Cinnabar moth usually control the growth of ragwort, but a picture from 1994 showed a work party pulling ragwort when it had got out of control and Juniper Valley was a sea of yellow. In 2014, when Privet was beginning to spread across the approach track in the valley, the landowner sent in heavy machinery to cut it back. The cleared area was initially colonised by a sea of thistles, but now the chalk flora is coming back.

Sycamore regrowth is a recurring problem in the steep section of the transect which runs up through Langdon Wood, despite the best efforts of volunteers who have repeatedly cut it back. The first Butterfly Conservation work party to clear scrub at Aston Upthorpe was in 1988. Initially volunteers worked only with hand tools, but more recently they have also been using chainsaws, which has increased the productivity considerably. In 2019, volunteers started to clear back trees and create sheltered scallops along the edge of Langdon Wood which adjoins Juniper Valley, in the hope that it might create suitable habitat for the reintroduction of the Duke of Burgundy.

The final part of the presentation looked at what the transect data can tell us about butterfly population trends. Overall, there has been an increase in abundance of 0.8%/year in the period 1993 – 2019, but for the habitat

specialists, there has actually been a decline of 0.9%/year. Of the widespread species, the average increase/year has been 1.5% for Common Blue, 2.5% for Meadow Brown and 3% for Small Heath, while the average decline/year has been 4.5% for Small and Essex Skippers and 4.2% for Marbled White. One theory is that the known nitrogen deposition in rainfall has increased the fertility of the soil, enriching the grassland and swamping the fine grasses needed by some of the butterflies. Of the habitat specialists, apart from the species which had gone extinct, Small Blue had declined by an average of 6%/year. This was attributed to the decline in Kidney Vetch, which needs bare soil. Adonis Blue, a species near the north-west limit of its British range, has increased by 8%/year, perhaps helped by climate change. Dark Green Fritillary has increased by 13.9%/year, an increase that has also been observed at other locations in the Upper Thames region. In May 2020, Marsh Fritillary was recorded here for the first time, but this may have been the result of unauthorised release of captive-bred stock. Jim finished off with a brief look at Lid's Down, a crescent-shaped steep slope to the north. Baseline surveys have found good numbers of Green Hairstreak, Dingy Skipper and Brown Argus. It is hoped that grazing might be introduced to the site in the future.

2 February 2021

The deep sea: what does it do for you? by Dr Lucy Woodall (University of Oxford)

There are lots of valuable benefits we derive from the ocean and the term used to describe that is "Ecosystem services". It provides us with the supporting services of primary production, water circulation and nutrient cycling. Equatorial waters are warm and full of marine algal plankton converting the sun's energy into food and oxygen for organisms up the food chain. There is a conveyor belt of ocean currents across the planet caused by cold water sinking at the poles, particularly in the Antarctic. This draws warm water away from the equator and in doing so distributes heat and food from the equatorial regions to the temperate ones, with nutrients cycling back towards the equator from the poles.

There are provisioning services including fisheries, minerals and energy production and there are cultural services like recreation. Blue spaces are equally as important as green spaces for our health and well-being.

The ocean helps with climate regulation by absorbing heat and carbon dioxide. Ocean marginal habitats like mangrove forests provide numerous benefits, one of the most important being coastal protection. Studies showed that after a tsunami, healthy mangrove systems reduced flooding in the Indo-Pacific by over 80%.

Seagrass beds, deep reefs and seamounts were discussed in more depth. Seagrass beds provide nurseries for fish, they protect coastlines from storm surges by dissipating energy and help stabilize the seabed, especially in the intertidal zone.

Deep reefs provide homes for a lot of the fish that we eat. They are mostly unvisited, and therefore unstudied because of their depth, but discoveries are being made all the time. A trip to Bermuda in 2016 uncovered a new species of black coral which was the most numerous organism seen on the expedition. This was in an area where great science is happening as there is a marine research station there, but just by not going down deep enough an entire ecosystem had been missed. We were also shown footage of a Thresher Shark taken at a depth of 60 metres at a deep reef in the Seychelles. Very little Thresher Shark research has been done globally as they are not considered that numerous. The expedition showed that they are seen at depth so it appears they are maybe more numerous than previously thought.

Seamounts were the third aspect of oceans that were discussed. They are often found on ridges where tectonic plates are moving around. They contain a lot of space so support a great diversity of creatures. It's important to be aware of that when we think about how to manage and protect them. Because they are deep, they are great at carbon storage and their depth generally makes them more protected against some human activities.

There are numerous human activities that affect the ocean environments. Coastal developments, power production and the dumping of rubbish are some examples. However, the most impactful changes result from excess atmospheric carbon dioxide and poor fishing practices. Often the consequence of an activity is not seen by the perpetrator but is seen by a different population in a different location or time. What is in place to manage and protect the oceans and the resources provided by them?

1] The Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) is a maritime zone which extends to 200 nautical miles out from the land in which there are sovereign rights for exploring, exploiting, conserving and managing living and non-living resources. Beyond that are the high seas, only a small amount of which are currently protected or can be managed.

[2] The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) is an international agreement that establishes a legal framework for all marine and maritime activities. It was signed in 1982 but came into force in 1994. Most countries have now signed up to it. Prior to that there was no legislation and different nations had different ideas about what their territorial waters were. The agreement has 7 parts ranging from sea floor governance through to obligations for ship owners about international regulations like pollution control. Two supplementary agreements were added to it. The first covers the matter of transboundary fishing stocks and species like the European Eel where the young live in rivers, then migrate to the Sargasso Sea where they breed. The second agreement was required to cover the exploitation of abiotic resources of the seabed resulting in setting up:

[3] The International Seabed Authority (ISA).

It would be hoped that there would be interlinked global governance to manage fish stocks but instead there are only numerous Regional Fisheries Management Organizations (RFMO). Apart from the International Whaling Commission which is global, the others are all location specific and some are taxa specific e.g., the Indian Ocean Tuna Commission. This makes the interaction between them quite challenging. In 2010, 67% of fish stocks that were studied were found to be overfished or depleted. Limited money has been put into this so there is poor monitoring, control and surveillance and a lack of effective mechanisms for prosecution and punishment. This has resulted in 1 in 5 catches being illegal, unregulated and unreported (11-26 million tons of fish).

Rules in the high seas depend on what you are doing. A permit is not required for scientific research but is needed for seabed mining. Apart from fisheries, this is one of the only forms of regulation. Seabed mining is currently still in the exploration phase, often in the least explored parts of the ocean. For example, India has an exploration license for polymetallic nodules in the mid Indian basin. Lucy had shown us pictures of seamounts early in the talk pointing out a dark cobalt crust making up the substrate. If mined, the top layer would be removed, taking with it all the life that calls it home. The high seas are for all and the danger is that the richest nations get to resources first, exploit and deplete them leaving others with nothing. However,

[4] the BBNJ (Biodiversity Beyond National Jurisdiction) is an internationally binding agreement, currently in negotiation, on the conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction (the high seas).

There is currently no legal framework for establishment of a protected area on the high seas so it is going to implement agreements focusing on protection of marine biodiversity and on assessing the environmental impact of activities before they take place in the ocean. It is also going to look at marine genetic resources, the organisms themselves and products that can be derived from them. Agreements are to be set up on archiving data and samples so that discoveries made on the high seas can be shared and benefit everyone.

16 February 2021

Exploring Rainforest Diversity by Professor Owen Lewis (University of Oxford)

Tropical forests are the most diverse ecosystems on earth, supporting over 50% of all biodiversity. Rainforests play a major role in regulating global climates, and are key to the livelihood of a substantial proportion of the world's human population. However, they are also among the most threatened of all biomes. Understanding the ecology and evolution of tropical forests, and people's dependence on them, is fundamental to their future management and conservation. Illustrating some of the remarkable and beautiful plant and animal species in these habitats,

Owen recounted some of his research experiences in rainforest ecosystems on three continents, but especially in Central America and Borneo. He explained his research investigating the mystery of why so many species are able to persist in rainforests, and in particular his team's studies of the role of insect herbivores and fungal pathogens in promoting high plant diversity.

By documenting the complex food web of interactions among species, researchers are able to examine the impacts of human disturbances like timber extraction or conversion of forests to plantations, along with the consequences for the ecosystem services on which we all depend. Owen's talk concluded with a summary of the latest work on the human-modified tropical landscapes of SE Asia, where large-scale planting of oil palms threatens the remaining rainforest fragments.

With other researchers, he and his team are investigating possible solutions such as riparian reserves (areas of rainforest conserved along water courses). These provide a promising approach to allow countries like

Malaysia and Indonesia to benefit economically from palm oil, while retaining habitat and dispersal routes for rainforest plants and animals.

2 March 2021

Return of the Peregrine by Keith Betton (Hampshire Ornithological Society)

Keith is the County Bird Recorder for Hampshire and has studied that county's Peregrines for over ten years, managing and monitoring up to 25 nest sites annually. He explained that Peregrines have not had an easy time. Our native populations were decimated for over 150 years firstly by game keepers eradicating vermin – i.e. anything that competed with the game reared and managed solely for the pleasure of being shot for 'sport', as well as the taxidermy and egg collecting trade to furnish burgeoning private and museum collections in Europe and the developing world. Whatever relict populations were hanging on came under even more pressure because the Government ordered for many to be killed during the 1st & 2nd World Wars, so that they did not intercept and eat the Feral Pigeons carrying secret messages from the front lines. After the wars, with the massive expansion and use of pesticides in the western world, the unknown and in particular the hidden and undetected side effects of organochlorines caused a further, more serious widespread decline by thinning egg shells and increasing adult mortality. In fact, by the 1980s Peregrines had disappeared from southern England completely, despite receiving blanket protection from the Protection of Birds Acts & amendments of 1954 to 1967 and the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. Regional extinction took place on an even larger scale at the same time in Europe and North America, largely down to the same reasons, i.e. the detrimental medium to long term environmental damage and destruction caused by widespread use of agricultural pesticides.

After three decades of challenge, the Peregrine started to recover following the banning of some pesticides such as DDT in the 1980s, and breeding recommenced in Dorset and Sussex. Sightings in Hampshire and elsewhere grew in line with this expansion until at last in 1993 a pair nested for the first time on the Fawley Power Station tower. The Hampshire breeding population expanded along the south coast and it then leapt inland, eventually reaching Winchester in 2011 and then Andover. Winter sightings of Peregrine steadily increased in Berkshire and it was only a matter of time before nesting eventually occurred in Berkshire in 2006 in the Theale area. However the first confirmed breeding attempt in Berkshire was in 2010 at the Queen Mother Reservoir in the east of the county. They first attempted to breed in Newbury in 2019, and reared their first juveniles in 2020.

Keith explained that most adult Peregrines remain in their nesting territories throughout the year. Young birds usually start naturally dispersing from their natal sites in the early autumn, but some remain with their parents into their first winter, but are chased away at the beginning of the New Year when the next breeding season begins in earnest. Peregrines are more widely distributed outside the breeding season than during it. They often peregrinate over wide areas looking for suitable prey such as duck and waders on the coast. The German name for the Peregrine is Wanderfalke, Swedish is Pilgrimsfalk, and Norwegian is Vandrefalk; in the UK peregrinating describes well the behaviour of the dispersing juveniles at the end of the breeding season, but on the continent and especially in Scandinavia the winter weather is so harsh that the majority of adults have to migrate out to milder areas as well.

Although now green-listed with a UK population of about 2000 pairs, the Peregrine is still regarded as being of conservation concern in both a European and a UK context, but after having suffered at the hands of man for many years, this top predator is now benefiting from our protection.

5 October 2021

Presidential Address: Discovering the Purple Emperor by Matthew Oates (National Trust)

Matthew Oates has had a distinguished career in nature conservation, including as the National Specialist Advisor on Nature to the National Trust. Since retiring, he has been involved with a number of projects, including being one of the earliest members of the Knepp Wildland Advisory Board and running Purple Emperor safaris at the Knepp Castle Estate rewilding project in West Sussex, and advising on the development of the Heart of England Forest in south-west Warwickshire. He has published a number of books, including 'His Imperial Majesty, a natural history of the Purple Emperor'. He writes a monthly contribution to the 'Nature Notebook' column in The Times and has appeared on a number of television and radio programmes, including Countryfile, the One Show and Springwatch.

In his presentation, Matthew set out to disprove a number of theories about the Purple Emperor, in particular that it is a rare species of southern oak woodlands. The Purple Emperor is one of our largest butterflies. The male has an iridescent purple sheen on the upper side of all four wings. The female lacks the purple colouring, is larger than the male and has bolder white markings. In woodland, the Purple Emperor is a canopy dweller and is found

at a very low density. This makes it hard to monitor in the adult stage which lasts for between 10 days and three weeks. Instead, Matthew has been searching for it in the larval stage, which lasts for about 10 months. The eggs are laid on Goat Willow and some of the other narrow-leaved willows and hybrids. The ideal leaves for egg laying are mid-green, not shiny, soft and out of the full sun. The females tend to lay in the middle of the day, high up on isolated sub-canopy branches. The eggs hatch after about three weeks. The caterpillars feed on the upper side of the leaf, leaving typical patterns of feeding damage at the tip of the leaf. In the autumn, the caterpillar changes colour from green to brown, before going into hibernation for about five months on a twig near a bud. The winter predation rate by birds, especially Great and Blue Tits, is in the range 25 – 85%. The caterpillars fare worst in mild wet winters. They restart feeding in spring when the willow flowers, and with another change of skin, they turn back to green again. At this stage, they move from shade to sun to continue feeding. Before pupation, they turn pale and they may move some distance. The pupal stage lasts for about three weeks before the adult butterflies emerge. It has been discovered that the pupae fluoresce under ultra-violet light. This might help to monitor the insects at this stage.

During the first half of the flight season, the males spend the mornings searching the sallows for freshly-emerged females. In the afternoons, they hold territories in sheltered arboreal high points. The males are particularly violent, attacking any flying object including birds. Matthew has observed them attacking small and medium-sized birds, and even larger birds including Mallard, Hobby (that ended badly) and even White Stork at Knepp. When two males meet, they spiral upwards together, rather like Commas do. Once the females have mated, they spend a lot of time avoiding males. They have a characteristic tumbledown flight in which they plummet towards the ground before turning aside at the last moment. The males are infamous for their habit of coming to the ground to feed on the salts from animal dung. In areas with old trees, they are also known to feed at sap runs.

For a very long time, the Purple Emperor was thought to be a butterfly of large oak woodlands, with its core range in central southern England. That is where observers looked for it, and found the adult butterflies with some difficulty as they flew high up around the canopy. But the rewilding project at the Knepp estate has completely rewritten the story. Knepp now holds far and away the largest British population, with the butterfly thriving in willow scrub. Willow is a pioneer species, thriving in damp clay soils and river valleys, in disturbed ground and brownfield sites. The heavy clay soils of the former arable land at Knepp have proved ideal for the development of willow scrub. Here the Purple Emperor butterflies can be found in their hundreds as they fly around the scrub – not high up in the canopy. Monitoring at Knepp and elsewhere shows that their numbers are generally fairly steady, but every five years or so, the population increases significantly and in these years the butterfly is able to expand into new areas. In the current century, the butterfly has been moving northwards and has recently been recorded from Yorkshire. Also, instead of just surveying for adults in oak woodland, observers are hunting for the larvae on suitable sallows and finding them. We do not know if all these are new colonies, or if some have been there for a long time, but we have just been looking in the wrong place. With climate change, the core population of the Purple Emperor is likely to continue moving northwards.

19 October 2021

Tawny Owls coming to a wood near you by Stephen Powles (Wildlife photographer)

Stephen was a vet who took early retirement to pursue his passion for wildlife and wildlife photography. Many of his insights come from spending 16 years observing 2 Tawny Owls near his home in rural mid Devon. The presentation was filled with beautiful photographs.

Tawny Owls are widely spread from Europe through to China, though are not found in Ireland. They are fairly sedentary and ringed birds from the UK have not been found on the continent and vice versa. Territories are held by females and cover approximately 10 acres depending on abundance of food. Their preferred habitat is a mixture of woodland and open countryside. Their cryptic colouring allows them to hide, often resting up against the trunk of a tree. The owls' disc-shaped faces allow funnelling of sound to their ears, and they have 70 degrees of binocular vision, making them excellent predators. 70% of the skull of a Tawny Owl is occupied by its eyes (compared to 5% in humans and 50% in most birds). The Tawny Owl is mainly a perch and drop hunter.

They don't need much light to hunt but do need some. Along with the Long-eared Owl they are probably our most nocturnal of owls.

They take readily to tube shaped nest boxes placed either vertically on a tree trunk or at an angle under a branch. Stephen has also had Tawnies in his Barn Owl box. They breed early in the year laying 2 to 4 eggs in February/March time. Eggs are incubated from the day they are laid and hatch after about a month. Females are ferociously protective of the nest site. Eric Hosking, probably the first ever professional bird photographer,

lost his eye to a Tawny Owl and named his book "An eye for a bird". Do not mess about near nest sites. The females will hit you and you won't hear them coming. When they fledge, the chicks often climb out of the nest into the tree in which it is found. This is known as 'branching'. At this stage they only have a few wing feathers and a few feathers on their tail which allows them to glide and fly a short distance if they are lucky. If they end up on the ground, their calls can attract the attention of local foxes. Hard to believe but a significant number of Tawny Owl chicks lose their lives to grumpy sheep. If you find a chick on the ground it's most likely to be a Tawny or a Barn Owl. Tawny Owls have vivid pink eye lids and, with the exception of foxes and sheep, should be ok as the mother will be keeping an eye on it and they will more than likely scramble back into a tree. If it's a Barn Owl chick (dark eyes and eyelids) it won't be looked after and fed by the mother so rescuing could be considered by putting it back in the box. Tawny chicks disperse in late July/August going on average only 4km. Some go as far as 10 km and one has been recorded going an exceptional 100km.

The chicks call incessantly to be fed in late April /May and don't hide up too much, giving excellent opportunities to photograph them. It's mad panic to try and get a photograph when an owl comes in to feed a chick, Stephen has only managed once in which a frog was offered to the young. They are incredibly adaptable in what they eat, allowing them to live in a wide range of habitats. Stephen has captured images of many food types being brought to nest sites including Wood Mice, Bank Voles, shrews, a Water Shrew, worms, Cockchafer, songbirds, Pheasant (road kill) and fish (probably taken from the edge of a garden pond). A camera trap set up for Otters, showed Tawnies on the edge of a pond at frog spawning season in February.

Stephen was inspired by a photo taken by Jonathan Scott of a vulture coming into a kill and yearned to take something similar. With no vultures in Devon, he tried to get a similar shot of a Buzzard. A feeding table was set up in the corner of a field using day old chicks as a lure. After a week, the Tawny Owl had learnt to make use of it. Stephen only gives them one chick a day which he estimates is a quarter or a third of their daily requirements so they don't become dependent. He set up his cameras at the food table. He had a goal post arrangement with an infra-red light beam strung between them and bamboo canes to funnel the owl to the location. As the owl flies through the beam, it triggers the camera which triggers the flashgun, taking its own photo. The shots he wanted of course do not occur at the first attempt, and he kept getting photos of the rear end of an owl. The owl is a creature of habit and followed the same route every night, flying up into an ash tree, then into an oak tree, and then flying down to the table. While hidden in a hedge one night he discovered the owl was flying under the light beam, so by dropping it lower he finally managed to get his shot. Because the owl invariably lands in the same place, he uses a stick on which he sets the focus of the camera before removing it for the photo. One day he forgot to remove the stick and witnessed the owl pulling its wing in to go by the stick before extending it out again once it had grabbed the food. Their long broad wings allow them to be very manoeuvrable. Another night he witnessed the owl coming in late, looking wet and bedraggled. It had almost certainly had a bath. Stephen has managed to capture the Tawny Owl doing just that on his river camera-trap. Because they take the same routes, he can set cameras in locations where he expects them and has gained beautiful shots of them flying in woodland over bluebells and at exactly the same location with a one-shot chance after snow.

The next image he aimed for was a shot taken from the perspective of the prey as it was about to be taken. To do this he had the camera set up beneath the table so the camera became the prey's eye with the chick being its body. He finally managed to get a picture with the owl's eyes, beak and talons all in line with the food. If you were a vole and saw that coming, your chances would not be too good.

The first Tawny Owl came to Stephen's garden for about 12 years and he fed him in the woods and at a table by his house. We were shown a fantastic film of Stephen going into the wood to place food, whistling as he went to warn the owl of his arrival. As he turned to walk away, we saw the owl fly straight down behind him. Sadly this bird died, but he has managed to train up another owl. This current one took 9 months as opposed to a week for the first one. Having got the shot he really wanted, he takes far fewer photos of them now, most of the time simply watching (and occasionally filming) them under a spot light.

2 November 2021

Britain's Ground Beetles: Diversity, Ecology and Change

by **Dr Chris Foster (University of Reading)**

Thanks to J.S. Haldane's much repeated 'inordinate fondness' quote, the staggering diversity of beetles is well known, especially among those with at least a passing interest in natural history. While the UK hosts only around 1 in 100 of the species described globally, that still leaves 4000 for the student of British beetles to get to grips with. Of these, fewer than 1 in 10 belong to the family Carabidae, the ground beetles. Despite the somewhat uninspiring common name, this is one of the best gateway groups to the world of beetles. Some of the large, striking species are among those most often noticed by general naturalists, from the Green Tiger to the Violet Ground Beetle.

Many of the smaller species (some under 3 mm long) can only be separated using characteristics best viewed down a microscope, but there are also superficially similar species that are easily distinguishable in the field with a bit of knowledge and a good lens to hand. There is an excellent accessible key by Martin Luff, published as part of the Royal Entomological Society handbooks, and lots of other resources, including some recent PDF guides to some of the genera by Mark Telfer and John Walters. As with any other group of organisms, identification is based on a suite of clues including habitat, behaviour and comparisons with other species.

So how do you know it is a ground beetle you are dealing with? The adults are more or less flat, sleek beetles with filiform antennae (meaning they are not adorned with clubs, fans or anything of that nature, as seen in dung or stag beetles). Most species are predators of other invertebrates and they can certainly move – tiger beetles are among the fastest animals on the planet, adjusted for body length – but quite a few species specialise in slugs and snails, so their speed may have as much to do with escape from vertebrate predators looking to eat them as it does hunting down their own prey. There are also seed-eaters, such as the taxonomically challenging genus *Amara* and some of the common species of arable fields and other cultivated land like *Harpalus rufipes*, sometimes called the Strawberry Seed Beetle. These tend to have a more rounded (*Amara*) or ‘bull-necked’ (*Harpalus*) appearance, while some of the woodland specialists are a sturdy wedge shape, ideal for ploughing through leaf litter. Ground beetle larvae have similar diets and habits to the adults but tend to range less far and stay hidden in soil and leaf litter.

As well as providing an identification challenge, the sheer variety of ground beetles means they are frequently studied as ecological indicators. Samples of the species present in an area are easily obtained by simple pitfall traps, and the characteristics of that mix of species – flight ability, diet, size, rarity – can potentially reveal useful information about the collection site. Pitfall traps do not give a perfectly unbiased or exhaustive sample, since smaller species are less likely to be caught, and they also miss those few ground beetle species that are most active *above* the ground. For example, there are some colourful species in the genera *Dromius* and *Demetrias* that frequent the foliage of trees or climb reed stems. However, pitfall traps remain a well-used tool in ecological surveys and setting a simple pitfall trap – an old jam jar buried so that it is flush with the ground, for example – is a good way to find out which species are active in your garden.

At the individual species level, there are fantastic behaviours worthy of study, from species that lay each of their eggs in an individual mud cup to the extraordinary explosive chemical defence of Bombardier beetles, which have the ability to eject boiling caustic liquid from their abdomens. Bombardier beetles (represented in the UK by two species in the genus *Brachinus*) also have an unusual life history in that their larvae are ectoparasites on the pupae of other ground beetles.

There are also fascinating ground beetle species that make brilliant champions for just about every major habitat type in Britain, being intimately connected with the future fate of the landscapes they inhabit. In the moist oak woodlands of South Wales and Devon, the 30 mm Blue Ground Beetle (*Carabus intricatus*) tracks the slime trails of slugs at least as big as itself, injects digestive juices to form a ‘slug soup’ and then consumes the succulent results. One Dartmoor-based distiller has named a gin ‘Carabus’ in honour of the beetle, with a portion of the sales donated to Buglife’s work to protect this species. In acid grasslands, another ectoparasitic species called *Lebia cruxminor* – strikingly marked in black and orange – attacks the leaf beetle *Galeruca tanaceti*. The leaf beetle has a range of host plants but *Lebia* goes for it when it feeds on Devil’s bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis*, also the food plant for the Marsh Fritillary butterfly. Perhaps this is an example of how conservation work on behalf of popular insect groups like butterflies can indirectly aid other scarce invertebrates.

Speaking of scarce invertebrates, ex-industrial brownfield sites, especially in the Thames estuary region, are increasingly celebrated as hotspots of invertebrate diversity, and ground beetles are well represented among the special species they harbour. Two of these, *Scybalicus oblongiosculus* and *Brachinus sclopeta*, have also turned up recently in arable fields in the south-east. Since they appear to be associated with well-drained, sun-baked open soil and are common farmland species in parts of continental Europe, this is perhaps no surprise, but it could also be a sign of climate change modifying our ground beetle fauna. Another potential climate impact on ground beetles to watch for is in the highest peaks of Snowdonia and the Scottish Highlands, where the Snow Patch Heart Shield, *Nebria nivalis*, hunts around the edges of permanent (or persistent) snow fields – obviously a habitat that is likely to face an unstable future. Similarly, another *Nebria*, the Cliffcomber *Nebria livida*, inhabits partly vegetated, damp crumbling cliffs on the east coast and finds itself vulnerable to either too much or too little erosion.

Changes in ground beetle populations can be seen in the data collected by the national recording scheme and other monitoring projects. In Natural England’s species status review (Telfer, 2016), 1 in 5 British ground beetle species were given an IUCN conservation status, of which 3 are considered regionally extinct, 10 Critically Endangered, 19 Endangered and 16 Vulnerable. Data from the Environmental Change Network also show

declining abundance in some of the commoner species – 3 out of 4 species in a 2012 study were found to be in decline, of which half showed a greater than 30% decline in just 10 years. These declines were particularly acute in montane habitats and lowland pasture in the west of the country, whereas ground beetles in southern downland showed increases and populations in woodland and hedgerows appear to be stable, so it is a more complex picture than the headline figures suggest.

The Ground Beetle Recording Scheme welcomes new recorders – even records of very common species in under-recorded areas will help increase the reliability of the trend analyses mentioned above. The best way to submit records is through the iRecord website, but you can also get in touch with the recording scheme organiser via email at c.w.foster@outlook.com.

16 November 2021

Local walks on the wild side by Rob Stallard (RDNHS)

Rob has been busy exploring the local area over the last twenty years and has clocked up over 2,200 miles in the process. The talk gave an overview about paths in general and then a catalogue of the main long distance paths that run through the Reading area.

The area is surprisingly rich in wildlife because the underlying geology gives us a wide range of habitats including chalk downs, clay farmland, lowland acid heath, wetland and beech woodland. This great diversity gives a wide range of wildlife species.

Many of the paths which Rob surveyed reflect their usage within a village, often radiating out from the church. All the heavily used paths and tracks have over the years become tarmaced roads. Evidence of the age of the path can be seen, for example, in ‘hollow ways’ where the path has worn its way down between banks on either side. Another strong indication is the presence of ‘ley lines’. Contrary to popular opinion these are not about ‘psychic energy’ but, long before maps and compasses, a very practical way of navigating. Back in the stone and bronze ages the few people who travelled long distances did so in a series of straight line segments from one prominent landmark towards the next. A local example of this is Oareborough Hill, near Hermitage on the Old Street.

All types of path and road can form useful wildlife corridors. Our nature reserves are in danger of species loss due to climate change. These small, isolated reserves where rare species are clinging on are very vulnerable. Creating thin wooded margins to paths is an easy way of linking together reserves and in the process providing useful carbon capture. Some of our local ancient paths have become excellent wildlife corridors.

In the second part of the talk Rob took us on a journey along the main long distance paths that pass through the Reading area. An extensive set of slides included views, wildlife highlights and unexpected events encountered along the routes. All the walks took less than an hour’s travel to reach the start point.

Old Street Reading to Wantage, 24 miles. An ancient track.

Great Ridgeway Ivinghoe Beacon to Alton Priors (Ordnance Survey route), 90 miles. Western part is ancient, eastern section from Goring is a modern creation.

Chiltern Way Ewelme to Hambleden to Luton circular, 129 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths.

Chiltern Way (Southern extension) Ewelme to Warburg via Whitchurch Hill, 31 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths tacked on the southern part of Chiltern Way.

Kennet and Avon Reading to Devizes, 56 miles continues on to Bath. The canal towpath.

Wansdyke Path Marlborough to Morgan’s Hill, 13 miles. Follows route of ancient ditch.

Tan Hill Way Savernake to Alton Priors 8 miles. An ancient ridgeway.

Lambourn Valley Way Newbury to Uffington White Horse, 19 miles. It follows the old railway line to Lambourn then an ancient track.

Thames Path Windsor to Oxford, 73 miles (full route Greenwich to Kemble 180 miles). It follows the towpath.

Shakespeare’s Way Stratford upon Avon to Globe Theatre London via Marlow, 146 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths.

Photographic Competition 2021 Winning Photographs
(for article, see page 38)



Overall Winner & Winner: Nature in Action Hummingbird Hawk-moth
Plastow Green garden, on Buddleja © Ken White



Winner: **Small is Beautiful** Dandelion seed head
Plastow Green garden © Ken White



Winner: **Colour Prejudice Orange-tip**
© John Thacker



Winner: **Three of a Kind** Shaggy Inkcap
Tilehurst © Laurence Haseler



Winner: **Pattern Perfect** Turkeytail fungus
Quarry Wood, Cookham Dean © Fiona Brown

Photographic Competition 2021: Winning photographs and Runners Up



Winner: **Makes you smile** Egyptian Geese
Maiden Erleigh Lake © Fiona Brown



Winner: **Flora & Fungi UK** Sealheal
Aston Rowant © Fiona Brown



Winner: **Fauna UK & Overall Runner Up**
Female Roe Deer, New Forest © Steve Woolnough



Winner: **Local in Lockdown** Poppies & Flax
Lower Assendon © Fiona Cummins



Runner Up: **Small is Beautiful** Hawthorn Shieldbug
Tilehurst garden © Rob Stallard



Runner Up: **Three of a Kind** Common Blues
Aston Upthorpe Downs © Dorothy Marshall

Photographic Competition 2021: Runners Up



Runner Up: **Nature in action** Blackbird
Yorkshire Dales © Steve Woolnough



Runner Up: **Colour Prejudice** Yellow Stagshorn
Sulham Woods © Rob Stallard



Runner Up: **Pattern Perfect** Light Crimson Underwing
Axmansford © Andy Bolton



Joint Runner Up: **Makes you smile**
Bracket Fungus, Hartley Wintney © Rob Stallard



Joint Runner Up: **Makes you smile** Squirrel kittens playing
Pamber Forest © Steve Woolnough



Runner Up: **Flora & Fungi UK** A Fungal log,
Pamber Heath © Rachel Woolnough

Photographraphic Competition 2021: Runners Up



Runner Up: **Fauna** Raven searching for food at a café
Isle of Wight © Fiona Brown



Runner Up: **Local in Lockdown** Muntjac browsing flowers in
Tilehurst garden © Jan Haseler

Other photos for articles in this Naturalist



The Dragonfly Pond newly installed by Fiona Cummins in her
Sonning Common garden 2018 © Fiona Cummins



Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* egg laying in Fiona's
new pond in Sonning Common 2018 © Fiona Cummins



Big-headed Digger Wasp *Ectemnius cephalotes*
Plastow Green garden 26.08.21 © Ken White



Elm-balloon Gall *Eriosoma lanuginosum* near Whitchurch,
found by Andy Bolton 24.07.21 © Ken White

Three Castles Path Windsor to Winchester, 59 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths (yet to be fully explored) that runs to the south of Bracknell and Basingstoke.

Harrow Way Seaton (Dorset) to Dover, 210 miles. An ancient track (yet to be fully explored).

Oxfordshire Way Bourton on the Water to Henley on Thames, 67 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths (yet to be fully explored).

Test Way Inkpen Beacon to Southampton, 39 miles. A modern amalgamation of local paths that follows the valley of the River Test in its southern half (yet to be fully explored).

Wayfarer's Way Inkpen Beacon to Havant, 64 miles. Modern amalgamation of local paths. The northern part is an ancient ridgeway.

7 December 2021

Plant communities of the Canary Islands by Dr Brian Ferry (Royal Holloway College)

The seven Canary Islands are one of several island clusters in the Atlantic Ocean, off the north-west coast of Africa. The rocks at the surface range in geological age from about one million years old (La Palma and El Hierro in the west) to over 20 million years old (Lanzarote and Fuerteventura in the east). (*Ed. Note: a major eruption started on La Palma 19th Sept 2021 and lasted 85 days*) Their climate regime is best demonstrated on the central island of Tenerife where Mount Teide reaches an altitude of over 3,600 metres, well above the cloud zone. Four climate (altitude) zones can be identified, each with its distinctive plant community. (1) A lowland zone, dominated by *Euphorbia* (Spurge) shrubs, extends up to a few hundred metres above sea level within which the climate is essentially that of the Mediterranean (hot, dry Summers and mild, moist Winters). (2) Above this in the cloud zone is Laurel forest, extending to 1500 metres altitude but confined to the north-facing side of the island. This zone is immersed in cloud on a daily basis giving the climate the feel of a cool rain forest. (3) Then there is a Pine forest zone which extends up to about 2000 metres and finally (4) a sub-alpine zone, just above 2000 metres and situated in a collapsed crater complex. In the sub-alpine zone the climate is more extreme, especially diurnally with hot day-time temperatures and sub-zero night temperatures. The other six Canary Islands, all with appreciably less altitude, lack any significant sub-alpine zone and the eastern islands (Lanzarote and Fuerteventura), now much geologically worn down and closest to Saharan Africa, are very dry, with only a lowland zone present.

The fossil record shows that plant species arrived on the islands from north-west Africa and the Mediterranean, windblown or carried by birds, or across the ocean surface on logs and later on boats. With isolation from their mainland sources, evolution through natural selection has produced a remarkable range of new plant species, in many cases endemic even to individual islands. Genera which illustrate these processes well include *Euphorbia* (Spurges), *Sonchus* (Sow thistles), *Echium* (Buglosses), *Lotus* (Bird's-foot Trefoils), *Argyranthemum* (Ox-eye Daises), *Aeonium* (House-leeks), *Cistus* (Sun Roses), *Senecio* and *Pericallis* (Ragworts) and *Limonium* (Sea Lavenders). Many of these genera have evolved even further to produce new species confined to the particular vegetation (altitude) zones mentioned earlier.

In summary, the Canary Islands offer a remarkable array of plants, many endemic to those islands, and equivalent to the unique animals, tortoises and iguanas, that Darwin eventually found on the Galapagos Islands. By chance, Darwin missed an opportunity to explore the Canary Islands because quarantine regulations prevented him landing there, and he had to wait until HMS Beagle arrived several years later in the Galapagos Islands, where his theory of evolution crystalized, based on animals rather than plants.

Editor's Note:

*the RDNHS is still looking for members to take on the task of compiling an annual short report of local sightings of the following taxa:- **Invertebrates** (or a part of), **Fungi**, **Lichens & Galls**
It is a great shame that large numbers of taxa go completely unrecorded. It has never been easier to find an app or online forum to help with identification. Most of us are snapping wildlife with our mobile phone cameras, so it has never been easier to share and get help with I.D.*

Christmas Party Photographic Competition by Rachel Woolnough

For the second year running, the 2021 Christmas party and photographic competition were moved to an online event due to the constraints imposed by Covid-19. Similar to last year, we had the usual eight categories all taken in the British Isles, plus the additional 'Local in Lockdown', the latter for pictures taken within 5 miles of members' homes. Members were allowed to submit one picture in up to six of the categories. Photos were sent to Rob Stallard in electronic format. He then very kindly produced a website where members could scroll through the photos and vote on line. Members were allowed one vote per category with a further two votes for their overall favourite pictures.

Seventeen people entered a total of 85 pictures, which is the highest number in the five years I have been receiving the Reading Naturalist. Twenty-eight members voted. Photos were spread fairly evenly over the usual eight categories with a reduced number in Local in Lockdown. I think we are all hoping that by next year this category will be obsolete.

There were lots of wonderful pictures in this year's competition. The first and second places were shared between eleven people and the winners and runners up in each category can be seen in the table below. The overall winner by one vote was Ken White's Hummingbird Hawk-moth.

Category	Winner	Subject
1. Small is Beautiful: (UK)	Ken White	Dandelion seed head, Plastow Green garden
2. Three of a Kind: (UK)	Laurence Haseler	Shaggy Ink-cap, Tilehurst
3. Nature in Action: (UK)	Ken White	Humming-bird Hawk-moth, Plastow Green garden
4. Colour Prejudice: (UK)	John Thacker	Orange-tip on Everlasting Sweet pea
5. Pattern Perfect: (UK)	Fiona Brown	Turkeytail fungus, Quarry Wood, Bisham
6. Makes You Smile: (UK)	Fiona Brown	Egyptian Geese, Maiden Erleigh Lake
7. Any Flora or Fungus:	Fiona Brown	Selfheal, Aston Rowant
8. Any Fauna:	Steve Woolnough	Roe Deer doe, New Forest
9. Local in Lockdown: (UK)	Fiona Cummins	Poppies & Flax, Lower Assendon
OVERALL WINNER	Ken White	Hummingbird Hawk-moth feeding

Category	Posn.	Runner Up	Subject
Runner up to Overall Winner	1st	Steve Woolnough	Roe Deer doe, New Forest
1. Small is Beautiful: (UK)	1st	Rob Stallard	Hawthorn Shieldbug, Tilehurst garden
2. Three of a Kind: (UK)	1st	Dorothy Marshall	3 Common Blues, Aston Upthorpe Downs
3. Nature in Action: (UK)	1st	Steve Woolnough	Blackbird with food, Yorkshire dales
4. Colour Prejudice: (UK)	1st	Rob Stallard	Yellow Stagshorn, Sulham Woods
5. Pattern Perfect: (UK)	1st	Andrew Bolton	Light Crimson Underwing, Axmansford
6. Make You Smile: (UK)	= 2nd	Rob Stallard	Bracket fungus, Hartley Wintney
" " "	= 2nd	Steve Woolnough	Grey Squirrel kittens, Pamber Forest
7. Any Flora or Fungus:	1st	Rachel Woolnough	Fungus on end of cut log, Pamber Heath
8. Any Fauna:	1st	Fiona Brown	Raven attending a cafe, Isle of Wight
9. Local in Lockdown: (UK)	1st	Jan Haseler	Muntjac eating garden flowers, Tilehurst

Moth highlights of Great Haughurst Copse, Axmansford by Andy Bolton

Although I've been learning about and recording moths in my own woodland-edge garden at Axmansford since about 2010, when the opportunity came up to do some trapping at a new location, albeit just a ¼ mile distant from where I live, I gladly accepted. The owners purchased Great Haughurst Copse in 2019, partly as a means to keep themselves occupied in retirement by utilising their woodland management skills. Although their house comes with a fairly large rural garden, more interestingly this blends into a 28 acre block of woodland, the majority of which is ancient semi-natural and was in a managed coppice cycle in decades past.

The objectives are to restore and re-invigorate the woodland so it can once again be considered genuinely to be a managed woodland, with all the benefits that brings in terms of wildlife, plants and the whole ecosystem. The aim is to achieve this with significant community help and involvement; regular volunteer work parties take place using hand tools and saws for thinning, coppicing and dead hedging to deter deer. A large number of native shrub whips have been planted, and the bridleway passing through has been transformed from sticky clay quagmire to a hard firm surface thanks to grants for repair from the British Horse Society and Hampshire County Council.

The majority of the land is high quality biodiverse native woodland which overlooks damp streamside meadows with Alder and Willow. However part of the site consists of a block of very dense mature conifers; the ambition is to thin and harvest a large proportion of these to allow light to the woodland floor and thus increase biodiversity, although access for the necessary large machinery remains a difficulty to overcome. Regarding the moths, I ran my Robinson-type moth trap with 125w Mercury Vapour bulb on three occasions here in 2020 and eight times in 2021 and already we have identified a remarkable 260 species. Here are some of the highlights:

Common name	Scientific name	Dates	No. seen	Status
Double Kidney	<i>Ipimorpha retusa</i>	20/07 + 21/08	1 + 1	Local
Alder Moth	<i>Acronicta alni</i>	21/06	6	Local
Festoon	<i>Apoda limacodes</i>	21/07	1	Notable B
Small Black Arches	<i>Meganola strigula</i>	21/07	5	Notable A
Light Crimson Underwing	<i>Catocala promissa</i>	21/07	1	Red Data Book
Mocha	<i>Cyclophora annularia</i>	21/08	1	Notable A
	<i>Argyresthia ivella</i>	20/07+ 21/08	1 + 1	Notable B : the only county record
	<i>Metalampra italica</i>	21/08	1	Immigrant/adventive new 10km square record
	<i>Falseuncaria ruficiliana</i>	21/08	1	Local; new 10km square record
	<i>Caryocolum blandulella</i>	21/08	1	Notable B; new 10km square record

Notes on the species

Double Kidney – A localised resident of damp woodland, fens, riverbanks and marshes whose larval food plants are sallows, willows and Black Poplar. I had only ever seen this moth once before, so to find it two years running at this location is pleasing.

Alder Moth – This distinctively marked moth has one annual generation in May/June and the larva feeds on Oak, Elm, Birch and Goat Willow, in addition to Alder itself. I'd wanted to see this species for a long time and finally it turned up.

Festoon – Another moth that had been high on my wish list. The larval food plant is Oak, growing in broadleaved woodland and hedgerows, so I'm not sure why this moth isn't seen more often, although there are

signs of a recent upturn, possibly related to climate warming.

Light Crimson Underwing – Prize of the year! A very scarce Red Data Book species normally confined to the New Forest and South Wiltshire. However this is not the whole story, as very recently it has begun to spread further north in Hampshire, reaching Harewood Forest near Andover and evidently beyond. A few days after this sighting, several individuals were seen at Pamber Forest. Once again this could be a range expansion due to climate warming.

Mocha – A personal first, this prettily marked moth would have been a second generation of the year example, its caterpillar being limited to Field Maple in the wild.

Argyresthia ivella – Occasionally found in old orchards and isolated wild apple trees, this distinctive micro moth was the only County Record when found in 2020. It was seen again in 2021.

Metalampra italica – An interesting mystery, this species was found new to the UK in Devon in 2003, having previously not been recorded outside Italy. Since then it has spread rapidly with over 100 sightings by 2019; the larvae feed under the dead bark of Oak.

Falseuncaria ruficiliana – One of many in the large Tortricidae family, this is a localised species with habitat niches on downland, heathland and mosses. The larvae have quite specific tastes, feeding within the seed heads of Cowslip and Lousewort.

Caryocolum blandulella – This is a rarely seen micro moth whose larvae feed only on the seeds and shoots of Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*. It has been recorded at only three other locations in mainland Hampshire so far this century.

I look forward to further visits here to monitor the changing fortunes of the moth communities that are visiting and living in this special place.

My grateful thanks to Graham Dennis and Mike Wall for their skill and knowledge.

Also to the owners at Great Haughurst Copse for their help, enthusiasm and coffee.

www.ghcopse.co.uk

House Martin Survey 2021 by Sarah White

House Martins are included on the Red List of Birds of Conservation Concern. These are birds of the highest conservation priority, having suffered a severe decline in their UK breeding population and they have become particularly scarce in the south of Britain. For example, a BTO survey in 2015 covered 33 randomly-selected tetrads (2x2 km squares) in Berkshire and nesting House Martins were only found in five of these.

A RDNHS project in 2021 aimed to record numbers of House Martin nests in the Reading area. Thanks to Tricia Marcousé, a very significant set of previous data was available. Reading Urban Wildlife Group had carried out a comprehensive survey in 1988, recording numbers of nests in each of the thirty-one 1km squares. This historical data is particularly valuable, allowing us to record change across these 1km squares.

Member volunteers were asked to visit their allocated 1km square at least twice between June and August, recording numbers of active nests, together with details of location, type, age and fabric of the building and aspect.

In addition to re-surveying the 1988 Reading squares, members were asked to check their local area for nests in order that these could be added to our data set for re-survey in the future.

A total of 13 members took part in the survey covering 11 of the previously-surveyed 1km squares between them. The results are summarized in the table below, which also includes numbers of nests found in all the squares covered in the 1988 survey.

Squares surveyed in 2021 are shaded grey, showing number of nests this year compared with numbers in 1988

Grid Square	Location	No. Nests 1988	No. Nests 2021
SU6572	Pincent's Lane	10	-
SU6573	Little Heath	10	-
SU6574	Sulham Hill	2	0
SU6576	Purley Rise	4	0
SU6672	Calcot	12	-
SU6674	Tilehurst	5	0
SU6676	Purley	3	0
SU6772	Calcot Golf Course	30	-
SU6773	Tilehurst	24	-
SU6774	Tilehurst	19	0
SU6872	Prospect Park	2	-
SU6873	Grovelands Rd/Lousehill Copse	53	-
SU6874	Norcot	9	
SU6875	Chazey Wood south	4	
SU6876	Chazey Wood north	80	4
SU6973	Kensington Park (West Reading)	6	
SU6974	Caversham Festival ground by river	24	
SU6975	Caversham Heights west	2	
SU6976	Caversham Heath Golf Course	12	
SU6977	Chazey Heath	4	0
SU7070	Green Park	3	
SU7072	Coley Park	1	
SU7073	Reading West	26	
SU7075	Caversham Heights	26	
SU7077	Tokers Green	13	0
SU7170	Whitley	3	0
SU7174	Caversham riverside	39	
SU7271	Northumberland Ave	1	0
SU7272	Redlands Road	2	
SU7471	Earley	1	0
SU7474	Thames Valley Park	2	0

The table shows that all of the surveyed squares in 1988 had House Martin nests, but none of the 2021 surveyed squares had nests. The sharp decline is particularly marked in the Tilehurst (SU6774) and Tokers Green (SU7077) squares which had 19 and 13 nests respectively in 1988.

One surveyor did however record seeing three birds in a nesting colony in Crescent Road (SU7372), a location which is a traditional nesting site but in a square which was not included in the 1988 survey. This was nevertheless a smaller number of birds than had been seen there in previous years.

Another of our surveyors who has lived near Purley for over 30 years, and covered the two Purley squares, remembers when the skies around the village were alive with twittering House Martins and now there isn't a single nest, although some birds were reported feeding in the area in April.

Fortunately there were some more positive results from nearby rural locations: at Kidmore End (SU7078), just one square further north than the Tokers Green square, a large House Martin colony was discovered, with some 20-30 birds seen; at Pangbourne (SU6376) a single active nest was found on Reading Road; at Ufton Green (SU6267) a minimum of three active nests and 11 birds were observed on a farmhouse; nesting House Martins were also seen in Turville (SU7691) where artificial nests had been provided for them; nesting Swallows were found in the Sulham Hill square (SU6574) and there was evidence of old House Martin nests in Whitley (SU7170).

As can be seen from the table, several squares with substantial numbers of nests in 1988 were not covered in the present survey, so it is quite possible that, had we been able to survey these squares, more nests might have been found.

Additional observations from the BerksBirds website for 2021 included nesting at Thatcham, possibly 4 active nests at Pangbourne Police Station (SU6376), two nests with nestlings in Church St/Prospect St. Caversham (SU7174) and in Holyport (SU8977).

This was generally considered to have been a particularly poor year for House Martins due to the long cold and frosty spring, so it would be well worth repeating the survey and aiming for a more complete coverage of the 1988 squares.

There are a number of possible reasons for the decline. It could be related to reduced food supply (insects have declined in abundance by 75% or more in the last 50 years); more modern buildings offering fewer suitable nest-building sites; lack of mud to make nests with warmer drier summers and loss of ponds; fewer birds arriving on migration because of problems in their wintering area, the expanding of the Sahara Desert or bad weather on migration routes.

An observation from one of our surveyors paints a picture of the sort of changes which have taken place in Reading:

A friend of mine who lives in SU7570, very close to SU7471, told me that when she moved into her present house in 1975, House Martins built their nest under the eaves of her roof every year, until Lower Earley was being built from 1980 onwards. She thinks that when the nests were there, the birds collected the mud for their nests from the River Loddon. At that time there were only meadows between her house and the river. However, the many new houses that were built on this meadow between her house and the river put an end to mud availability and the nests under her roof.



House Martin feeding juveniles in an artificial nest in Beenham 2005
Photo © Ken White

Acknowledgements: sincere thanks to all the members for taking part in this survey and to BerksBirds (<https://berksbirds.co.uk/>) for allowing use of their data.

Dragonfly Pond by Fiona Cummins

During the spring of 2018 I decided to fulfil a long term ambition to create a small wildlife pond in my back garden in Sonning Common. The removal of a decaying willow left a suitable space so I dug a circular hole and, with my husband's help, I lined it and built a low brick surround. We bought some oxygenating plants, placed a wooden plank at an angle and filled the pond from a water butt. (photo of pond p.36) Then we waited.

That summer turned out to be a 'scorcher', and on 12th July my record reads: 'Our wildlife pond has been a life-saver recently. We have seen Large Red Damselflies *Pyrrhosoma nymphula*, and dragonflies including a female Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* which I observed laying eggs on the plank and below the surface of the pond

(photo p.36). We also have a resident Common Frog and lots of different species of birds are using it for drinking and bathing’.

The following year I didn’t notice much activity on the dragonfly front although I did see a few small exuviae which may have been those of the Large Red Damselfly. However it became obvious, during a bit of dredging with my net, that there were a number of nymphs living at the bottom of the pond.

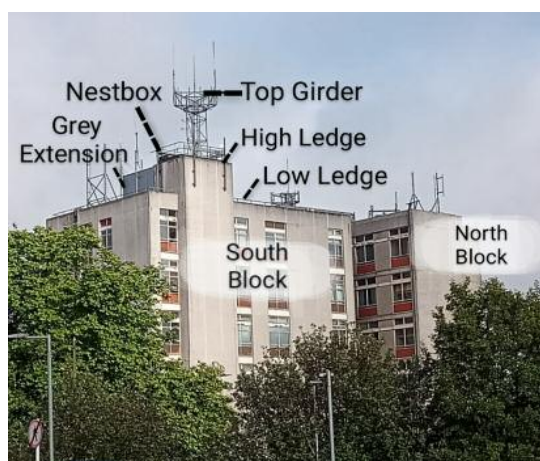
In early 2020 I introduced a horsetail plant to the pond in anticipation of the emergence of Southern Hawkers. It became clear to me during the late spring/early summer that some of the nymphs were becoming bigger and more active to the extent that I could often see some moving around just below the surface of the pond. My records show that I found the first exuvia on a spike of horsetail on the morning of 24th June. The next day I found another two exuviae but one dragonfly was floating on the surface of the pond. I fished it out and it was still alive, but it soon became obvious that its abdomen was deformed and it was eventually taken by a bird. Over the next two weeks, judging by the exuviae, four more dragonflies successfully emerged but one of those got stuck, giving me the chance of photographing it (I failed to get up early enough to see other emergences), though unfortunately it had deformed wings so did not survive. The last one evidently emerged on 17th July making a total of seven so maybe five survivors isn’t too bad.

In the summer of this year I found an adult Smooth Newt in the pond and shortly afterwards some small juveniles (called ‘efts’ when they become terrestrial). Newts may have been present in 2021 as I introduced a batch of frogspawn from another pond that spring which quickly disappeared. I have not noticed any dragonfly larvae or exuviae since 2020 although I briefly saw a female Southern Hawker in July so maybe there will be more next year.

Newbury Peregrines Update 2021 by Ken & Sarah White

An adult pair of Peregrines *Falco peregrinus*, tiercel B69 and falcon Mrs N, first attempted breeding on the Newbury BT Exchange rooftop in April 2019 and failed at the end of that May due to a period of persistent rain just as the eggs were hatching or when there were young chicks. In 2020 they managed to successfully rear 3 juveniles on the rooftop to fledging and independence. On 4th February this year (2021) our BTO ringer and camera technician Jason Fathers installed a new camera to monitor the Peregrine nestbox, and because the falcon might have nested on the bare rooftop again (as she did 2019 & 2020) he fitted a deep gravel-filled tray onto the BT roof below the nestbox just in case they didn’t use the actual box.

The diary entries below are selected notable events that were recorded by us and members of the Newbury Peregrine WhatsApp group; emboldened text are key stages in the breeding cycle.



BT Exchange seen from Sainsbury’s car park



BT Exchange nestbox on the mesh floor & camera

12th March: **Mating** on St Joseph's church bell tower and then on the BT High Ledge later.

14th March: 07.05 **Mating** on the BT Top Girder. **B69 was caught on camera 07.56 visiting the nestbox for**



Falcon Mrs N & Tiercel B69 courting in the nestbox 18th March

the first time and the pair mated again later.

18th March: **Mrs N visited the nest box for the first time.**

24th March: **Mrs N in the nestbox all night**

25th March: 03.14 **1st egg visible**; 05:30 B69 came to see it. Minimum night time temp. was -2° C.

26th March: the egg was left on its own overnight but B69 was back at 05:28 to check it and again at 06.44; Mrs N eventually came 07.02 and brooded it; they both came and went repeatedly during the rest of the day, at times brooding it and at other times just being near it.

27th March: min. night time temp. -2° C. 08.09 mating on the Top Girder.

13.20 **2nd egg visible**. B69 came to see it 13.25, 15.00 & 16.35: there was an interval of 58 hours between the laying of the 1st and 2nd egg. **Mrs N brooded the eggs all night.**

30th March: 07.32 **3rd egg visible**, min. night time temp. -1° C: there was an interval of 66 hours between the 2nd and 3rd egg. Mrs N brooded the eggs all night.



Mrs N & B69 with the eggs 2nd April

2nd April: 00.28 **4th egg visible**; there was an interval of 64.5 hours between the 3rd and 4th egg. Mrs N brooded the eggs all night. Min. night time temp. 0° C.

3rd April: 06.58 B69 turned the eggs and brooded them continuously, so **full incubation was definitely underway**. At 08.37 B69 appeared on the Top Girder with prey. Mrs N joined him there to eat it; he went back to the nestbox to continue incubation.

4th April: **03:52 min. night time temp. was -6° C**

5th April: 04.01 Mrs N came off the eggs, 04.06 B69 went back on the eggs

7th April: **min. night time temp. was -7° C**

15th April: min. night time temp. was -6° C

17th April: **06 45 Mrs N off the eggs; 06.46 B69 back on the eggs**; amazing synchrony between the birds.

24th April: 06.15 Mrs N went hunting: 06.42 she returned with prey. She ate some and then cached leftovers, doing it all out of sight of B69 while he was incubating.

25th April: 06.04 B69 brought in breakfast and gave it to Mrs N; within 1-minute B69 had resumed incubation. At 06.13 Mrs N cached the prey and then she went off hunting.

2nd May: **1st chick hatched** by 19:43

3rd May: **2nd chick hatched** by 10:52

6th May: **3rd chick hatched** by 08:41



Mrs N with the 3 chicks + unhatched egg 20th May

With the demands of feeding 3 hungry mouths the 4th egg became increasingly stranded and never hatched.

Mrs N brooded the chicks every night all night, until

22nd May: this was the first night she left the now well grown chicks unbrooded, even though the temperature dropped to 0° C. Looking like little Sumo wrestlers cloaked in thick white down, they huddled together throughout the night; difficult to believe that they will become the fastest creatures on the planet in only a couple of months time

The 4G Trail camera nestcam allowed us to monitor the day by day progress of the chicks. The camera is powered by a car battery and the PIR-activated photos are sent over the mobile network to an app on my mobile phone. I download the photos and share them with Jason the BTO ringer and with the Newbury Peregrine WhatsApp group. The first part of a growing young Peregrine to reach full size are the feet and legs. This is very useful because when the chicks are BTO-ringed they still do not have any feathers and their instinct is to sit tight in the nest and hiss at danger instead of fleeing, so this makes the job of the ringer much easier.

25th May: Jason accessed the nestbox under BTO Schedule 1 licence to **ring and colour-ring the chicks**. He bagged the chicks and took them away for 20 minutes to fit them each with a standard BTO uniquely numbered alloy ring and a coded plastic colour ring: **Blue PS male (Joe)**. **Blue YS male (Nick)**. **Blue VZ female (Beattie)**. The chicks were all put back in the nestbox within half an hour. Both parents flew round and round BT rooftop for hours remonstrating; this is normal behaviour. If disturbance happens at an earlier stage in the breeding season the adults might well abandon the nest and could destroy that year's whole breeding attempt. However, when there are well grown chicks in the nest their constant calling eventually draws the parents back in and regular feeding resumes. **Mrs N finally fed the chicks at the nestbox 6 hours after the chicks were safely returned.**

26th May: seventeen other bird species were seen from Sainsbury's car park during the Peregrine monitoring session this morning. 08.48 Mrs N went off hunting; the flight mode is quite different from routine flights around the BT building. Sometimes the perched Peregrine will wing and leg stretch, sometimes both sides before a final rouse to settle all the feathers in the correct place. This is followed by a variable period of looking intently around before a purposeful launch into flight that normally continues in a laser-straight line, with continual flapping to accelerate quickly into a fast and gradually ascending trajectory. Sometimes the constant flapping continues until the bird is a pinprick on the horizon, but is invariably lost behind trees and tall buildings. In this urban environment more often than not the hunt is done at rooftop and treetop level, the style more reminiscent of an Accipiter than the classic Peregrine textbook 'ascent to great height followed by the classic stoop'. 08.50 she returned and took the prey straight to the nestbox to feed the chicks.

30th May: **06.04 B69 off hunting; 06.08 he returned with prey**. He ate some and then took the rest down to the nestbox. **It was the first time we heard the chicks calling** as he arrived. (n.b. Sainsbury's car park is nearly 200 yds from the nestbox).

1st June: **06.00 both adults went hunting. B69 was back in 1.5 minutes with prey** with Mrs N in hot pursuit wanting to take it from him.

5th June: **the chicks were vigorously wing flapping** in the nestbox, exercising the muscles for their newly acquired flight feathers. 05.33 B69 went off hunting, and returned 5 mins later with prey. After a bit of plucking preparation he offered it to Mrs N in his bill and she took it straight to the nestbox to feed the family. 06.10 both parents went off hunting. 06.16 B69 returned with prey which he then cached on the BT building.



3rd June : Tiercel B69 feeding the young



Falcon Mrs N feeding the young.

Mrs N returned 06.39 with prey and took it straight to the nestbox to feed the family. At 06.55 B69 returned with prey again, started eating it in front of Mrs N and family; after Mrs N had paced around the nestbox area and perched nearby he finally took the prey to the now very well feathered chicks (juveniles) and fed them. **This was a total of 3 prey items brought in by tiercel B69 in only 2 hours.**

8th June: lots more wing flapping from the juveniles. 06.58 B69 went off hunting. 07.04 he returned to the top girder with prey. Mrs N tried to take it from him but he evaded her attempts. Then suddenly at 07.14 she lunged and grabbed it from him, took it to the nestbox and left it to the juveniles whole to sort out between themselves.

9th June: 05.20 B69 on top girder, Mrs N on High Ledge; there is a juvenile on far right hand end of mesh floor - **FLEDGING has started**. Surprisingly it was the youngest of the three, Joe, who has left the nestbox first, as he has the most white baby fluff on him still. Nick then got on the nestbox roof and wing-flapped while Beattie flapped furiously while still inside the nestbox. 06.10 B69 returned with prey and gave it to the 2 juveniles at the nestbox - maybe fledging out into the big wide world for Joe was not such a good idea after all. 06.50 B69 returned with more prey. Mrs N took it from him up to the top girder and in a strong westerly breeze started plucking the prey - a line of feathers like smoke streamed away almost horizontally and within seconds there was a small flock of Swifts catching the feathers to take away to line their own nests.

10th June: all 3 juveniles are now away from the nestbox but at the same High Ledge level, the top of the BT tower block.

11th June: 05.24 Mrs N returned with prey to the High Ledge and was greeted by 2 juveniles but Nick was stuck down at the Low Ledge level of the main rooftop. He tried running around the main rooftop but couldn't find a way up the vertical sides of the tower block back to the nestbox level.

12th June: 05.26 Nick was still stuck on the main rooftop level, while the other 2 juveniles were still up at the nestbox level. Mrs N returned with prey to the juveniles on the High Ledge after only 3 minutes of hunting, while Nick below was going frantic again to join them. Our second visit at 20.00 revealed that sibling Joe had joined Nick on the Low Ledge of the main rooftop.

14th June: 06.44 a parent flew in onto BT flushing the resident flock of Feral Pigeons off the rooftop. With all the excitement **Nick flew around the BT rooftop several times**, and he demonstrated his control of this amazing thing called flight.

15th June: **a delight to see all 3 juveniles on the wing around BT.** For the 2nd consecutive summer there are five Peregrines flying around Newbury town centre. Nick made it to the Top Girder to perch with the parents.

16th June: **a juvenile was already chasing Feral Pigeons;** it's what Peregrines do.

17th June: 2 juveniles playing tag on the wing with mock attacks thrown in for extra training; it was Beattie with one of the boys (see photo p.49) and occasionally all 3 were together.

21st June: Herring & Lesser Black-backed Gulls are appearing more frequently around BT. They are nesting on the warehouse rooftops in Hambridge Lane and have their own families to feed. They have realised that the adult Peregrines are flying past them coming from the Lower Farm lakes carrying food back to BT, and they see the labouring Peregrines as vulnerable targets to mug for easy food for them and their families, especially if several gulls manage to harass them at the same time. We were first alerted to this as Mrs N went off hunting heading east for Lower Farm. Even on the way to Lower Farm empty handed the gulls gave chase. Mrs N eventually caught prey at the nearby Racecourse and started heading for home with it, but a marauding Lesser Black-backed Gull started pursuing her and attempted to take the prey. B69 happened to be on the Top Girder and saw this happening. He took off like a rocket, so fast as he raced across the sky, even at an incline to get height. The second he reached her he dived repeatedly at the gull. Bullies soon know when they've met their match and the gull very sensibly ducked away to safety. As Mrs N approached BT she was then beset by her own juveniles, all keen to grab the prey from her as well; this is what they are trained to do by the parents. Somehow she made it back to the High Ledge still hanging on to the prey, pausing for a while to get her breath back before dispensing the prey out amongst her hungry family.

22nd June: 07.00 after several short hunting sorties we watched in awe as Mrs N circled up effortlessly higher and higher rising on the invisible thermals, drifting gently S.W. all the while, and then, albeit at a distance and watched through binoculars, we saw the vertical stoop, the closing of the wings, the classic teardrop, the plummeting and accelerating earthwards, seemingly jet propelled. Just how can she pull out of this near vertical

dive at such speed ? We've witnessed it only a few times before despite hundreds of hours of devoted monitoring of these amazing birds. Especially on rainy days, when I see her stoop I think "did she make allowances for her wet flight feathers / Does she have to increase her braking distance or call off the pursuit sooner than later / Will that last stoop be the last time I ever see her ?" No; only 22 minutes later she reappeared at BT with well prepared prey and with Beattie in hot pursuit screaming for it.

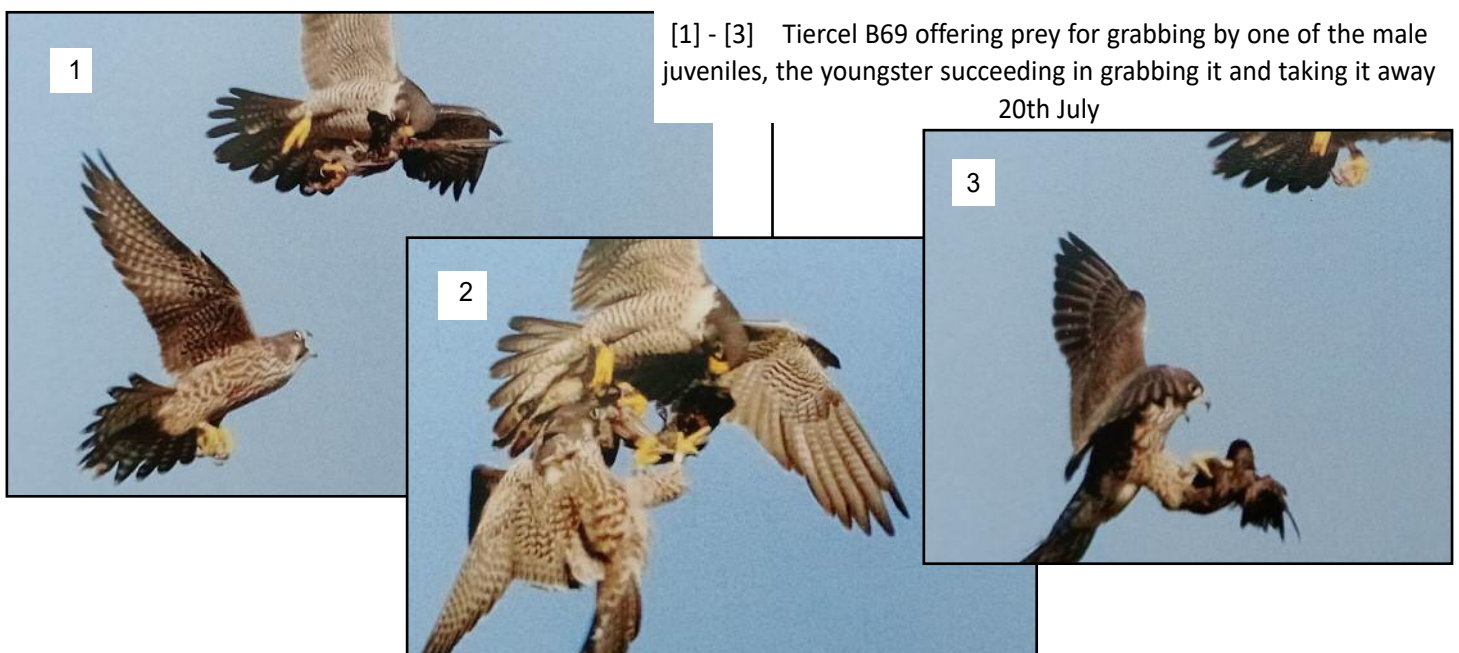
Later in the evening of the same day, having just met up with long-time-no-see friends at a local pub, I received one of the most memorable WhatsApp messages from friend and birding companion Patrick Crowley, who is running the current Berkshire Peregrine Survey: "just found juv Blue YL on St Luke's church Maidenhead".

In 2020, Mrs N decided to nest on the flat rooftop below the mesh floor again for the second year running. As luck would have it, coinciding with the first COVID-19 lockdown, southern England enjoyed over 6 weeks of Mediterranean spring weather. Unseen by anyone, Mrs N laid her clutch of eggs on the BT flatroof, and the adult pair completed a month of incubation and started feeding chicks until that pivotal day of 13th June, when the 3 chicks managed to scramble off the rooftop up a 3ft vertical retaining wall to precariously perch on the High Ledge and view the big wide world. The chicks were inaccessible to a BTO ringer due to the mesh floor above protecting them. As the juveniles learnt to fly, one of them had the misfortune to Maiden Flop to the ground instead of achieving a Maiden Flight. After being grounded the female juvenile was cornered and boxed up ready for BTO ringer Jason Fathers to check her out and colour-ring her 'Blue YL'. After her ringing, the site manager Dean Cleall arrived and took Jason & Blue YL up to the main rooftop for release. Two days later she was flying around BT with consummate ease. The juvenile Peregrines naturally disperse in late summer and early autumn, and wander away from their natal site. Imagine our delight when we heard from Patrick that he had seen the 2020 juvenile Blue YL on a church spire in Maidenhead; he had managed to read the blue leg ring code 'YL' through a telescope and shared the view with veteran local birder Dave Fuller. She had managed to survive her first year, the most demanding time for any Peregrine. We were unable to go at that moment of receiving the news, so decided to go early the next morning, but sadly she had already moved on. We wait earnestly for the next message saying she has been seen again, although it might be a little while.

26th June: 08.30 Mrs N returned to BT with prey, pursued by all 3 juveniles.

27th June: 06.02 no-one in sight. But by 06.15 B69 and all 3 juveniles had arrived at BT. By 06.45 all 3 juveniles were playing on the strong breeze, practising their attacks, twists and turns, gliding, soaring and diving. We think that the Feral Pigeons recognise the juvenile plumage of the Peregrines; they seem to have learnt that they are not in imminent danger from the birds with dark brown feathers and buff tips. The Ferals sit around BT and Sainsbury's car park confidently ignoring the juveniles, until the juveniles' curiosity and instinct kicks in and they get just a bit too close. The overall result for us are incredibly close encounters with the young Peregrines as they learn and gain confidence in their aeronautical skills and abilities.

29th June: 06.03 B69 returned with prey and a juvenile grabbed it off him in flight. This is what the young are initially taught to do. It is probably a life saver for them in their first year. They wander away from home, but probably rely on snatching prey from other raptors like Buzzard and Red Kite, which gives them more time to perfect the art of catching their own live prey, the most difficult skill of all that they have to acquire.



1st July: 06.45 We found B69 with prey on one of the construction cranes at the railway station. All 3 juveniles were around him calling. B69 then flew out, transferred the prey to his bill and then dropped it to a juvenile below. The juvenile below him caught it but then accidentally let go. In a flash B69 then stooped vertically and re-caught it, gained height and then re-released it for the juvenile to catch again. This the juvenile did and returned to the BT rooftop to eat it. 07.35 Mrs N returned to BT with prey and the 2 male juveniles were on her noisily hassling her for it. Beattie was still perched on a crane, and on sensing food was on offer came hurtling towards BT. On the way she took a lunge at a startled Collared Dove and then a Feral Pigeon, and then unbelievably chased a Mute Swan that happened to be flying towards the River Kennet Wharf. Later on she and Nick were taking it in turns to grab leaves from the nearby London Plane treetops.

4th July: 06.45 we noticed 2 juveniles perched on the scaffolding of a new Sterling building site on Boundary Road. Then Mrs N flew east heading out towards them. They saw her approaching and must have realised she was carrying prey (we didn't), and flew back to meet her. One of the juveniles - one of the boys - grabbed the prey and the other- Beattie - came back with her.

5th July: all 3 juveniles perched on the construction cranes

11th July: 06.55 all 5 birds accounted for. 07.05 B69 hunting. He returned 3 minutes later with prey and then took it to the cranes with juveniles in pursuit who were calling a lot.

20th July: all 5 birds accounted for.

21st July: 06.30 one male juvenile chased a Feral Pigeon and isolated it high away from trees and buildings. The 2nd male joined in and helped keep it clear of an easy escape. But despite several near misses by both juveniles it managed to escape to cover.

26th July: Beattie hadn't been seen since 20th, but at 06.10 on 26th she arrived in a flurry and commotion of Peregrines carrying a whole pigeon prey onto St Joseph's bell tower and ended up perched near a very calm and resting Mrs N on the adjacent buttress; clearly Beattie hadn't just acquired the prey from Mrs N. Proud Beattie was mantling it, wings half outstretched, she was breathless from the effort of flying with it and staring wide eyed at her 2 siblings that had come in with her. After a while both siblings left her to it and Beattie stood motionless for 20 minutes. We couldn't work out what was going on. But then it began to look more and more like a standoff between Beattie and Mrs N, who began to look more and more interested in Beattie's catch. Eventually Beattie relaxed a bit and began to make a start at the essential plucking that had to be done before the meal proper could start. But as soon as Beattie started Mrs N began to move closer. **It became clear that Mrs N wanted that prey**, and clearly had no qualms about taking it from Beattie. Beattie stood her ground; a flick of the wings and a gentle lunge towards Mrs N did the trick - Mrs N backed off and resumed her rest. But it was only a matter of minutes before Mrs N stirred again and this time leapt over to take the prey. I'm sure Beattie didn't expect this scenario, but her instincts kicked in and she told Mrs N to back off, which without any more ado did, and scuttled to another buttress and pretended nothing had happened. But Beattie was still very cautious and she didn't start her breakfast properly for quite some time. It was great to see all 3 juveniles today and again on the 29th July.

29th July: this day was special too because after numerous sorties and sitting on the cranes by the 2 male juveniles earlier on, at 08.03 one came dashing overhead at Sainsbury's, going N.E. like a rocket and grabbed a Feral Pigeon that had suddenly come into view from the Bear Lane roundabout, and took it down behind the line of trees along the R. Kennet out of sight; this was the first time ever that we had seen a juvenile catch live prey. Nick was on the BT mesh floor, so it must have been Joe.

7th August: 06.15 B69 returned to BT with prey but no-one came out to meet him. He headed for the cranes and on the way a juvenile male intercepted him, grabbed the prey and returned to BT to eat it: it was Joe. Later on when it had warmed up a bit, a male juvenile launched from BT and spiralled upwards effortlessly. The second male Nick joined him and they circled up and up until tiny dots even through binoculars. Then they started a game of dive and tag up there, mock attacks time and time again until eventually they drifted back down to the cranes.

10th August: Mrs N flew in with prey and circled BT several times as if to say "comes and get it" but no-one came in response. So after a while she headed off to a nearby rooftop with it. There were juveniles on the cranes but they were doing their own thing and didn't respond.

14th August: Beattie came in and joined Mrs N on the top girder, calling all the while, drooping her wings a bit and looking rather pathetic. Mrs N looked unconcerned. After further noise from Beattie Mrs N slipped off seemingly to get away from the noise.

15th August: 07.15 Beattie on the top girder and Mrs N snoozing on a window ledge. After a while she became more active and started eating cached prey on the ledge. Beattie started calling and soon afterwards Mrs N took the leftovers up to Beattie and gave it to her.

16th August: a juvenile came onto the top girder sporting a very pale forehead - of the 3 juveniles, this was Nick's plumage trademark. But after the juvenile flew round and briefly chased some Feral Pigeons, it landed on an aerial cluster and very clearly it didn't have any rings - an intruder juvenile - a short while later better views gave more detail on the heavily buff-tipped plumage and pale markings on the nape and neck.

It was 22/08/20 that we had a visit to BT from another unringed juvenile which actually brought in its own prey with it, possibly an un-moulted juvenile from the previous year. All the while B69 was snoozing on a window ledge totally oblivious to the visitor. Later on Joe – with his colour coded ring Blue PS came in onto the top girder.

10th September: a single juvenile has been around for the last few days but either the light was poor or the birds were too far away to read the rings. After many distant views of a juvenile, eventually Mrs N flew in onto the top girder with a juvenile shadowing her, which turned out to be Joe. This was the last date for 2021 of a juvenile on BT.

19th September: 07.25 both B69 and Mrs N raced off N.E. fast. This was intruder response. Very soon in binoculars we saw a 3rd very distant Peregrine flying east with prey. The Newbury pair were going together to intercept it, but then at a mutually agreed point they gave up the chase and returned to BT. Had they reached the edge of the territory or had they realised it was one of their juveniles ? Only they know.

17th October: most times we go we find one or the other adult, often we find both. Today several Peregrine feathers on the floor show that moult is still an ongoing major event for them that will continue well into the autumn. Newbury is their home. BT is their nesting site. Many hunting sorties start from the highest perch available - the top girder - even if they spend a lot of time roosting elsewhere, they are here and live here all year.

It was remarkable that by mid-September 2021, B69 and Mrs N had successfully reared 6 juveniles to fledging and independence. Four of that six have uniquely coded colour rings. The network of Peregrine monitors grows each year and a lot of information is shared on Twitter and WhatsApp. It took our tiercel B69 three years to mature and find Newbury BT to breed on, so we must be patient waiting to find out who amongst our Newbury juveniles has survived through to breeding age.

Our BTO ringer and camera technician Jason Fathers is planning to refurbish the nestbox and nestcam. We wait with baited breath for the first appearances of our Peregrines B69 and Mrs N to appear at and use the gravelled nestbox installed especially for them, and look forward to the reports of observations from the members of the Newbury Peregrines WhatsApp group in 2022.

Our special thanks go to:

Dean Cleall, Site Manager (CBRE). Jason Fathers, Wildlife Windows Ltd.

Rhoda Bashford & Bob Hotchkiss. Adrian Hickman. Newbury Peregrine WhatsApp group



Juveniles ♂ Nick & ♀ Beattie having fun 5th July

Botany Recorder's Report 2021 by Renée Grayer

The plant records below have been selected from the plant species seen during the RDNHS field meetings and Wednesday walks, and from those observed by members during wildlife or plant recording trips. Despite Covid problems, nearly twice as many plant records were received in 2021 as in the previous few years, so not all the species worth reporting could be included into this report. The Flora of Berkshire by M.J. Crawley (2005) was used for selection of the species, using rarity or decrease in numbers as criteria and only records in a 15 mile radius from Reading are included with the exception of plants recorded during field meetings.

The 4th edition of New Flora of the British Isles (2019) by C.A. Stace has been followed for the scientific and British names of the plant species and for the taxonomic arrangement of the species into families and higher taxa. Whenever a species was recorded during a RDNHS trip or walk, often the name of the excursion leader is given after the record, even if another member of the group discovered the plant.

Abbreviations: RN trip/walk = RDNHS trip/walk

G.P.(s) = Gravel Pit(s)

CALAMOPHYTES

Equisetaceae

Equisetum sylvaticum - Wood Horsetail

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU473631 (RS)

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619620 (JH)

PTERIDOPHYTA

Aspleniaceae

Asplenium adiantum-nigrum - Black Spleenwort

28/03/2021 Stratfield Mortimer, Railway Bridge, 50+ plants SU667635 (SW & KW)

11/06/2021 Caversham, St Peter's Churchyard, growing on tombstone SU708748 (RG)

Blechnaceae

Blechnum spicant - Hard-fern

24/04/2021 Nettlebed Common (RN trip) SU700872 (SR)

Dryopteridaceae

Dryopteris affinis - Scaly Male-fern

19/05/2021 Burghclere, Herbert Plantation (RN walk) SU476622 (RS)

ANGIOSPERMAE

Ranunculaceae

Caltha palustris - Marsh-marigold

10/04/2022 Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve (RN trip) SU511652 (RD)

17/05/2021 Paices Wood, dipping pond. SU58296351 (JL)

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU473631 (RS)

Helleborus foetidus - Stinking Hellebore

15/09/2021 Rotherfield Greys (RN walk) SU733829 (MN)

Helleborus viridis - Green Hellebore

01/03/2021 Winterbourne, roadside by garden hedge, 2

specimens SU45477174 (JL)

Pulsatilla vulgaris - Pasqueflower

22/05/2021 Juniper Valley (RN trip) SU545834 (JH)

Ranunculus omiophyllus - Round-leaved Crowfoot

16/06/2021 Bramshill SU75356213 (RS)

Saxifragaceae

Chrysosplenium oppositifolium - Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage

10/04/2022 Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve (RN trip) SU511652 (RD)

19/05/2021 Burghclere, Herbert Plantation (RN walk) SU480625 (RS)

Chrysosplenium alternifolium - Alternate-leaved Golden-saxifrage

10/04/2021 Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve (RN trip) SU510652 (RD)

05/05/2021 Baynes Wood SU508651 & SU510652 (RS)

14/11/2021 Greenham Common, Aldernbridge Gully, many in very wet ground, mixed with *C. oppositifolium* SU49046401 (SW)

Crassulaceae

Hylotelephium telephium - Orpine

31/03/2021 Shepherd's Green (RN walk) SU715832 (SR)

Fabaceae

Galega officinalis - Goat's-rue

18/07/2021 Shefford Woodlands SU360728 (JL)

Anthyllis vulneraria - Kidney Vetch

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU049188 (SW)

Hippocrepis comosa - Horseshoe Vetch

22/05/2021 Oven Bottom (RN trip) SU537835 (JH)

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)

***Lathyrus linifolius* - Bitter-vetch**

28/05/2021 Fobney Island SU702711 (JL)

***Trifolium incarnatum* - Crimson Clover**

17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU550796 (MV)

***Genista anglica* - Petty Whin**

21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU97436567 (JC & ID)

***Ulex minor* - Dwarf Gorse**

01/08/2021 Pangbourne Meadows, south (RN trip)
SU640758 (RS)
21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU967653 (JC & ID)

Rosaceae

***Sorbus torminalis* - Wild Service-tree**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 (JH)
21/07/2021 Burnt Platt (RN walk) SU695833 (SR)
16/10/2021 Sulham Woods north (RN walk) SU645745
(DO)

***Filipendula vulgaris* - Dropwort**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU038198 (SW)
17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip)
SU724973 (CA & SH)

Polygalaceae

***Polygala serpyllifolia* - Heath Milkwort**

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU477628
(RS)
26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619623 (JH)

***Polygala calcarea* - Chalk Milkwort**

22/05/2021 Aston Upthorpe Downs (RN trip) SU546839
(JH)
22/05/2021 Juniper Valley (RN trip) SU545834 (JH)
22/05/2021 Oven Bottom (RN trip) SU537835 (JH)

Hypericaceae

***Hypericum elodes* - Marsh St John's-wort**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 (JH)

***Hypericum humifusum* - Trailing St John's-wort**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619623 (JH)

Euphorbiaceae

***Euphorbia exigua* - Dwarf Spurge**

17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU55928018 (MV)

Geraniaceae

***Geranium versicolor* - Pencilled Crane's-bill**

07/06/2021 Hartslock area SU61027992 (RS)
11/06/2021 Lousehill Copse SU681667347 (JL)
01/08/2021 Pangbourne, Lane north to A329 following

Sulham Brook SU64237598 (RS)

Cistaceae

***Helianthemum nummularium* - Common Rock-rose**

22/05/2021 Oven Bottom (RN trip) SU537835 (JH)

Brassicaceae

***Barbarea verna* - American Land-cress**

26/04/2021 Woolhampton G.P.s, few plants only
SU567664 (SW & KW)

***Cardamine quinquefolia* – Whorled Coralroot**

17/03/2021 Huntsmoor Hill, 2 patches, well naturalised,
fully in flower SU53026227 (SW)

***Cardamine amara* – Large Bitter-cress**

02/05/2021 Woolhampton (RN trip) SU571665 (SW)
05/05/2021 Baynes Wood SU50945618 (RS)

***Erophila glabrescens* - Glabrous Whitlowgrass**

07/04/2021 Earley, Wychwood Crescent, many
specimens in grass verges SU738710 (RG)

Santalaceae

***Thesium humifusum* - Bastard-toadflax**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)
07/06/2021 Hartslock SU61767942 (RS)

Droseraceae

***Drosera rotundifolia* - Round-leaved Sundew**

21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU96986622 (JC & ID)

Caryophyllaceae

***Stellaria palustris* - Marsh Stitchwort**

09/06/2021 Ashford Hill Meadows NNR, plentiful in 20 x
45m strip SU56296182 (SW)

***Cerastium diffusum* - Sea Mouse-ear**

02/05/2021 Earley, Copperdale Close, c.10 plants
growing on pavement SU73587114 (RG)

***Spergularia rubra* - Sand Spurrey**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619623 (JH)

Montiaceae

***Montia fontana* - Blinks**

19/04/2021 Nettlebed Cricket Pitch, tiny plants in
mown grass (RN walk) SU70088718 (SR)

Primulaceae

***Hottonia palustris* - Water-violet**

09/06/2021 Ashford Hill Meadows NNR, spread over
10m square SU56446203 (SW)

***Lysimachia tenella* - Bog Pimpernel**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619620 (JH)

Sarraceniaceae

***Sarracenia flava* - Pitcher Plant**

21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU969662 (JC & ID)

Ericaceae

***Vaccinium myrtillus* - Bilberry**

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU476632 (RS)
26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 (JH)

***Hypopitys monotropa* - Yellow Bird's-nest**

09/07/2021 Sulham Woods, many specimens
SU64927577 & SU64947577 (RS)
16/07/2021 Lambridge Woods SU73098415 (JW)
21/07/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Greatbottom Wood (RN walk) SU704828 (SR)
15/09/2021 Lambridge Wood (RN walk) SU732843 (MN)
23/09/2021 Sulham Woods SU64937577 & SU64947577 (RS)

Rubiaceae

***Asperula cynanchica* - Squinancywort**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)
17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip) SU724973 (CA & SH)

Gentianaceae

***Blackstonia perfoliata* - Yellow-wort**

17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip) SU724973 (CA & SH)

***Gentiana pneumonanthe* - Marsh Gentian**

21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR c.20 plants (RN trip) SU965656 (JC & ID)

Boraginaceae

***Lithospermum officinale* - Common Gromwell**

02/05/2021 Lambourn Woodlands, 2 large clumps SU33277685 (JL)
04/06/2021 Basildon Park, National Trust, 17 specimens SU60877746 (RG)
10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)

***Trachystemon orientalis* - Abraham-Isaac-Jacob**

28/03/2021 Tadley Common, layby, naturalised & flowering SU623603 (SW)

Veronicaceae

***Veronica scutellata* - Marsh Speedwell**

16/06/2021 Bramshill SU75146243 (RS)
09/07/2021 Sulham Woods SU75146243(RS)
16/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR SU96536585 (JC, ID, RG)

***Veronica polita* - Grey Field-speedwell**

30/12/2021 Earley, Harcourt Drive, in grass verge, still flowering SU73587109 (RG)

***Kickxia elatine* - Sharp-leaved Fluellen**

17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU55928018 (MV)

***Kickxia spuria* - Round-leaved Fluellen**

17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU55928018 (MV)

***Linaria repens* - Pale Toadflax**

17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip) SU724973 (CA & SH)

Lamiaceae

***Stachys arvensis* - Field Woundwort**

18/08/2021 Hambleden (RN walk) SU793858 (FB)
17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU550796 (MV)

Orobanchaceae

***Melampyrum pratense* - Common Cow-wheat**

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU476632 (RS)
26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 & SU620619 (JH)

***Pedicularis sylvatica* - Lousewort**

01/05/2021 Inkpen Crocus Field SU369639 (JL)
26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619623 (JH)

***Lathraea clandestina* - Purple Toothwort**

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RN walk) SU473630 (RS)

***Orobanche rapum-genistae* - Greater Broomrape**

30/06/2021 Ashford Hill Meadows NNR, 25+ spikes in centre of Broom bush. One spike of the yellow form *flavescens* (found by Fred Rumsey early June, determined by Tony Mundell) SU56356208 (SW)

***Orobanche elatior* - Knapweed Broomrape**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU039198 (SW)

Campanulaceae

***Campanula glomerata* - Clustered Bellflower**

17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip) SU724973 (CA & SH)

***Phyteuma orbiculare* - Round-headed Rampion**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU055181(SW)

Menyanthaceae

***Menyanthes trifoliata* - Bogbean**

21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU97316603 (JC & ID)

Asteraceae

***Cirsium eriophorum* - Woolly Thistle**

15/09/2021 Rotherfield Greys (RN walk) SU733827
(MN)

***Cirsium dissectum* - Meadow Thistle**

09/06/2021 Ashford Hill Meadows LNR SU56416204
(SW)

***Serratula tinctoria* - Saw-wort**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU056180 (SW)
21/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR (RN trip)
SU966652 (JC & ID)

***Centaurea scabiosa* - Greater Knapweed**

17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill (RN trip),
SU724973 (CA & SH)
17/11/2021 Aldworth (RN trip) SU550798 (MV)

***Tragopogon porrifolius* - Salsify**

11/06/2021 Caversham, St Peter's Churchyard
SU708748 (RG)
26/06/2021 Whiteknights, near Harborne Building, c.10
plants SU73587147 (RG)

***Inula conyzae* - Ploughman's-spikenard**

18/08/2021 Homefield Wood (RN walk) SU809867 (FB)

***Solidago virgaurea* - Goldenrod**

16/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR SU96856602 &
SU96766591 (JC, ID, RG)

***Achillea ptarmica* - Sneezewort**

01/08/2021 Pangbourne Meadows north (RN trip)
SU644771 (RS)
26/09/2021 Fobney Island (RN trip) SU701711 (AL)

***Tephrosia integrifolia* - Field Fleawort**

22/05/2021 Juniper Valley (RN trip) SU545835 (JH)
22/05/2021 Oven Bottom (RN trip) SU537835 (JH)

***Doronicum pardalianches* – Leopard's bane**

02/06/2021 Fobney Island, by tow-path SU70067118 (JL)

***Bidens frondosa* - Beggarticks**

01/08/2021 Pangbourne Meadows north (RN trip)
SU646771 (RS)

Apiaceae

***Sanicula europaea* - Sanicle**

19/05/2021 Burghclere, Herbert Plantation (RN walk)
SU476622 (RS)
05/06/2021 Bradfield, Long Copse (RN trip) SU580726
(JL)

16/06/2021 Lousehill Copse SU679735 (JL)

***Torilis nodosa* - Knotted Hedge-parsley**

23/07/2021 St Luke's churchyard, Maidenhead, St Luke's
churchyard, several small plants under Yew tree, north
of church SU88658166 (SW)

Nartheciaceae

***Narthecium ossifragum* - Bog Asphodel**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 (JH)
16/08/2021 Chobham Common NNR SU96986623 (JC,
ID, RG)

Orchidaceae

***Cephalanthera damasonium* - White Helleborine**

07/06/2021 Sulham Woods SU64457474 & SU64947578
(RS)23/06/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Kent's Hill (RN
walk) SU724809 (FC)

***Epipactis phyllanthos* - Green Helleborine**

16/07/2021 Lambridge Woods SU73098415 (JW)
21/07/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Greatbottom Wood
(RN walk) SU704828 (SR)
15/09/2021 Lambridge Woods (RN walk) SU732843
(MN)

***Epipactis leptochila* - Narrow-lipped Helleborine**

16/10/2021 Sulham Woods north (RN walk) SU649757
(DO)

***Neottia ovata* - Common Twayblade**

23/06/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Kent's Hill (RN walk)
SU724809 (FC)
24/06/2021 Basildon Park, Nat. Trust, 2 specimens
SU605771 (RG)
10/07/2021. Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU050187
(SW)

***Neottia nidus-avis* - Bird's-nest Orchid**

21/07/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Greatbottom Wood
(RN walk) SU704828 (SR)

***Platanthera chlorantha* - Greater Butterfly-orchid**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU050187 (SW)

***Gymnadenia conopsea* - Chalk Fragrant-orchid**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)

***Coeloglossum viride* - Frog Orchid**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)

***Dactylorhiza fuchsii* - Common Spotted-orchid**

19/06/2021 Whiteknights, Harris Garden, in field, not
seen there before SU738712 (RG)
24/06/2021 Basildon Park, thousands of specimens in
one large area SU604771 (RG)
08/07/2021 Crowsley Park, albino specimen SU733804
(MN)

***Dactylorhiza maculata* - Heath-spotted Orchid**

19/05/2021 Burghclere, Herbert Plantation (RD NHS walk) SU478624 (RS)

19/05/2021 Newtown Common (RD NHS walk) SU477629 (RS)

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RD NHS trip) SU619621 (JH)

***Orchis mascula* - Early-purple Orchid**

18/05/2021 Clayfield Copse, 2 specimens. SU724774 (JL)

22/05/2021 Moor Copse, Park Wood, 12 specimens SU638740 (JL)

05/06/2021 Bradfield, Long Copse, c. 50 plants (RN trip), SU580726 (JL)

***Neotinea ustulata* - Burnt Orchid**

22/05/2021 Oven Bottom (RN trip) SU537835 (JH)

***Anacamptis pyramidalis* - Pyramidal Orchid**

23/06/2021 Rotherfield Peppard, Kent's Hill (RN walk) SU725809 (FC)

24/06/2021 Basildon Park, National Trust, 1 specimen only SU60697724 (RG)

27/06/2021 Whiteknights SU741720 (DO)

05/07/2021 M4 Services S, 63 plants SU669699 (JL)

06/07/2021 Tilehurst, Scours Lane, Thames side SU68427461 (KJ)

06/07/2021 Tilehurst, Scours Lane, in meadow used for Festival car park SU689746 (KJ)

08/07/2021 Paices Wood main car park, 3 plants SU58636357. Also at SU58726364 (JL)

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU038198 (SW)

15/07/2021 Along Lower Earley Way verge near Pearman's Copse, 333 spikes SU737693 (AB)

17/07/2021 Aston Rowant NNR, Beacon Hill SU724973 (CA & SH)

01/08/2021 Pangbourne Meadows, south (RN trip) SU63777577 (RS)

***Himantoglossum hircinum* - Lizard Orchid**

19/06/2021 Reading, Basingstoke Road, flowering for the 3rd year SU71786972 (RS)

***Ophrys apifera* - Bee Orchid**

07/06/2021 Hartslock, c. 50 plants flowering, upturned lip SU61807943 (RS)

12/06/2021 The Holies SU594799 (JL)

29/06/2021 Paices Wood, main car park, 1 specimen SU58806389 (JL)

Amaryllidaceae

***Leucojum aestivum* - Summer Snowflake**

03/04/2021 Loddon River Bank SU786721 & SU787723 (DO)

15/04/2021 Hosehill, Ash Hill, The Mire, 5 clumps with 71 spikes SU650694 (JL)

***Narcissus pseudonarcissus* - Wild Daffodil**

31/03/2021 Greys Green (RN walk) SU717831 & SU720830 (SR)

31/03/2021 Satwell, Highmoor (RN walk), SU707838 & SU708837 (SR)

Asparagaceae

***Convallaria majalis* - Lily-of-the-valley**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619620 (JH)

Cyperaceae

***Eriophorum angustifolium* - Common Cottongrass**

26/06/2021 Silchester Common (RN trip) SU619621 (JH)

***Carex pallescens* - Pale Sedge**

09/06/2021 Ashford Hill Meadows NNR SU56416204 (SW)

***Carex humilis* - Dwarf Sedge**

10/07/2021 Martin Down NNR (RN trip) SU040196 (SW)

***Carex pilulifera* - Pill Sedge**

20/10/2021 Marlow Common, Hollowhill Wood (RN trip) SU820854 (IB)

Poaceae

***Polypogon monspeliensis* - Annual Beard-grass**

06/07/2021 Tilehurst, Scours Lane, Thames side meadow, 50+ plants SU68937469 (KJ)

Botany Report Contributors. Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(AB) Anne Booth, (AL) Adrian Lawson, (CA) Chris Ash, (DO) David Owens, (FB) Fiona Brown, (FC) Fiona Cummins, (IB) Inge Beck, (ID) Ian Duddle, (JC) Julia Cooper, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (JW) Jerry Welsh, (KJ) Katie Jenks, (KW) Ken White, (MN) Maria Newham, (MV) Marion Venners, (RD) Roger Dobbs, (RG) Renée Grayer, (RS) Rob Stallard, (SH) Sheelagh Hill, (SR) Sally Rankin, (SW) Sarah White

Lepidoptera Report 2021 by Norman Hall

2021 for me was quite a good year, though I saw very few moths before the start of May, with April having been disappointingly cold. After that it was pleasant enough but, unusually among recent years, though the temperature reached 30 °C in one good spell, it never got *above* 30 °C. The hottest spells were from July 18th - 22nd when the temperature reached 29 °C or 30 °C every day, and on September 7th and 8th, when the temperature reached 29 °C on each day (according to the data for Reading on the timeanddate.com website). There were no very high temperatures in August (max. 24 °C on 14th). But high day temperatures are not necessarily followed by good mothing nights and the conditions on September 4th - 5th, which we had chosen for the RDNHS annual mothing event held at Hartslock BBOWT reserve, were about as good as one can get – not only warm by day but warm, windless, humid and overcast overnight, so that it stayed warm overnight, *and* it was near a new moon.

The Hartslock meeting proved to be the highlight of the year. More than 10 species seen were new to the reserve list – and most of the large showy moth species that could turn up at this time of year did so, including the Clifden Nonpareil ('the Blue Underwing') *Catocala fraxini*, the Red Underwing *Catocala nupta*, the Dark Crimson Underwing *Catocala sponsa*, the Old Lady *Mormo maura*, and the Jersey Tiger *Euplagia quadripunctaria*, all enjoyed by those who came to the Sunday morning viewing of the catch. Less welcome pest species: the Gypsy Moth *Lymantria dispar* and the Oak Processionary Moth *Thaumetopoea processionea*, unfamiliar to most people, were also seen. A Dotted Rustic *Rhyacia simulans*, was my personal best moth of the night.

Of the moths seen elsewhere in 2021, I would pick out as particularly interesting the July Belle *Scotopteryx luridata* and the Dog's Tooth *Lacanobia suasa*, both at Red Cow Cottage Cholsey, and also the Southern Chestnut *Agrochola haematidea* found for the third year in succession at Snelmore. The Southern Chestnut up until recently was thought to breed only in Sussex and Hampshire or as a migrant, but it may now be established here in Berkshire.

However, for me it is not just the rarities that are of interest. I see species expanding their ranges by immigration from Europe or by expansion from isolated local hubs within the UK where they were already known to occur, and see them as natural dynamic changes speeded up by climate change rather than caused by climate change. Some species such as the Blue Underwing have already expanded considerably in this way and the previously very rare Crimson Underwings are apparently doing the same. The beautiful Jersey Tigers may soon become commonplace, to be seen regularly sipping nectar on flower heads in the daytime. Though any rare species can ultimately become a common species, it is a great pleasure to watch the change happening – and many beside myself who remember seeing those species for the first time when they were rare might still get the same thrill from seeing them however common they become.

The systematic list that follows includes records from up to about 20 miles from Reading, all but one from Vice County 22 (Old Berkshire S or W of the Thames), VC23 (Oxfordshire N or E of the Thames) or VC12 (North Hampshire). If a record does not include a Vice County number, the record will be VC22, where most of our recorders live and were mostly trapping at home because of Covid-19.

Selected records are listed for *all* butterflies and earliest and latest sightings are all included. Earliest and latest dates for butterflies at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey are also included because these constitute part of an ongoing dataset of comparable records. If they are not the earliest or latest records of all those submitted the map reference is omitted making the entry look much shorter.

Few records are listed for moths considered common in the standard field guides, but as many records of less common moths are included as is practicable.

In general, the main recorders will have seen everything they reported, or photographs thereof, and can be considered as the identifiers as well. They are acknowledged by their initials in round brackets. They may not have caught the species themselves or been the only ones to identify them, so a second acknowledgement may follow in square brackets. For example (PB [BMG]) would mean that PB saw it at a meeting of the Berkshire Moth Group (BMG). The status categories at the end of species headings are based on those given in Waring & Townsend (3rd edition). The rarest native species are taken to be those listed in the **Red Data Book** (Shirt, 1987) as in danger of extinction, or occurring in 15 or less 10km squares in the UK. Then follow **Notable A**, **Notable B**, **Local** and **Common**, depending on the number of 10 km squares it occurs in. If any status includes the word '**Adventive**' it means that the species is assumed to have been originally imported accidentally rather than by natural expansion of range.

BAP for some butterflies indicates that there is a Biodiversity Action Plan to promote the conservation of the species. Many moths are trapped using Actinic (**Act.**) (fluorescent) lamps, but most use Mercury Vapour (**MV**) lamps, which are much brighter. If records are not marked **Act.** it can be assumed that **MV** lamps were used.

Special thanks are due to Paul Black who provides a handwritten list of every species he has seen during each year, with dates and places where first and last seen. He is also the main trapper on RDNHS mothing nights, usually watching his (and often other people's traps) throughout the night with no sleep. Fortunately for him this is a labour of love.

HEPIALIDAE

03.003 *Korscheltellus fusconebulosa* Map-winged Swift

Local

11/06/21 Hailey Lane, Stanmore SU467788 (PB)

03.004 *Phymatopus hecta* Gold Swift Local

02/07/21 Kintbury Chase SU374658 (PB)

ADELIDAE

07.002 *Nemophora metallica* Notable B

15/07/21, 2 Wolverton, Rectory Lane, SU542582 VC12 (AB)

18/07/21 Lambourn Woodlands SU3275 (JL)

18/07/21 Watts Bank SU330772 (JL)

TINEIDAE

12.048 *Psychoides filicivora* Local

31/03/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

YPONOMEUTIDAE

16.007 *Yponomeuta plumbella* Local

14/08/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

16.020 *Paraswammerdamia nebulella* Common

17/07/21, 3, Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

08/07/21, 2, Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

17/07/21, 3, Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

ARGYRESTHIIDAE

20.010 *Argyresthia ivella* Notable B

20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

PRAYDIDAE

22.003 *Prays ruficeps* Status uncertain

02/06/21, 3 Harcourt Dr, Earley SU735709 (NH)

DNA analysis suggests that *P. ruficeps* is distinct from *P. fraxinella*. It has occurred frequently in my garden here where there is a large Ash tree but I have previously recorded it as a form of *P. fraxinella*. It has a characteristic head colour which will help you recognise it. (NH)

OECOPHORIDAE

28.008 *Metalampra italica* Established adventive

14/08/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

29/06/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)

This small adventive micromoth has a characteristic cinnamon colour & is increasing in numbers. One to look out for. (NH)

28.024 *Tachystola acroxantha* Established adventive

High counts: 13 on 03/06/21, 19 on 12/06/21, 13 on 16/09/21, 46 on 03/10/21, Earley, Harcourt Dr, SU735709 (NH)

Other records were received from Crowthorne at Actinic light on 9 dates (IE) & Tilehurst, Westwood Rd to MV

on 4 dates (JH), but of no more than 3 individuals. Though small, it has an easily recognisable shape & a yellow termen unless very worn. I do not understand why I see so many yet others see so few. (NH)

CHIMABACHIDAE

29.002 *Diurnea lipsiella* Local

26/10/21 Waltham Place SU856771 (IE)

ETHMIIDAE

33.006 *Ethmia bipunctella* Notable B

13/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 New record for garden. 2nd record for VC22, previous record 1991 (JH)

GELECHIIDAE

35.003 *Syncopacma larseniella* Local

17/07/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

35.050 *Aristotelia ericinella* Local

29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

35.065 *Monochroa cytisella* Local

29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

35.107 *Psoricoptera gibbosella* Local

20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

35.133 *Caryocolum blandella* Notable B

20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12. New for the site (AB)

PTEROPHORIDAE

45.011 *Amblyptilia punctidactyla* Brindled Plume Local

08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

45.033 *Merrifieldia leucodactyla* Thyme Plume Local

20/07/21 The Holies SU592799 (JL)

TORTRICIDAE

49.001 *Olindia schumacherana* Local

14/09/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

49.018 *Choristoneura hebenstreitella* Local

08/07/21, 3 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

49.073 *Acleris schalleriana* Local

23/10/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

49.092 *Phtheochroa inopiana* Local

15/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

49.096 *Hysterophora maculosana* Local

22/05/21 Moor Copse, Park Wood SU637739 (JL)

49.136 *Cochylis hybridella* Local

08/09/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

49.142 *Falseuncaria ruficiliana* Local
20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

49.200 *Enarmonia formosana* Cherry-bark Moth Local
14/06/21 & 24/06/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

49.212 *Ancylis apicella* Notable B
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

49.225 *Spilota laricana* Local
08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD
)

49.251 *Epinotia rubiginosana* Local
14/06/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

49.332 *Cydia coniferana* Notable B
08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

49.343 *Cydia amplana* Immigrant, now established.
04/08/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
08/09/21, 2 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
18/09/21 Earley, Harcourt Dr. SU735709 (NH)

49.365 *Pammene albuginana* Local
10/06/21, 3 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

LIMACODIDAE

53.001 *Apoda limacodes* The Festoon Notable B
13/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 New for site. (AB,
GD)
16/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
17/07/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)

ZYGAENIDAE

54.002 *Adscita statice* The Forester Local
09/07/21, 4 Sonning Common, Millenium Field SU71393
VC23 Daytime observation. (FC)

HESPERIIDAE

57.001 *Erynnis tages* Dingy Skipper BAP
Earliest 15/05/21 Paices Wood SU587635 (JL)
18/05/21 Red Cow, only record at the site here in 2021
(AR)
High Count 12/06/21, 10 Aston Upthorpe Downs,
Juniper Valley SU544832 (JH)
Latest 13/06/21 Paices Wood SU585636 (JL)

57.002 *Pyrgus malvae* Grizzled Skipper BAP
Earliest & high count 10/05/21, 7 Aston Upthorpe
Downs, Langdon Hill SU545838 VC23 (JH)
Latest 02/07/21 Paices Wood SU588635 (JL)

57.005 *Thymelicus lineola* Essex Skipper
Earliest 08/07/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd, SU666742
(JH)
13/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 13/07/21, 4 Kennet & Avon Canal, Towney
Lock, Padworth SU610680 (JH)
01/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 06/08/21 Bradfield Southend, Holly Copse

SU596701 (JL)

57.006 *Thymelicus sylvestris* Small Skipper
Earliest 15/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
High Count 09/07/21, 14 Overton, Tidgrove Warren
SU526543 VC12 (AB)
High Count 15/07/21, 25 Wolverton, Rectory Lane
SU542582 VC12 (AB)
16/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 02/08/21 Hampstead Norreys SU545763 (JL)

57.009 *Ochlodes sylvanus* Large Skipper
Earliest 14/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR), Holly Copse
SU594700 (JL)
High Count 09/07/21, 3 Overton, Tidgrove Warren
SU526543 VC12 (AB)
31/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 10/08/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse, SU585734 (JL)
PIERIDAE

58.003 *Anthocharis cardamines* Orange-tip
Earliest 29/03/21 Bradfield, Greathouse Wood
SU589734 (JL)
30/03/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 22/04/21, 9 Overton, Tidgrove Warren
SU526543 VC12 (AB)
Latest 14/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

58.006 *Pieris brassicae* Large White
Earliest 22/04/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
Latest 26/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR) & Hosehill
SU648694 (JL)

58.007 *Pieris rapae* Small White
Earliest 22/03/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
High Count 20/07/21, 18, Overton, Tidgrove Warren,
SU526543 VC12 (AB)
Latest, Red Cow 24/10/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

58.008 *Pieris napi* Green-veined White
Earliest 18/04/21 Devil's Highway SU674626 (JH)
21/04/21 Red Cow (AR)
03/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 20/09/21, 2 Burghfield, footpath east of St Mary's
Church SU673683 (JH)

58.013 *Gonepteryx rhamni* Brimstone
Earliest 12/02/21 Padworth Common SU618648 (JL)
18/02/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 22/08/21, 14 Aston Upthorpe Downs,
Langdon Hill SU545838 VC23 (JH)
25/10/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 29/12/21 Bradfield, Rushall Farm pond SU583724
(JL)

NYMPHALIDAE

59.003 *Pararge aegeria* Speckled Wood
Earliest 15/04/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
Latest 22/10/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

59.005 *Coenonympha pamphilus* Small Heath BAP
Earliest 12/05/21, 2 Overton, Tidgrove Warren,
SU526543 VC12 (AB)

18/05/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 15/07/21, 26 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 VC23 (JH)
18/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 24/09/21, 21 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 VC23 (JH)

59.009 *Aphantopus hyperantus* Ringlet

Earliest 18/06/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU577731 (JL)
01/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 09/07/21, 30 Mortimer, Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer SU639651 (JH)
03/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 14/08/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse SU587730 (JL)

59.010 *Maniola jurtina* Meadow Brown

Earliest 09/06/21 The Holies SU593797 (JL)
16/06/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Counts 09/07/21, 121 Ufton Court SU624667 (JH),
15/07/21, 130 Wolverton, Rectory Lane SU542582 VC12 (AB)
14/09/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 09/10/21, 8 Holies SU592799 inc. a mating pair (JH)

59.011 *Pyronia tithonus* Gatekeeper

Earliest 18/06/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU5773 (JL)
30/06/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 02/08/21, 17 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd, SU666742 (JH)
14/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 05/09/21 Paices Wood SU583638 (JL)

59.012 *Melanargia galathea* Marbled White

Earliest 23/06/21, 5 Rotherfield Greys SU725809 VC23
Leader: (FC) (JH [RDNHS])
25/06/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 15/07/21, 53, Wolverton, Rectory Lane, SU542582 VC12 (AB)
Latest 06/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

59.013 *Hipparchia semele* Grayling BAP

Earliest 03/08/21 Decoy Heath SU610634 (JL)
High Count 15/08/21, 85 Mortimer, Hundred Acre Piece, Grayling bank SU633651 (JH)
Latest 21/08/21, 3 Chobham Common SU965652 VC17
Leaders: Julia Cooper & Ian Duddle (JH [RDNHS])

59.017 *Argynnis paphia* Silver-washed Fritillary

Recorded from Bradfield (Mirams Copse, Greathouse Wood & Owlpit Copse), Moor Copse (Hogmoor & Horsemoor Copse), Holly Copse, Paices Wood, Homefield Wood, Decoy Heath, Beech Hill & Mortimer Starvale Woods. (NH)
Earliest 18/06/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU5773 (JL)
10/08/21, 8, Greathouse Wood, on Buddleja, inc. one *valezina*. SU588734 (JL)
Latest 06/09/21 Mortimer, Starvale Woods SU655656 (JH)

59.019 *Speyeria aglaja* Dark Green Fritillary

Four 4 records only:
15/07/21, 2 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley

SU544832 VC23 (JH)
17/07/21, 10 Aston Rowant, Beacon Hill NNR SU728972 VC23VC23 (JH [RDNHS])
20/07/21 The Holies SU592799 (JL)
Latest 24/07/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse SU585734 (JL)

59.021 *Limenitis camilla* White Admiral BAP

Seen at Silchester Common & Wokefield Common (Rachel & Steve Woolnough), Paices Wood, Owlpit Copse Bradfield, Paices Wood & Decoy Heath (JL), Stoke Row Burnt Platt & Mortimer Hundred Acre Piece (JH [RDNHS])
Earliest 29/06/21 Paices Wood SU583638 (JL)
Latest 04/08/21 Paices Wood SU583638 (JL)

59.023 *Vanessa atalanta* Red Admiral

Earliest 23/02/21 Tilehurst garden SU661758 (ID)
Next 19/05/21 Newtown Common SU470628 (JH [RDNHS])
05/06/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 10/08/21, 16 Padworth Lane, on Buddleja SU609673 (JL)
Latest 17/11/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

59.024 *Vanessa cardui* Painted Lady

Earliest 19/05/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse field SU587730 (JL)
11/06/21 Red Cow (AR)
17/07/21 Red Cow (AR)
10/08/21, 8 Padworth Lane, on Buddlejas SU609673 (JL)
Latest 21/09/21, 3 Wolverton, near Coneygrove Copse. SU554578 VC12 (AB)
10/08/ 21 Padworth Lane SU608671 (JL)

59.026 *Aglais io* Peacock

Earliest 27/02/21 Tilehurst garden SU665742 (JL)
High Count 22/04/21, 14 Overton, Tidgrove Warren, SU526543 VC12 (AB)
09/03/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
Late 09/10/21 Holies SU592799 (JH)
Latest 17/11/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

59.027 *Aglais urticae* Small Tortoiseshell

Earliest 29/03/21 Beech Hill, Elm Tree Inn SU695641 (JH)
01/04/21 Red Cow (AR)
28/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 21/09/21, 2 Wolverton, near Coneygrove Copse . SU554578 VC12 (AB)

59.031 *Polygonia c-album* Comma

Earliest 22/03/21, 2 Burghfield Common, Great Auclum SU661667 VC23 (JH)
11/10/21 Red Cow (AR)
23/03/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 30/10/21 Plastow Green VC12 reported at meeting SU537624 VC12 (K&SW)

59.033 *Euphydryas aurinia* Marsh Fritillary BAP

Only record (NH): 22/05/21, 2 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Oven Bottom SU537835 Leader: Jan Haseler. There is suspicion that these may have been released unofficially (JH [RDNHS])

RIODINIDAE

60.001 *Hamearis lucina* Duke of Burgundy BAP

Only record (NH): 26/05/21 Lambourn, Crog Hill, The Hollow Way SU3283 (JL)

LYCAENIDAE

61.001 *Lycaena phlaeas* Small Copper

Earliest 25/04/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
Next 10/05/21 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Langdon Hill SU545838 VC23 (JH)
Latest 16/10/21 Red Cow SU592868(AR)

61.004 *Favonius quercus* Purple Hairstreak

Only record (NH): 10/08/21 Paices Wood SU583638 (JL)

61.005 *Callophrys rubi* Green Hairstreak

Earliest (of 6) 12/05/21 Paices Wood SU588637 (JL)
Latest 13/06/21 Paices Wood SU585636 (JL)

61.006 *Satyrrium w-album* White-letter Hairstreak BAP

Only record (NH): 04/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

61.010 *Cupido minimus* Small Blue BAP

Earliest 26/05/21 Lambourn, Crog Hill, The Hollow Way SU322834 (JL)
08/06/21, 5 Overton, Tidgrove Warren, 1st definite evidence of breeding SU526543 VC12 (AB)
High Count 16/06/21, 10 Overton, Tidgrove Warren, SU526543 VC12 (AB)
Latest 18/08/21 Lambourn, Crog Hill, The Hollow Way SU322833 (JL), &) & Seven Barrows SU328828 (JL)

61.012 *Celastrina argiolus* Holly Blue

Earliest 04/04/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR), & Tilehurst, Westwood Rd, SU666742 (JH)
High Count 24/04/21, 5 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
23/08/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 25/08/21 Fobney Island SU705710 (JL)

61.014 *Plebejus argus* Silver-studded Blue BAP

Only record (NH): 26/06/21, 20 Silchester Common SU620622 VC12 Leader: Jan Haseler (JH [RD NHS])

61.015 *Aricia agestis* Brown Argus

Earliest 24/05/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
High Count 24/08/21, 6 Grazeley, west of church SU698669 (JH)
Latest 24/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

61.018 *Polyommatus icarus* Common Blue

Earliest 28/05/21 Englefield roundabout SU631707 (JL), & Fobney Island SU703711 (JL)
31/05/21 Red Cow (AR)
High Count 09/06/21, 23 nr Kingsclere, Combe Hole, SU511568 VC12 (AB)
18/09/21 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 24/09/21, 9 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 VC23 (JH)

61.019 *Polyommatus bellargus* Adonis Blue

Four 4 records only (NH):
Earliest 14/08/21 The Holies SU594797 (JL)
22/08/21 Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 VC23 (JH)
High Count 22/08/21, 32 Lardon Chase SU588809(JH)
Latest 30/08/21 The Holies SU594798 (JL)

61.020 *Polyommatus coridon* Chalk Hill Blue

Earliest & High Count 15/07/21, 33 Lardon Chase SU588809 (JH)
Latest 22/08/21, 17 Lardon Chase SU588809 (JH)

PYRALIDAE

62.005 *Achroia grisella* Lesser Wax Moth Local
20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

62.007 *Cryptoblabes bistriga* Local
20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)
17/09/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, MW)

62.010 *Elegia similella* Notable B
10/06/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)

62.012 *Pyla fusca* Local
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

62.021 *Oncocera semirubella* Notable B
27/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
14/08/21 The Holies SU5980 (JL)
30/08/21 The Holies SU592799 (JL)
04/09/21, 4 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (NH)

62.022 *Pempelia genistella* Notable B
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

CRAMBIDAE

63.016 *Anania fuscalis* Local
26/05/21, 2 Lambourn, Crog Hill, The Hollow Way
2 separate SU322834 (JL)

63.030 *Paratalanta hyalinalis* Notable B
19/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

63.039 *Mecyna flavalis* Red Data Book
20/07/21 The Holies SU592799 (JL)
27/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

63.054 *Cydalima perspectalis* Box-tree Moth

Established pest species
Records from 27/06/21 to 28/10/21 indicating an astonishing increase in numbers over the last two years (NH). High catches of 21, 23 & 29 were reported from Earley, Harcourt Drive on 11/07/21, 13/07/21 & 08/10/21 respectively (NH), & a catch of 41 on 07/10/21 at Tilehurst, Westwood Rd, (JH). NH had seen a grand total of 22 individuals in 2019, but had no comparable data for 2020. (NH)

63.075 *Eudonia pallida* Local
04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (NH)

63.091 *Agriphila latistria* Local
15/08/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

DREPANIDAE

65.011 *Tethea* or *Poplar Lutestring* Local
29/05/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
14/08/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)

65.014 *Cymatophorima diluta* Oak Lutestring Local
14/09/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

SPHINGIDAE

69.010 *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird Hawk-moth Frequent immigrant
04/04/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 Field record earliest ever for garden, taking nectar from Aubretia (AB)
11/05/21 Axmansford, Thatchers, SU565607 VC12 Field record (AB)
23/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
02/09/21 Boxford SU4271 (JL)
05/10/21 Earley garden this week on Blackcurrant Sage (reported at RDNHS meeting by Anne Booth)

69.017 *Deilephila porcellus* Small Elephant Hawk-moth Local
Earliest 01/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
High Count 15/06/21, 27 Red Cow (AR)
Latest 26/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

GEOMETRIDAE

70.015 *Idaea emarginata* Small Scallop Local
18/07/21, 01/08/21 & 12/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

70.018 *Idaea straminata* Plain Wave Local
03/07/21 & 24/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

70.025 *Scopula immutata* Lesser Cream Wave Local
01/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
17/07/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

70.031 *Cyclophora annularia* The Mocha Notable B
20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 New for site (AB)

70.041 *Scotopteryx luridata* July Belle Common
08/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 1st record for site (AR)

70.043 *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* Chalk Carpet Notable B
04/09/21, 11 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB, NH)

70.047 *Nycterosea obstipata* The Gem Immigrant
07/10/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 New record for garden (JH)

70.055 *Xanthorhoe quadrifasiata* Large Twin-spot Carpet Local
03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury, on Hemp Agrimony (PB)

70.057 *Catarhoe rubidata* Ruddy Carpet Notable B

01/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

70.062 *Epirrhoe rivata* Wood Carpet Local
04/09/21, 2 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)

70.064 *Euphyia biangulata* Cloaked Carpet Notable B
17/07/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)

70.065 *Euphyia unangulata* Sharp-angled Carpet Local
04/06/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)
29/08/21 Horris Hill SU460629 VC12 (PB)

70.074 *Hydriomena furcata* July Highflyer Common
16/07/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742. Comment: 3rd record for garden, last seen 2013 (JH)

70.083 *Thera cupressata* Cypress Carpet Local
07/07/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)

70.084 *Plemyria rubiginata* Blue-bordered Carpet Local
24/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
01/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
03/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
16/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
23/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

70.086 *Electrophaes corylata* Broken-barred Carpet Common
30/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742. Comment: Latest of 14 records. Previous previous latest 19/06/2013 (JH)

70.090 *Eulithis testata* The Chevron Common
23/07/21 & 24/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.092 *Eulithis mellinata* The Spinach Common
24/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU66674 Comment: New record for garden (JH)

70.117 *Minoa murinata* Drab Looper Notable B
22/05/21 Moor Copse, Park Wood SU636741 (JL)
22/05/21 Moor Copse, Park Wood SU637739 (JL)
22/05/21, 2 Moor Copse, Park Wood SU637740 (JL)
30/05/21 Newbury, Fence Wood SU5171 daytime (PB)
31/05/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU577731 (JL)
05/06/21, 9 Bradfield, Long Copse SU580727 (JL)
05/06/21, 6 Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU577730 (JL)

70.119 *Philereme transversata* Dark Umber Local
01/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
17/07/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)
21/07/21, 3 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
21/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
25/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
26/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

70.121 *Hydria undulata* Scallop Shell Local
03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.134 *Perizoma bifaciata* Barred Rivulet Local
13/08/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

70.137 *Perizoma albulata* Grass Rivulet Local
Earliest 09/06/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

Latest 16/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

70.148 *Eupithecia inturbata* Maple Pug Local
17/07/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)
13/08/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

70.159 *Eupithecia phoeniceata* Cypress Pug Local but increasing
9 records received (NH)
Earliest 24/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
Latest 07/10/21, 3 Earley, Harcourt Dr SU735709 (NH)

70.179 *Eupithecia absinthiata* Wormwood/Ling Pug Common
24/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

70.198 *Lobophora halterata* The Seraphim Local
29/05/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
02/06/21, 4 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

70.208 *Ligdia adustata* Scorched Carpet Local
31/03/21 Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
14/08/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)
04/09/21, 2 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB, NH)

70.211 *Macaria notata* Peacock Moth Local
29/05/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
05/09/21 Paices Wood SU585636 (JL)
16/09/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.218 *Chiasmia clathrata* Latticed Heath Common
04/09/21, 2 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)

70.225 *Pachycnemia hippocastanaria* Horse Chestnut Notable B
09/07/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
29/07/21, 4 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)
04/08/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

70.229 *Pseudopanthera macularia* Speckled Yellow Common
Earliest 17/05/21 Paices Wood SU583637 (JL)
High totals on transects: 30/05/21, 29 & 07/06/21, 32
Bradfield, Owlpit Copse SU5873 (JL)
Latest 12/06/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse SU588731 (JL)

70.231 *Apeira syringaria* Lilac Beauty Local
03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.233 *Ennomos quercinaria* August Thorn Local
Earliest 16/07/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 2nd record for garden (JH)
Latest 07/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
09/04/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.246 *Apocheima hispidaria* Small Brindled Beauty Local
17/03/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
18/03/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
70.254 *Agriopis aurantiaria* Scarce Umber Common
11/11/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
26/11/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)

70.264 *Deileptenia ribeata* Satin Beauty Common
08/07/21, 9 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)
08/07/21 Stanmore, Hailey Lane SU467794 (PB)
17/07/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12 (AB)

70.267 *Hypomecis roboraria* Great Oak Beauty Notable B
08/07/21, 8 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)
09/07/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. unconfirmed (IE)

70.274 *Aethalura punctulata* Grey Birch Common
22/05/21 & 05/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

70.288 *Cleorodes lichenaria* Brussels Lace Local
16/08/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)

70.295 *Perconia strigillaria* Grass Wave Local
15/06/21 Decoy Heath SU610634 (JL)

70.300 *Comibaena bajularia* Blotched Emerald Local
18/06/21 & 03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
08/07/21, 4 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

NOTODONTIDAE

71.001 *Thaumetopoea processionea* Oak Processionary Establishing pest species
04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)
08/07/21, 3 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)
21/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

71.016 *Peridea anceps* Great Prominent Local
Earliest 20/04/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB)
Latest 12/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

71.022 *Ptilodon cucullina* Maple Prominent Local
14/06/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
14/08/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)

EREBIDAE

72.001 *Scoliopteryx libatrix* The Herald Common
21/12/21 Brimpton. Comment: reported at a meeting as hibernating in a spare bedroom (Grahame Hawker)

72.004 *Hypena rostralis* Buttoned Snout Notable B
18/01/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
02/06/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12. *n.b.* new for this site (AB)
02/06/21 Earley, Harcourt Dr SU735709 (NH)
05/10/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12
Indoors preparing to hibernate (AB)

72.007 *Hypena crassalis* Beautiful Snout Local
12/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

72.009 *Leucoma salicis* White Satin Moth Local
21/06/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

72.011 *Lymantria dispar* Gypsy Moth Establishing pest species
04/08/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
13/08/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)

18/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 20/08/21, 3 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
 23/08/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 New record for garden (JH)
 25/08/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
 29/08/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)
 02/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)

72.012 *Euproctis chrysorrhoea* Brown-tail Local

16/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 16/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
 20/07/21, 6 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 04/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

72.026 *Arctia caja* Garden Tiger was Common, but now decreasing (NH)

23/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 09/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
 16/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

72.030 *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger

previously Notable B, but now rapidly increasing? (NH).

24/07/21 Caversham SU711750 VC23 (JL)
 06/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 14/08/21 Caversham, Woodcote Way SU7076 VC23 At rest (Carol Moloney)
 19/08/21 Sonning Common SU798708 VC23 Daytime obs (FC)
 23/08/21, 2 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
 04/09/21, 4 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB, NH)
 06/09/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
 07/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

72.037 *Thumatha senex* Round-winged Muslin Local

17/07/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC12 (PB)

72.038 *Cybosia mesomella* Four-dotted Footman Local

18/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
 15/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
 18/07/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
 29/07/21, 2 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

72.047 *Eilema caniola* Hoary Footman Notable B

04/09/21, 2 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)

72.052 *Macrochilo cribrumalis* Dotted Fan-foot Notable B

03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

72.060 *Hypenodes humidalis* Marsh Oblique-barred Notable B

29/07/21, 2 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

72.061 *Schrankia costaeirigalis* Pinion-streaked Snout Local

08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)
 31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury in flight (PB)
 04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB, NH)
 25/09/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

72.066 *Parascotia fuliginaria* Waved Black Notable B

17/07/21 Axmansford, Thatchers, SU565607 VC12 (AB)
 20/07/21, 2 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

23/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

05/08/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)

72.076 *Catocala fraxini* Clifden Nonpareil Established & and increasing

04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (NH)
 05/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 13/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 09/10/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

72.081 *Catocala sponsa* Dark Crimson Underwing Red Data Book but now spreading (NH)

29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH [M. Botham])
 04/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 First site record (AR)
 04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB)

72.082 *Catocala promissa* Light Crimson Underwing

Red Data Book but now spreading (NH)
 08/07/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC 12. New for site, an exciting find. (AB, GD)
 14/08/21 Burghclere Churchyard SU469610 VC 12(PB)

NOCTUIDAE

73.002 *Abrostola triplasia* Dark Spectacle Common

05/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
 07/06/21 Crowthorne SU839638 Act. (IE)
 04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB, NH)

73.010 *Macdunnoughia confusa* Dewick's Plusia

Established Immigrant, spreading
 05/10/21 Snelsmore, Arlington Lane, on ivy SU466714 (PB)

73.036 *Acronicta alni* Alder Moth Local

Earliest 01/06/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
 08/06/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742.
 2nd record for garden, last seen 2012 (JH)
 Latest 18/06/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

73.048 *Panemeria tenebrata* Small Yellow Underwing Local

29/05/21 Englefield roundabout SU631707 (JL)
 31/05/21 Ashford Hill Meadows VC12 day (PB)
 08/06/21 Ashford Hill Meadows VC12 day (PB)
 12/08/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

73.059 *Calophasia lunula* Toadflax Brocade Local but increasing

12/08/21, 2 Cookham SU894857 Daytime obs. (IE)

73.070 *Pyrrhia umbra* Bordered Sallow Local

01/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
 03/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 16/07/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

73.082 *Cryphia algae* Tree-lichen Beauty Established colonist

16 records, more than I expected. (NH):
 Earliest 20/07/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
 High Count 26/07/21, 7 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

73.119 *Helotropha leucostigma* The Crescent Local

31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury, on Greater

Burdock (PB)

73.137 *Arenostola phragmitidis* Fen Wainscot Local
31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury, on Hemp
Agrimony (PB)

73.141 *Archanara dissoluta* Brown-veined Wainscot Local
31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury, on Greater
Burdock (PB)

73.191 *Agrochola haematidea* Southern Chestnut Red
Data Book
08/10/21 & 09/10/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

73.197 *Conistra rubiginea* Dotted Chestnut Notable B
25/03/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
30/04/21, 2 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
12/05/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

73.201 *Lithophane socia* Pale Pinion Local
06/10/21 Elcot, Newbury, on Ivy (PB)

73.212 *Ipimorpha retusa* Double Kidney Local
20/08/21 Axmansford SU568612 VC12. Rarely seen (AB)

73.215 *Cosmia affinis* Lesser-spotted Pinion Local
16/07/21 & 19/08/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

73.221 *Parastichtis suspecta* The Suspected Local
15/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)
24/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

73.237 *Polymixis flavicincta* Large Ranunculus Local
29/09/21 Axmansford, Thatchers SU565607 VC12
External lighting (AB)
07/10/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)
08/10/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)

73.246 *Orthosia populeti* Lead-coloured Drab Local
04/04/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

73.248 *Orthosia opima* Northern Drab Local
31/03/21 & 17/04/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

73.252 *Tholera cespitis* Hedge Rustic Common
High Count 04/09/21, 24 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB,
NH)
07/09/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)

73.264 *Lacanobia thalassina* Pale-shouldered Brocade
Common
03/07/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

73.265 *Lacanobia contigua* Beautiful Brocade Local
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

73.266 *Lacanobia suasa* Dog's Tooth Local
13/07/21 & 18/07/21 Red Cow SU592868.
1st records for site (AR)

73.280 *Hecatera dysodea* Small Ranunculus was Red
Data Book, now increasing (NH)
08/08/21 Newbury, Station Rd SU4766. Larvae on wild
lettuce (PB)

73.289 *Mythimna pudorina* Striped Wainscot Local
29/07/21, 2 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

73.294 *Mythimna straminea* Southern Wainscot Local
31/07/21 Kennet & Avon Canal, Newbury, on Greater
Burdock (PB)

73.297 *Mythimna albipuncta* White-point Established
colonist
High Count 04/09/21, 71 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (PB,
NH)

73.302 *Leucania obsoleta* Obscure Wainscot Local
13/07/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)

73.327 *Agrotis ipsilon* Dark Sword-grass Immigrant
15/06/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)
04/08/21 Hill Green SU451767 (PB)
04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (NH)
15/09/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
11/11/21 Tilehurst, Westwood Rd SU666742 (JH)

73.339 *Rhyacia simulans* Dotted Rustic Local
04/09/21 Hartslock SU616795 VC23 (NH, PB)

73.355 *Xestia castanea* Neglected Rustic Local
16/09/21 & 24/09/21 Snelsmore SU463710 (PB)

NOLIDAE

74.001 *Meganola strigula* Small Black Arches Notable A
08/07/21, 5 Axmansford SU568612 VC12 (AB, GD)

74.002 *Meganola albula* Kent Black Arches Notable B
23/07/21 Hungerford, Dove's Farm Foods SU325646 (PB)
31/07/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)
24/09/21 Red Cow SU592868 (AR)

74.007 *Bena bicolorana* Scarce Silver-lines Local
28/06/21 Earley, Harcourt Drive SU735709 (NH)
29/07/21 Wildmoor Heath SU840627 (NH)

Contributors

Abbreviations for the main recorders are: (AB) Andy Bolton, (AR) Tony Rayner, (PB) Paul Black, (FC) Fiona Cimmings, (GD) Graham Dennis, (ID) Ian Duddle, (IE) Ian Esland, (JH) Jan Haseler, (NH) Norman Hall, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (MW) Mike Wall, (K&SW) Ken & Sarah White. I am grateful to them, and to Anne Booth, Grahame Hawker, Carol Moloney and Rachel & Steve Woolnough who also contributed useful records.

Vertebrates Report 2021 by John Lerpiniere

Some interesting member's bird records are included here, but these are comprehensively collated by the **Berkshire Ornithological Club**, and their latest annual report available is 2018; see their website:

<http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/annual-reports/>

The majority of Herpetiles and Mammals are secretive and not easily seen, but a few are more obvious such as Common Frog or urban Foxes, hence there are many records for some, especially Muntjac. Many of the sightings are of road kills and most of these are not recorded, but a few are included here. An abundance of one is assumed in each record unless indicated by the value given after the date and before the place name

Abbreviations used are: **ad(s)** = adult(s), **juv(s)** = juvenile(s), **imm(s)** = immature(s), **GP(s)** = Gravel Pit(s), and ♂ = male, ♀ = female.

The nomenclature has been updated using current listings on the national recording website **iRecord**, run primarily by the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology. However, the website is due to be completely updated with the most recent information on 14th January 2021. This is a very versatile one-stop shop for all your records if you wish to record your sightings. The records are then available for use by relevant authorities including Thames Valley Environment Centre (**TVERC**) who make good use of them.

AMPHIBIANS

***Bufo bufo* - Common Toad**

15/04/21 Hosehill Meadow, imm under refuge
SU652695 (JL)

05/06/21 Bradfield, Long Copse, under tin SU58077279
(RDNHS trip, leader JL)

29/06/21 Paices Wood, imm tin1 SU58566410 (JL)

21/07/21 Rotherfield Peppard, Greatbottom Wood
SU704824 (RDNHS trip, leader Sally Rankin)

04/09/21 Hosehill, imm SU65126955 (JL)

04/09/21 Hartslock BBOWT reserve SU616795 (Paul
Black)

***Lissotriton vulgaris* - Smooth Newt**

27/06/21, 4 Woolley Firs pond, 1 ♂ & 3 ♀ of which 2
pregnant (JL)

10/11/21 Tilehurst allotment SU670748 (JL)

***Lissotriton helveticus* - Palmate Newt**

11/06/21, 6 Tilehurst, Lousehill Copse, in pond
SU68217334 (JL)

27/06/21 Silchester Common SU622622 (RDNHS trip
leader JH)

***Triturus cristatus* - Great Crested Newt**

No records received

***Rana temporaria* - Common Frog**

29/01/21 Tilehurst, 1st this year in garden SU666742
(JH)

21/02/21 Tilehurst, pregnant ♀ clambering over
woodpile SU661758 (Ian Duddle)

25/02/21, 26 Tilehurst, inc. a ball of frogs SU666742 (JH)

12/03/21, 45 Tilehurst, & 1st spawn SU666742 (JH)

17/05/21 Paices Wood top park, juv SU587635 (JL)

19/05/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse, juv SU58757303 (JL)

15/08/21, 2 Tilehurst garden & 1 in pond 26/08/21
SU665742 (JL)

23/08/21 Paices Wood glade, around 15 of different
ages disturbed during conservation task SU583638, & 1
on 16/09/21 (JL)

26/08/21 Hosehill SU651695 (JL)

12/09/21 Moor Copse SU638739 (JL)

REPTILES

***Zootoca vivipara* - Common Lizard**

18/04/21 Seven Barrows SSSI SU329828 (JL)

30/05/21 Paices Wood heath SU58336361 (JL)

11/05/21 Padworth Common SU621646 (JH)

12/05/21 Decoy Heath SU61166336 & 03/09/21 SU6063
(JL)

30/05/21 Paices Wood heath SU58336361 (JL)

26/06/21 Silchester Common SU619623 (RDNHS trip,
leader JH)

16/09/21, 3 Paices Wood heath, ad & 2 juv SU583637
(JL)

20/10/21 Broadmoor Bottom, juv SU856629 (JL)

***Anguis fragilis* - Slow-worm**

08/01/21 Tilehurst, at least 15 hibernating under patio
bricks, moved to new site close by SU666742 (per JL)

21/02/21 to 20/10/21 Tilehurst, over 20 individuals
during the year in garden mostly under 3 refuges

SU665742 (JL)

03/04/21, 10 Tilehurst, in compost heap SU666742 (JH)

10/04/21 Bowdown Wood SU612634 (RDNHS trip, leader Roger Dobbs)

15/04/21 Hosehill, Butterfly Bank, imm under refuge SU648694 (JL)

24/04/21 Decoy Heath SU612634 (JH)

04/05/21, 09/05/21, 12/05/21 & 15/05/21 Tilehurst allotment, different individuals all imm SU67087489 (JL)

08/05/21, 3 Padworth Common, tin 2, & 01/07/21 1 ♀ & 2 ♂ SU618647 (JL)

07/06/21 Decoy Heath, under tin SU61286226 (JL)

29/06/21 & 08/07/21 Paices Wood heath, juv under refuge SU58326363 (JL)

24/08/21, 2 Paices Wood heath, under refuge inc. pregnant ♀ SU583636 (JL)

10/10/21 Tilehurst garden, very young under refuge SU665742 (JL)

***Natrix helvetica* - Grass Snake**

23/04/21 Paices Wood, basking SU584637 (D Glover per JL)

29/06/21 Paices Wood heath, imm. SU58326370 (JL)

10/08/21 Paices Wood glade, imm. tin5 SU583637 (JL)

***Vipera berus* - Adder**

01/07/21 Padworth Common, ♀ tin1 SU6164 also ♂ & imm ♀ 01/08/21 (JL)

24/09/21 Padworth Common, under tin SU6164 (JL)

BIRDS

***Netta rufina* – Red-crested Pochard**

11/01/21, 10 Theale, Kennet & Avon canal SU640700 (JH)

***Aix galericulata* – Mandarin Duck**

10/01/21, 3 Emmer Green, ♂ & ♀ at pond Emmer Green SU7276 (Maria Newman)

24/03/21, 2 Plastow Green, pair flying around trees looking for nest site SU530625 (KW)

18/04/21, 2 Mortimer, Simms Stud Farm SU647634 (JH)

24/04/21, 2 Nettlebed Common SU700872 (RDNHS trip, leader Sally Rankin)

02/05/21, 2 Woolhampton SU571661 (RDHNS trip, leaders KW & SW))

***Bubulcus ibis* – Cattle Egret**

17/04/21 Hosehill Lake island SU649646 (JL)

***Egretta garzetta* – Little Egret**

03/01/21, 23/01/21 & 03/03/21 Whiteknights Lake, 1st year seen here SU737723 (DO)

17/11/21 Lavells Lake SU785729 (DO)

***Casmerodius albus* – Great White Egret**

01/03/21 Theale SU6270 (FB)

17/11/21 Lavells Lake SU785729 (DO)

***Ciconia ciconia* – White Stork**

December 2021 Brimpton Common, seen flying over 3 times this year SU6763 (Lesley Hawker)

***Plegadis falcinellus* – Glossy Ibis**

16/03/21 Otmoor RSPB reserve SU5712 (Alan Parfitt)

***Falco peregrinus* – Peregrine**

06/03/21 Reading, on gasometer SU728737 (JH)

01/07/21 5 Newbury BT, town centre, usual resident pair fledged 2 ♂ & 1 ♀ juvs (KW & SW)

***Grus grus* – Common Crane**

October 2021 Otmoor RSPB reserve, 1st chick fledged here for 500 years (Alan Parfitt)

***Haematopus ostralegus* – Oystercatcher**

02/05/21, 2 Woolhampton SU568661 (RDNHS trip, leaders KW & SW)

***Burhinus oedichnemus* – Stone Curlew**

06/06/21, 3 Aldworth area SU5382 (KJ)

***Pluvialis apricaria* - Golden Plover**

08/01/21, 6 Plastow Green, roosting in stubble field SU5362 (KW)

17/04/21 Aldworth, heard SU543816 (KJ)

01/11/21, 12 Plastow Green, flock arose from field & flew over house SU532624 (KW & SW)

***Vanellus vanellus* - Lapwing**

17/04/21, 4 The Fair Mile SU542826 (KJ)

***Numenius arquata* – Curlew**

17/04/21 The Fair Mile, Aldworth, heard SU543816 (KJ)

06/06/21 The Fair Mile, Aldworth, heard SU542826 (KJ)

***Cuculus canorus* – Cuckoo**

27/04/21 - 11/06/21 Plastow Green, singing every day SU537624 (KW)

17/05/21 Paices Wood SU587641 (JL)

***Alcedo atthis* – Kingfisher**

05/01/21 Moor Copse SU633737 (JH)

***Strix aluco* – Tawny Owl**

06/01/21, 2 Plastow Green, hooting in garden
SU532624 (KW)

04/04/21 Beenham, Old Copse, calling in full daylight
SU590678 (KJ)

19/09/21, 2 Plastow Green, hooting in garden
SU532624 (KW)

***Lullula arborea* – Woodlark**

31/01/21 Plastow Green, singing over barley stubble
SU532624 (KW)

15/02/21 Plastow Green, singing from garden
sycamore SU532624 (KW)

17/05/21 Paices Wood SU589636 (JL)

***Hirundo rustica* – Swallow**

06/07/21 4 Reading, Scours Lane, ad feeding 3 juvs on
balcony SU542826 (KJ)

***Delichon urbica* – House Martin**

see Breeding House Martin Survey report p.40

10/04/21, 8 Purley, Thameside, feeding SU6676 (KJ)

***Turdus torquatus* – Ring Ouzel**

21/04/21 Hannington SU542555 (RDNHS trip, leader
FB)

***Turdus pilaris* – Fieldfare**

02/02/21, 95 Plastow Green, on stubble field SU5362
(SW)

***Luscinia megarhynchos* - Nightingale**

27/04/21 Hosehill LNR, singing SU649694 (KJ)

27/04/21 Theale, Main Pit, singing SU652698 (KJ)

***Oenanthe oenanthe* - Wheatear**

17/04/21 The Fair Mile, showing well on Blackthorn
bush SU542820 (KJ)

17/04/21 Lowbury Hill, on muck heap SU544826 (KJ)

21/04/21, 4 Hannington SU545545 (RDNHS trip,
leader FB)

21/04/21, 2 Rotherfield Greys SU733828 (JH)

15/09/21 Rotherfield Greys SU733828 (JH)

***Sylvia atricapilla* – Blackcap**

13/02/21, 2 Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

***Phylloscopus trochilus* – Willow Warbler**

10/04/21 Tilehurst, Arthur Newbery Park, singing
SU670746 (KJ)

***Regulus ignicapillus* – Firecrest**

10/01/21 Checkendon SU6683 (Lorna Woolhouse)

21/07/21, 2 Shepherds Green SU716832 (RDNHS trip,
leader Sally Rankin)

***Corvus corax* – Raven**

13/04/21, 2 Lowbury Hill, tumbling SU 542826 (KJ)

20/12/21, 4 Plastow Green, high flyover SU539625
(KW)

***Fringilla montifringilla* – Brambling**

24/01/21 Sulham SU649741 (JH)

10/12/21 Plastow Green, on sunflower hearts feeder
SU537624 (KW)

***Emberiza calandra* – Corn Bunting**

17/01/21, 25 Churn Ridgeway SU528823 (JH)

MAMMALIA - Mammals

RODENTIA - Rodents

***Sciurus carolinensis* - Grey Squirrel**

22/03/21, 2 Winterbourne Wood, separate SU4472
(JL)

21/07/21, 14 Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst, counted in
just one half of wood SU6773 (JL)

***Rattus norvegicus* - Brown Rat**

01/01/21 4, Plastow Green, in garden & 5 on
07/01/21 (KW & SW)

27/02/21 Tilehurst, climbing to bird feeders in garden
& on 4 subsequent dates SU665742 (JL)

03/06/21 Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst SU67977334 (JL)

03/08/21 Sulham Wood, dead on road SU64887450
(JL)

25/08/21 Fobney Island SU69817122 (JL)

***Apodemus sylvaticus* - Wood Mouse**

17/03/21 Hampstead Norreys, dead on path
SU56317572 (JL)

15/04/21, 5 Hosehill, refuge 6, five together (JL)

12/09/21 Tilehurst, dead in garden SU66507423 (JL)

06/11/21 Tilehurst, 1 of 5 found in attic SU665742 (JL)

26/12/21, 2 Tilehurst, under garden refuge SU665742
(JL)

***Mus domesticus* – House Mouse**

No records received

***Muscardinus avellanarius* - Hazel Dormouse**

February 2021 Caversham, Bugs Bottom, during the day, 1st sighting for many decades SU7076 (Tricia Marcousé)

***Micromys minutus* - Harvest Mouse**

No records received

***Microtus agrestis* - Field Vole**

04/03/21 Hosehill meadow SU65206970 (JL)

13/04/21 Hosehill meadow, under refugia SU652697 (KJ)

15/04/21 Hosehill, refuge 1 SU65026981 (JL)

***Myodes glareolus* - Bank Vole**

02/02/21 Hosehill SU65046943 & SU64876945 (JL)

04/03/21, 03/04/21 & 15/04/21 Hosehill, under refuge SU64856946 (JL)

17/05/21 Paices Wood, refuge 3 SU58416384 & refuge 10 SU58736403 (JL)

01/10/21 Hosehill refuge 15 SU64626971 (JL)

***Arvicola amphibius* - Water Vole**

No records received

LAGOMORPHA - RABBITS & HARES

***Lepus europaeus* - Brown Hare**

15/01/21, 3 Plastow Green,, 3 circled by Fox SU533620 (KW)

27/01/21 Englefield SU61987047 (JL)

28/01/21 Plastow Green SU535624 (KW & SW)

06/02/21, 10 Englefield, in five adjacent fields SU6270 (JL)

12/02/21, 3 Plastow Green, on stubble SU5362 (KW)

09/03/21, 3 Englefield SU621704, & 1 SU622704 (JL)

12/03/21, 3 Plastow Green SU533622 (KW & SW)

22/03/21, 2 Winterbourne Wood, two separate SU4472 (JL)

28/03/21 Letcombe Bassett SU363852 (JL)

28/03/21 Stanmore SU464782 (JL)

18/04/21 Ragnal SU31387441 (JL)

21/04/21, 2 Ibworth SU560551 (RD NHS trip, leader FB)

25/04/21 Hollingsworth SU514747 (KJ)

25/04/21 Hollingsworth, juv came within 4 ft of me SU519744 (KJ)

22/04/21, 4 Hampstead Norreys SU5375 (JL)

06/06/21 Aldworth SU540814 (KJ)

24/04/21 Yattendon, dead by M4 SU5374 (JL)

12/05/21 Paices Wood, in alder woodland SU58706434 (JL)

19/05/21 Leckhampstead, dead on road SU434742 (JL)

***Oryctolagus cuniculus* – Rabbit**

19/02/21, 2 Paices Wood SU58376374 (JL)

07/03/21 Aston Upthorpe Downs, juv dead on track SU55218538 (JL)

19/03/21 Theale, Wigmore Lane, still & exposed, looking ill SU63427027 (JL)

21/03/21, 4 Winterbourne SU45517184 & 3 separate 22/03/21 SU4570 (JL)

21/03/21 Lambourn, Crog Hill SU32258432 & 11/04/21 SU32738218 (JL)

22/03/21 Chieveley Services SU47917244 (JL)

22/04/21 Hampstead Norreys juv SU535757 (JL)

04/05/21, 2 Plastow Green SU534620 (KW & SW)

12/05/21, 2 Decoy Heath SU61356346 (JL)

17/05/21 Paices Wood, juv & 29/08/21, ad SU58626357 (JL)

18/07/21 Lambourn Woodlands, juv dead on road SU32847507 (JL)

ERINACEOMORPHA - HEDGEHOGS

***Erinaceus europaeus* - Hedgehog**

16/08/21 Reading, exiting three-walled garden SU737725 (DO)

18/08/21 Reading garden SU740723 (DO)

Sept 2021, 6 Bradfield Southend, sightings in the garden this year include 3 ♂ fighting over ♀ plus 2 juvs SU592704 (Liz Butcher)

03/10/21 Earley, ad in garden SU735736 (Alice Ayers)

05/12/21 Earley, small juv in garden SU735736 (Alice Ayers)

SORICOMORPHA – SHREWS & MOLES

***Sorex araneus* - Common Shrew**

30/04/21 Hosehill meadow, under refuge SU65236965 (JL)

08/06/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse, dead on path SU577730 (JL)

29/06/21, 17/07/21 & 05/09/21 Paices Wood, refuge 8
SU58626357 (JL)

31/07/21 Hosehill meadow, under refuge SU65216966
(JL)

***Sorex minutus* - Pygmy Shrew**

05/06/21, 5 Bradfield, Long Copse, min 5 under refuge,
prob this species SU58077278 (RDNHS trip, leader JL)

25/06/21 Moor Copse, Park Wood, dead on path
SU63797411 (JL)

***Neomys fodiens* - Water Shrew**

No records received

***Talpa europaea* - Mole**

05/12/21 Worlds End, well over 100 hills in field
SU490764 (JL)

CHIROPTERA - BATS

***Pipistrellus sp.* - Pipistrelle**

27/02/21 Plastow Green, around house 6pm SU532624
(SW)

06/07/21 Tilehurst, nightly visits for last month
SU666738 (KJ)

CARNIVORA - Caniformia

***Vulpes vulpes* – Fox**

15/01/21 Plastow Green, circling hare in field but not
chasing it SU533620 (KW)

17/01/21 Tilehurst, on lawn in middle of day 11:23
SU666742 (JH)

22/03/21 & 11/04/21 Winterbourne Wood SU446717
(JL)

01/05/21 Paices Wood, scat in main car park
SU58716397 (JL)

23/06/21 Rotherfield Greys, Flowercroft Wood, dead
beside track SU726814 (RDNHS trip, leader Fiona
Cummins)

30/06/21 Tilehurst allotment SU67077488 (JL)

23/10/21, 2 Seif's Wood, Plastow Green, playing on
woodland edge SU539619 (KW)

CANIVORA - Mustelidae

***Meles meles* – Badger**

05/02/21 Englefield, dead on road SU632711 (JL)

22/03/21 Winterbourne Wood, active sett SU445718
(JL)

04/04/21 Beenham, 5 setts visible on banks of public
track & private field, signs of spring cleaning SU590678
(KJ)

04/04/21 Upton, dead on road SU516862 (JL)

22/04/21 Englefield, dead in road SU620713 (JL)

12/05/21 Aldermaston, dead on road SU6064 (JL)

19/07/21 Tilehurst, ripped hole in wooden side gate to
reach road from garden SU665742 (JL)

***Mustela nivalis* - Weasel**

24/04/21 Plastow Green, ran across road SU539623
(KW)

***Mustela erminea* - Stoat**

01/07/21 Midgham, dead on road SU564666 (JL)

***Mustela putorius* – Polecat**

09/06/21 Halfway, dead on road SU387684 (JL)

27/06/21, 2 Padworth Lane GP, adult crossing road
struggling to carry kit half its size SU60966732 (JL)

***Mustela vison* - American Mink**

No records received

***Lutra lutra* - Otter**

05/10/21 Beale Park, clearly seen by anglers in Thames
SU616792 (per JL)

14/11/21 Theale, Wigmore Lane GPs, on bank with
large fish videoed by angler SU634701 (per JL)

ARTIODACTYLA – Cervidae - Deer

***Muntiacus reevesi* – Chinese Muntjac**

02/01/21 Plastow Green, in garden, also 22/05/21
SU537625 (KW and SW)

27/01/21 Paices Wood SU58856360 (JL)

02/02/21 Hosehill LNR SU65186962 (JL)

20/02/21, 3 Ufton Green SU607698 (JL)

21/02/21 Tidmarsh, Bere Court SU62287470 (JL)

22/03/21 Winterbourne Wood SU44577197 (JL)

09/04/21 Hosehill Lake SU649696 (DO)

11/04/21 East Garston Woodlands SU35077410 (JL)

18/04/21 Chieveley SU462730 (JL),

22/04/21 Southend, Holly Copse, male seen then
calling loudly SU59707013 (JL)

24/04/21, 4 Decoy Heath SU611635 (JH)

01/05/21 Easton SU411727 (JL)

02/05/21 Woolhampton SU571663 (RDNHS trip,
leaders KW & SW)

02/05/21 Hermitage, juv dead on M4 SU5174 (JL)
 08/05/21 Tilehurst, in garden SU666742 (JH)
 14/05/21 Boxgrove Wood SU650730 (JH)
 27/05/21 Tilehurst, Cornwell Copse SU65737405 (JL)
 27/05/21 Beenham, Greyfield Wood SU58226902 (JL)
 07/08/21 Ufton, Roundoak Piece SU635655 (JL)
 09/06/21 Speen, dead on road SU43806785 (JL)
 13/06/21 Bradfield, Mirams Copse, also on 18/07/21 male seen then heard calling SU57837302 (JL)
 23/06/21 Lambourn Woodlands, Cleeve Hill SU33207651 (JL)
 28/06/21 Plastow Green, ad female & stripey new-born both dead on road SU535629 (KW & SW)
 10/08/21 Padworth Lane GP SU60826721 (JL)
 25/09/21 Tilehurst SU665742 (JH)
 07/10/21, 2 Plastow Green SU530625 (KW & SW)
 07/10/21 Bradfield, Owlpit Copse SU58637320 (Jo Parsons)
 17/10/21 Plastow Green, eating apples in garden, also 23/11/21 SU532624 (KW & SW)
 16/11/21 Plastow Green SU532624 (KW & SW)
 17/11/21 Lavell's Lake SU785728 (DO)

***Capreolus capreolus* - Roe Deer**

09/01/21, 3 Seif's Wood SU539619 (KW & SW)
 22/01 01/21, 5 Plastow Green SU535724 (KW & SW)
 11/02/21, 4 Sulham, inc. 2 with velvet on antlers SU648742 (JH)
 17/03/21, 5 Bere Court, in 3 groups along field edge SU620467 (JL)
 22/03/21, 4 Winterbourne Wood, four separate places SU4472 (JL)
 17/04/21 Decoy Heath SU611633 (Anne Booth)
 11/05/21 Padworth Common SU615647 & nearby Raghill Farm SU614647 (JH)
 14/05/21, 2 Boxgrove Wood SU650730 (JH)
 05/06/21 Bradfield, Long Copse (RDHNS trip, leader JL)
 01/06/21 Paices Wood SU58666354 & 17/07/21 SU588637 (JL)

Contributors

With thanks to those who have contributed to this report. The names of some of the contributors are abbreviated and these include:

(FB) Fiona Brown; (JH) Jan Haseler; (KJ) Katie Jenks; (JL) John Lerpiniere; (DO) David Owens; (KW) Ken White; (SW) Sarah White.

18/08/21, 3 Rotten Row, Heath Wood SU805868 (RDHNS trip, leader FB)
 12/09/21 Moor Copse, River Field SU535739 (JH)
 07/10/21, 3 Seif's Wood, ad & 2 well-grown fawns SU539619 (KW & SW)
 22/10/21, 3 Plastow Green SU5362 (KW and SW)

***Dama dama* - Fallow Deer**

16/03/21, 22 Southend, Holly Copse SU602702 (Liz Butcher)
 23/04/21 Frilsham, dead by M4 SU5573 (JL)
 25/04/21, 7 Lambourn, Crog Hill, herd crossed the road SU325835 (JL)
 07/11/21, 3 Lambourn Downs, Scary Hill SU325846 (JL)

***Cervus elaphus* - Red Deer**

No records received

Summary Note: no records were received for:

Fish: no records at all.

Great Crested Newt, House Mouse, Harvest Mouse, Water Vole, Water Shrew & Red Deer

Editor's note: *it is really good to see more members contributing to the various taxa data sets: however, it would still make such a difference if more members took the trouble to record their sightings on the straight forward 'easy to use' spread sheets offered by the recorders for use by members and submit them to the various RDNHS Taxa Recorders every December.*

The Weather in Reading during 2021 by Roger Brugge

Department of Meteorology, University of Reading

Averages and anomalies mentioned in this report refer to the climatological period 1991-2020. Historical records date back to 1901 for rainfall, 1956 for sunshine and to 1908 for most other weather elements.

2021 seemed to be a year which gave us a number of unusual spells of weather – a warm spell in late March, a very cold and sunny April, slight snowfall in early May, a very wet June, a cool August, a mild September and October, and finally a very mild and rather dull December. Overall, the year was average temperature-wise, slightly drier than normal and the dullest since 2000. It was the coolest year (with 2016) since 2013 – reflecting when considering the recent trend towards rising temperatures. Thunder was only heard on 6 days and none of these thunderstorms were noteworthy.

January

The year started with a January that was wet, dull and cooler than normal. It was the coolest month of the year and the equal coolest January since 2017 – there were 14 air frosts but none of them severe. It was the wettest January since 2016 with over half the precipitation falling in the final week, leading to some flooding of fields and roads around the town. There were 13 sunless days spread throughout the month while the total duration of 31.7 hours of sunshine made it the fourth dullest January on record. There were 3 mornings with at least half the ground covered by snow at 9 a.m., but never deeper than 3 cm (on the 24th).

February

February was slightly milder than normal, but on the 8th the temperature failed to rise above freezing. The 11th saw the lowest temperature of the year. It was a February that gave wintry conditions before mid-month and spring-like conditions thereafter. The wettest day, the 4th, saw only 6.4 mm falling while there were three days on which fog persisted until after 9 a.m.

March

March was a dry month, with sunshine amounts and temperatures overall close to normal, although the final three days were quite warm. The 30th saw the temperature climbing to 22.5 °C, the second highest March temperature on record; this followed an overnight minimum temperature of 1.3 °C, giving an unusually large daily temperature range. Temperatures of 20 °C and above in March are rare. There was no sleet or snow during the month, but ground frosts were recorded on 20 mornings.

April

April was more than 2.5 deg C colder than normal, had the sharpest ground frost of the year (on the 17th) and was unusually dry - but had four days with snow/sleet falling. It was also the sunniest month of the year with 226 hrs of sunshine. These conditions can be explained by the high prevalence of winds blowing from the east or north-east during the month, and they were also the result of rather high air pressure. Snow lay 1 cm deep on the morning of the 12th – an unusually late spring occurrence of lying snow these days. Since 1908 there have only been five colder Aprils in Reading – the previous one being in 1986 – while the clear skies that led to cold nights (11 of which had an air frost and 25 a ground frost) and reduced rainfall also made for the fifth sunniest April on record with the 17th-26th being especially sunny.

May

Cold conditions continued in May, a month in which temperatures only rose above 20°C during the final five days. The month was almost 2 deg C colder than normal (helping to make it the coldest spring since 2013) and had an air frost on the 6th. There were 17 nights with a ground frost, while equally unusual was the fall of snow on the 5th. May was almost twice as wet as normal and, consequently, rather dull. May was as cold as May 2013, the wettest since 2007 and the dullest since 2006.

June

June was 1 deg C warmer than normal but was the second consecutive month to have a rainfall total that was almost twice the expected amount. The month was duller than normal – it was sunnier than the preceding May but still duller than April 2021. The first half of the month was warm and dry while in the second half temperatures barely rose above 20 °C. The second half was wet, largely due to the 17th with 29.9 mm being the wettest day of the year – and this was followed by a fall of 21.1 mm the next day. Another 21.6 mm fell on the 27th. In the second half of the month eight days each recorded no more than 1 hour of bright sunshine.

July

July was easily the warmest month of the year with the highest temperature of the year, 30.5 °C, recorded on the 20th. Rainfall was slightly less than average, and over 200 hours of bright sunshine were observed – but the month was still duller than April. After most of the month's rain had fallen in the first 11 days, the 16th-23rd was a warm and sunny period and it was this spell that largely made the month warmer than average.

August

August was a relatively cool month, being 1.7 deg C cooler than July. The wet conditions of July continued for the first nine days of the month with little rainfall thereafter. The temperature only reached 23.9 °C – only marginally higher than the peak temperature of March and the coldest 'hottest day' in August since 1986. It was a dull month compared to normal – the duller August since 2015 – and winds from the north-east were unusually prevalent. Persistent cloud led to cool days; daytime temperatures were 1.5 deg C below normal while night-time temperatures were as expected for August.

September

Summery conditions returned during September, which was the fourth mildest on record, but still about 1 deg C cooler than in 1929, 1949 and 2006. Indeed, September was 0.1 deg C milder than June and just 0.1 deg C cooler than August. The highest temperature during the month of 28.7 °C was the highest in September since 2016 (29.2 °C) and 2006 (29.6 °C). Most of the rain fell during a final wet week, but the month overall was drier than average.

October

October was warmer than average by about 1 deg C with several very mild nights. It was the wettest month of the year, with wet spells around the 1st-4th, 15th-20th and 28th-31st. Over half the rain fell on just three days. But there were long, dry spells in between the days with rain and this helped to keep the sunshine total close to normal for the month. Winds from the south and south-west tended to dominate and there were no air frosts.

November

November was the third driest on record with only 13.3 mm of precipitation, behind 4.7 mm in 1945 and 11.2 mm in 1901. It was also the driest month of 2021 in Reading, but one morning (the 29th) had slight lying snow after a heavy snowfall the previous night. November was colder than usual due to some cool nights and was also slightly sunnier than normal.

December

December was an unusually warm month, being 2 deg C warmer than average overall and the warmest December since 2015. Nights were particularly mild and there were only 3 with an air frost. From the 24th onwards it turned unusually mild with 15.1 °C on the 29th making the day the equal sixth warmest in the records for December. The night of the 30th-31st was the equal fifth warmest December night on record with the temperature failing to drop below 11.9 °C. The 10th-23rd was almost without any rain, while the 11th to 30th was remarkably dull with only 2.4 hours of sunshine in these 20 days. As a result December was the duller month of the year and the fourth duller December on record.

This report was compiled using the daily weather observations made at the University of Reading climatological station – most of these being made by our chief observers Cahyo Leksmono and Ashley Dobie. The University also operates an automatic weather station that gathers weather information continuously. Details can be seen at

<https://research.reading.ac.uk/meteorology/atmospheric-observatory/atmospheric-observatory-data/> - there is even a mailing list that you can subscribe to in order to have daily weather reports sent direct to your inbox. The history of Reading's weather since 1901 can be discovered in *One hundred years of Reading Weather* by Roger Brugge and Stephen Burt.

Temperature 2021

	Mean Max temp	Mean Max anomaly	Mean Min temp	Mean min anomaly	Mean temp	Mean temp anomaly	Highest Max temp	Date	Lowest Max temp	Date	Highest Min temp	Date	Lowest Min temp	Date	Lowest grass Min temp	Date
	°C	°C	°C	°C	°C	°C	°C		°C		°C	°C	°C		°C	
J	7.1	-0.9	1.1	-1.0	4.1	-1.0	13.2	28	0.5	7	9.3	20	-3.0	25	-9.3	7
F	9.1	0.5	2.2	0.1	5.7	0.3	15.5	24	-0.3	8	9.4	21	-4.1	11	-10.0	11
M	11.5	0.3	3.3	-0.2	7.4	0.1	22.5	30	5.3	4	9.3	29	-2.1	6	-9.0	6
A	12.3	-1.9	1.7	-3.4	7.0	-2.7	17.9	23	7.5	6	7.9	1	-2.5	17	-11.2	17
M	15.2	-2.2	6.3	-1.6	10.8	-1.9	23.6	31	10.3	14	12.0	9	-0.1	6	-7.0	1
J	21.2	0.8	11.9	1.1	16.6	1.0	26.9	2	14.5	21	16.6	17	5.1	23	0.5	24
J	23.1	0.4	13.9	1.0	18.5	0.7	30.5	20	18.6	30	17.7	20	10.0	16	3.3	16
A	20.8	-1.5	12.7	0.0	16.8	-0.8	23.9	14	16.8	30	15.5	18	8.7	29	1.8	28
S	21.3	2.0	12.0	1.6	16.7	1.8	28.7	7	15.9	29	16.6	11	6.1	30	-1.8	30
O	16.2	1.1	9.0	1.1	12.6	1.1	19.5	19	12.0	21	14.0	8	4.0	22	-3.0	22
N	11.0	0.0	3.7	-1.0	7.4	-0.5	15.9	9	4.4	28	10.5	13	-1.9	5	-8.4	5
D	9.9	1.5	5.0	2.5	7.5	2.0	15.1	29	5.9	19	11.9	31	-3.5	22	-9.0	22
2021	14.9	0.0	6.9	0.0	10.9	0.0	30.5	July	-0.3	Feb	17.7	July	-4.1	Feb	-11.2	April

Precipitation 2021

	Total precipitation	% of mean precipitation	No. days with 0.2mm or more	No. days with 1.0mm or more	Greatest fall in 24 hrs	Date	No. days with air frost	No. days with ground frost	No. days with snow/sleet falling	No. days with 50% ground snow cover 0900GMT	No. days with thunder	No. days with ice pellets/small hail	No. days with hail over 5mm diam	No. days with fog 0900GMT
	mm	%	days	days	mm		days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days
J	84.7	131	19	17	21.9	27	14	20	4	3	0	0	0	2
F	37.5	83	14	10	6.4	4	10	16	4	0	0	1	0	3
M	30.0	74	8	6	8.6	3	4	20	0	0	0	1	0	1
A	13.4	28	3	2	8.0	28	11	25	4	1	0	3	0	0
M	85.3	196	23	18	16.3	16	1	17	1	0	2	1	1	0
J	92.3	197	13	8	29.9	17	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
J	44.4	91	15	9	14.7	5	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0
A	51.8	91	11	7	17.7	6	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
S	33.3	67	8	7	15.8	28	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1
O	99.1	134	15	13	22.6	19	0	6	0	0	0	0	0	1
N	13.3	18	10	3	6.6	26	5	18	2	1	0	2	0	1
D	53.0	82	19	13	10.8	25	3	9	0	0	1	0	0	1
2021	638.1	97	158	113	29.9	June	48	132	15	5	6	8	1	10

Sunshine & Soil Temperature 2021

	Total sunshine	% of average sunshine	Greatest daily sunshine total	Date	No. of sunless days	Mean 10cm soil temp	Mean 30cm soil temp	Mean 100cm soil temp
	hrs	%	hrs		days	°C	°C	°C
J	31.7	58	5.9	25	13	3.6	5.7	7.5
F	72.1	92	9.5	26	4	4.3	6.0	7.0
M	110.9	94	10.5	30	5	6.3	7.4	7.8
A	226.0	133	13.5	24	1	8.2	9.0	9.1
M	161.9	82	11.4	27	1	11.8	11.5	10.9
J	181.8	93	14.2	13	4	18.3	16.8	14.8
J	209.6	103	14.0	17	0	20.2	18.9	17.1
A	151.1	79	11.5	25	2	17.7	18.0	17.4
S	141.3	99	11.2	7	1	16.5	16.9	16.8
O	102.9	95	9.1	6	4	11.9	13.8	14.9
N	63.3	107	5.9	22	7	6.5	9.9	12.1
D	23.8	52	4.5	2	16	6.3	7.9	9.5
2021	1476.4	94	14.2	June	58	11.0	11.8	12.1

Wind details 2021

	No. days with Gales	No. days with <u>Northerly</u> winds	No. days with <u>NE'ly</u> winds	No. days with <u>Easterly</u> winds	No. days with <u>SE'ly</u> winds	No. days with <u>Southerly</u> winds	No. days with <u>SW'ly</u> winds	No. days with <u>Westerly</u> winds	No. days with <u>NW'ly</u> winds	No. days with calm winds at 0900 GMT
	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days
J	0	3	1	3	1	1	7	8	5	2
F	0	1	4	4	3	4	7	2	0	3
M	0	3	5	3	0	0	9	6	4	1
A	0	3	10	8	1	0	1	3	3	1
M	0	0	6	1	2	3	9	5	5	0
J	0	1	8	5	0	0	7	4	5	0
J	0	5	5	3	0	1	7	9	1	0
A	0	2	7	3	1	3	8	5	2	0
S	0	1	6	5	1	3	3	7	4	0
O	0	1	2	0	3	7	10	5	3	0
N	0	5	0	0	0	1	7	12	4	1
D	0	1	2	6	1	3	9	4	4	1
2021	0	26	56	41	13	26	84	70	40	9

Highlights of the Birding Year at Moor Copse 2021 by Ailsa Claybourn

The year started with the nation in Covid Lockdown again; this one lasted until the beginning of May but was less restrictive than the first one of 2020, allowing visits to Moor Copse throughout. The wonderful, warm, sunny weather of 2020 was not replicated this year, and after an abnormally warm late February into March, rain, grey skies and low temperatures marked much of the spring and summer until a warm and pleasant September.

In **January**, heavy rain and some snow led to the most extensive and serious flooding of Moor Copse that I've known. I couldn't access several paths, and even my long-legged, wellie-wearing son, accompanying me on my Winter Bird Survey (WBS), was defeated by the depth of water in the corner of Park Wood, near Five Acre Meadow. At the same time, contractors were felling a huge swathe of woodland in Hogmoor Copse, along the A340, clearing diseased Ash trees (and everything else) that posed a threat to public safety. The work looked devastating, but it will lead to new habitats developing and I'm excited to watch what appears there over the next few years. Elsewhere on the reserve, Ash trees are being felled or pollarded, again for safety reasons, but resulting in standing deadwood and logs which will soon be home to a wide range of interesting creatures; with the felling at the same time allowing in more light, which will stimulate more, and different, plants to grow. Moles and Badgers had been very busy in the soft ground, in both woods and meadows, foraging for food. As parts of the reserve were under water, Moles had moved-in to the drier areas, with large numbers of them concentrated together, judging by the number of molehills. Robins and Wrens were singing and calling, but Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits were even noisier. By the 29th, when I did my WBS, Coal and Marsh Tits were also calling. I saw three Great Spotted Woodpeckers chasing each other through the trees in Moor Copse, probably sorting out a territorial dispute. Five Song Thrushes were singing, a really cheerful sound after a difficult month; and I saw two Mistle Thrushes. There were two over-wintering Meadow Pipits in Arable Field. I recorded 71 Redwings: I counted 64 in January 2020; and 22 Siskins, compared with over 200 in 2020. The wet weather did have one good result: the flooded fields attracted two Little Egrets which were one of the month's highlights.

February was largely a month of floods and mist, though by the 26th the weather was glorious, with Bumblebees and a couple of Brimstone butterflies on the wing. Even in the gloomy weather, spring was in the air, and many birds were busy preparing for the breeding season. There were lots of Robins, Wrens, Great Tits and several Song Thrushes, singing and calling, at the beginning of the month. Large flocks of Redwings gathered in the woods, chattering together in the tops of the trees. I saw a Kingfisher as it perched on a fallen branch over the Pang, darting away as soon as I turned to admire it. The floods were receding by the 20th and more birds were active: wherever I walked, Wrens and Great Tits swore at me as I passed through their territories. There were plenty of Blackbirds across the reserve; Treecreepers, Goldcrests, Coal Tits, Robins and Blue Tits in Hogmoor Copse; Coal Tits and Goldcrests in Park Wood; and, an exciting first for my Moor Copse surveys, a female Goldeneye duck in the wet end of Cottage Field. She would have been over-wintering in the UK, and I was lucky to spot her.

We usually have Jackdaws on the reserve but the flock of 26 I saw was unusually large: they were circling and calling above Moor Copse, and I expect there was some pairing-up going on. The warm weather at the month's end stirred spring into action, most notably with a Skylark singing in Arable Field! This was very exciting, and raised the possibility of Skylarks breeding there in 2021. I often saw a Grey Heron, standing by the seasonal pond in Corner Field, enjoying the pond being bigger and deeper than normal, waiting to catch tasty snacks in the water. On my WBS visit I saw Stock Doves, Jackdaws, Carrion Crows, Great Spotted and Green Woodpeckers and two male Bullfinches in flight, flurries of Long-tailed Tits in woods and hedges, and a Mistle Thrush prospecting for a nest-site in an Ivy-clad tree.

Lockdown was dragging on, and I think the fact that I made seven visits to Moor Copse in **March** says a lot about how it was affecting me: I found it extremely therapeutic to be there, and watching and recording the wildlife is always rewarding. Every year I look forward to the arrival of our earliest summer migrants, the Chiffchaffs, heralds of spring and tireless, cheerful singers. It was very appropriate that I heard my first three singing males at Moor Copse on March 21st – the first day of spring! By the 24th there were six; and 15 on the 26th. Some of these would move on to set up breeding territories elsewhere, staying at Moor Copse to refuel after their long journey from southern Europe or northern Africa. Other signs of spring were lacking, unsurprising after the very wet winter: Wood Anemones were late to flower, and I saw no more butterflies for weeks after the late February heatwave. Management work in Park Wood and Moor Copse had let in more light, though, and Primroses leaves were shooting up where I hadn't seen them before. Robins and Wrens were noisy and busy, and I saw or heard an abundance of Goldcrests, singing loudly as the days lengthened. Treecreepers, which are very well-camouflaged against the trees, were easier to spot because they were singing loudly too - and the lack of leaves helped in finding them too! Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming-out their territories in every woodland and I heard a Green Woodpecker's distinctive, yaffling call. At least one pair of Jackdaws was nesting in Moor Copse, calling noisily to each other. The Grey Heron was still to be seen by the pool in Corner Field; a Moorhen on the River Pang was enjoying the safety afforded by the abundant vegetation along the riverbanks; and 'bachelor parties' of 11 drake Mallards loitered on the river. I also found Otter spraint by the river on the 21st, which wasn't there on the 17th: so in those four days, an Otter had definitely been on the reserve! Also very exciting were the two Skylarks singing in Arable Field! The possibility of two families being raised at Moor Copse was looking real. A first outburst of Blackcap song brightened the last days of the month.

There was a very handsome male Grey Wagtail on the old road near the car park, not quite on the reserve, though I willed it over the boundary so I could include it in my survey! This is one of the Wagtails' favourite haunts, and it's always worth looking out for them there.

April 2021 was the UK's coldest in 60 years. Spring was put on hold, or at least held back, with more frost than we'd had in the winter months, and snow on the 12th. Even the Redwings were unimpressed: I heard large flocks feeding and calling in the woods on the 2nd, but none thereafter. But despite the cold, the birds' breeding season was underway: male Chiffchaffs were having verbal duels across paths as I walked along, with competing males on either side; male Blackcaps did the same. Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming in the woodlands. I heard two Green Woodpeckers calling to each other in Moor Copse. Early in the month, when it was particularly chilly, I learnt how useful and appropriate the term 'to apricate' is: it means 'to enjoy the warmth of the sun on one's back'. I apricated thankfully on many a walk. The birds prefer to face into the sun and soak up the warmth; I recommend this technique as well!

It was a particularly cold, grey day when I did my first Breeding Bird Survey (BBS) of 2021 and the reserve was relatively quiet, perhaps because birds were brooding eggs. Nevertheless, Chiffchaffs, Blackcaps, Song Thrushes, Robins and Wrens were all singing. I saw a male Blackbird valiantly defending its nest against two marauding Jays. Blue Tits and Great Tits were active throughout the woodlands, along with a few Coal and Marsh Tits, but only a handful of lone Long-tailed Tits. One Skylark sang above Arable Field. Two Treecreepers and several Goldcrests fed and called in Park Wood, over which a female Sparrowhawk glided menacingly. A Grey Heron fed by the Pang, and two Canada Geese and four bachelor Mallards swam on it. I found two more fresh Otter spraints. By the end of the month, two Whitethroats had arrived and were singing in the hedges by the meadows: the next stage of summer was here, despite April's frostiness.

However, any hopes of a bright and sunny **May** were smothered by cold, wet weather in a month bereft of sunshine. Nevertheless, Bluebells were in bloom on the 16th, along with Stitchwort, Bugle, Yellow Archangel, Red Campion and Wood Spurge. Clearance work in Park Wood greatly benefitted Solomon's Seal, which was in greater abundance than I've seen there before. Parenthood was making the birds quieter, though Blackbirds, Robins and Wrens were very vocal, but not as loud as the Chiffchaffs and Blackcaps. Goldcrests in Hogmoor Copse and Park Wood were doing their best to outcompete them all. Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Nuthatches were busy in the trees, collecting food for families; I recorded Blue, Great, Long-tailed and Marsh Tits, but no Coal Tits. A pair of Buzzards appeared to be nesting in Horsemoor Copse, and the Red Kites may have been back in Park Wood; I saw one foraging over Arable Field, and recorded no Skylarks. There was a family of nine Mute Swans on the River Pang, not far from the boardwalk. By the 27th, the temperature had staggered up to 20 °C, which felt promising.

June was muddy, with the damp and the warmer weather encouraging a remarkable fecundity and growth amongst many of the plants, especially along the riverbank, where thistles and nettles towered over me. Visitors had strayed from the reserve's main paths the previous year, and these side paths had been closed off, which meant the meadows, undisturbed, were thriving and looking wonderful. On my last BBS of the year, there were teenage Orthoptera in their thousands, boinging around me as I – legitimately – walked through the fields, enjoying, like me, the occasional patch of sunlight that prised its way through the cool, grey clouds. With fledglings to feed, there was less song to be heard: a Mistle Thrush, Blackcaps and Whitethroat on the 22nd, but even the Chiffchaffs were only calling, thweeping and making a scrappy-churring sound. Wrens were still noisy, but Robins less so, and most of the noise came from families feeding in the vegetation, calling to each other to keep in touch and leave nobody behind. I was disappointed not to have seen any Spotted Flycatchers on the reserve, though I had been told of a reliable sighting of four, most likely a family. Five Whitethroats were still vocal, singing short warning songs as I passed, suggesting they had and were defending young. I saw two mixed flocks of Blue, Long-tailed and Marsh Tits with Nuthatches – shades of autumnal mixed flocks. There were several Goldcrest families in Hogmoor Copse and Park Wood, in what would seem to be a successful breeding season for them. Despite the often cloudy weather, there were lots of butterflies in the meadows even on dull, grey days, especially Marbled Whites, Ringlets and Meadow Browns.

In **July**, birds tend to begin to melt into the undergrowth to moult and keep a low-profile whilst they are so vulnerable. Wrens and Chiffchaffs were singing, as were some Blackcaps and Song Thrushes, and a Green Woodpecker could be heard yaffling. Families of birds were still foraging for food, and it was good to hear plenty of Blue Tits, badly hit by the cold spring weather which ruined their supply of caterpillars to feed their young; there were many reports of first broods dying across the country, but at Moor Copse it looked as if second broods were being reared successfully. I recorded – as usual - Carrion Crows, a pair of Magpies and several Red Kites; as well as a female Sparrowhawk over Park Wood again. The stars of the month were the invertebrates, including lots of Banded and Beautiful Demoiselles along the Pang; almost every towering thistle flower seemed to have a Peacock butterfly feeding on it, and there was an abundance of richly-coloured Commas along the hedges and in the woods.

Birders refer to 'the **August** trough' to describe what birdwatching is like this month, and Moor Copse was very quiet until the end of August, when mixed flocks of Long-tailed, Blue and Great Tits, with Chiffchaffs and Nuthatches, were feeding in the trees. I was delighted to see a Spotted Flycatcher perched in an Ash by the Pang, flying out in its distinctive way to catch flies as they passed.

It more than made up for missing the family in June. Robins and Wrens were singing, Nuthatches, Tits, Great Spotted Woodpeckers, Chiffchaffs and a Chaffinch were all calling and busily feeding. Crickets and grasshoppers were also still noisy, though BBOWT had scalloped along the rides in Park Wood, and cut back a lot of vegetation by the river, which will have disturbed the invertebrates; but we'll see the benefit of this management next summer. Meanwhile, the best place to see our striking Silver-washed Fritillaries was on the Hemp Agrimony along the R.Pang.

September was a warm and sunny month, in compensation for a dismal summer, though with a sudden decline into autumn at its end. Chiffchaffs were still calling, and joined Nuthatches and tits in large flocks. Robins were rehearsing their winter songs: they practise quietly, in what's called a sub-song, and juveniles will be learning from their elders. Blackbirds were busy and noisy, and I had a great view of a Green Woodpecker in Five Acre Meadow. I wondered if October would bring frost, as it did last year.

What **October** brought was Redwings, Siskins and a lot of rain! On the 16th I heard my first Redwing of the season and counted 52 around the reserve. This has turned out to be the peak for winter 2021-2022: considerably fewer than in previous years, perhaps because Northern Europe has had a relatively mild winter and fewer birds have flown this far. But what we lacked in Redwings was more than made up for by Siskins, whose numbers grew from 24 to 75 over the month, and have continued to increase. I heard no Chiffchaffs in October, another sign that summer was over. Autumn is when I expect to see mixed flocks of Tits and other birds feeding together, and this month didn't disappoint; I enjoyed watching a flock of 20 birds as I walked along the Pang, but they were upstaged by another of at least 53 crossing Bradfield Ride! Blue, Coal and Great Tits, Goldcrests and Long-tailed Tits darted across the gap, calling to each other and collectively finding food and looking out for predators. I saw a Kingfisher dart along the river, and Jays looking for food to cache. The largest flock of Siskins swirled up from the Bullace thicket in Cottage Field as a male Sparrowhawk dashed past me, like a little feathery Exocet missile, looking for lunch: the Siskins had spotted it first, and were not on the menu!

November was another mild month, but ended with Storm Arwen. The trees were looking lovely in their autumn colours. There were lots of Long-tailed Tits around – until I did my WBS, when they must all have been feeding elsewhere! There were a Moorhen and a Mallard on the river, but pawprints in the mink raft's clay interior showed we'd had a less welcome visitor: hopefully, this Mink was just passing through. I found some spraint, too old to tell if it was a Mink's or an Otter's. Wrens and Robins were, as ever, calling and singing, and Great Spotted Woodpeckers and Nuthatches were in all the wooded areas. I saw two Song Thrushes, a Mistle Thrush and a Goldcrest, and a Treecreeper in Moor Copse.

December was a grey, relatively mild month, with a temperature of 13 °C when I did my WBS on the 31st. The Siskins had settled in and were much less noisy than when they first returned in October, now only calling as they flew to find another place to feed. Their numbers had really built up: I counted 186! – and only 18 Redwings. There was a Meadow Pipit in Arable Field; Nuthatches, Goldfinches, Chaffinches and Goldcrests in the woodlands, along with Blue, Great and Long-tailed Tits. The Great Tits are resplendent in their breeding plumage, and their loud, clear and distinctive songs create a symphony of squeaky bicycles! I heard Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers during the month, and saw a Bullfinch, two Mistle Thrushes, and a Treecreeper; plus a Kestrel on two occasions, hunting in Cottage Field and later in Five Acre: Kestrels were once a common sight on the reserve but have become more occasional visitors, so I was glad to have these sightings. The month's highlight was a winter special: a Woodcock, which broke cover from the woodland floor in Horsemoor Copse, flying low and silently, jinking through the trees to find another peaceful spot, where I trust no other clumsy human disturbed its daytime repose.

2021 at Moor Copse was an interesting year, as ever, though I'm hoping for a warmer, sunnier summer in 2022. The Skylarks stayed in Arable Field through the summer, and mowing was restricted, to avoid disturbing any nests. I'm looking forward to seeing them again, and to watching what happens in the clear-felled strip along the A340.

Wishing you all good birding.



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