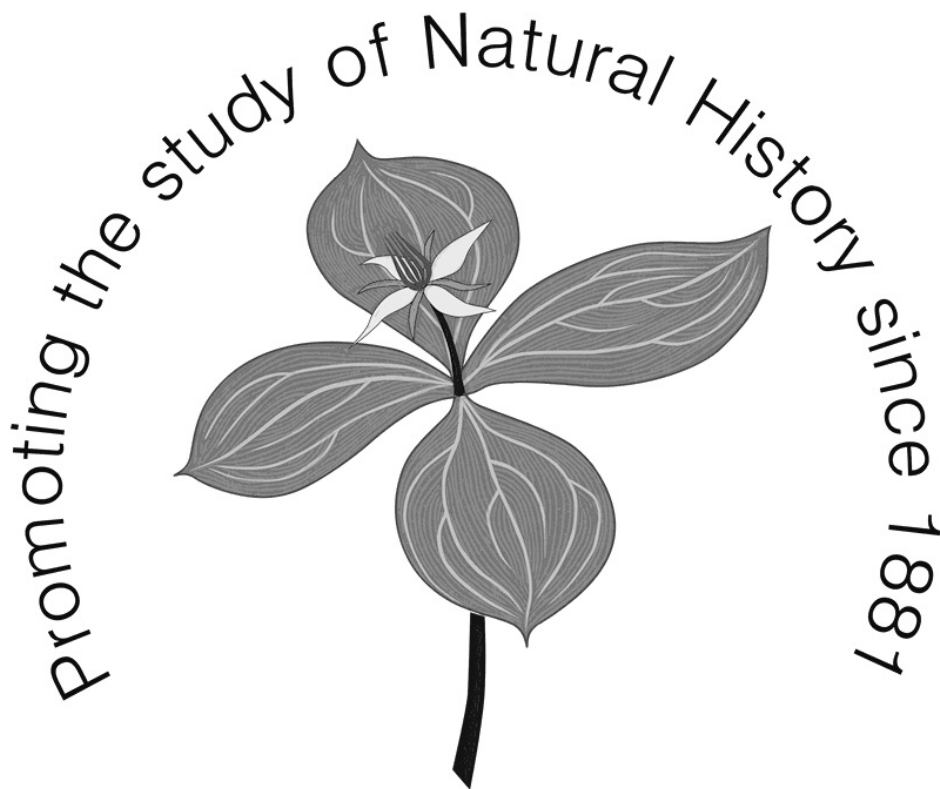


# The Reading Naturalist

**No. 71**



Published by the Reading and District Natural History Society

**Report for 2018**

(Published 2019)

Price to Non-Members £5.00

# **THE READING NATURALIST**

## **No 71 for the year 2018**

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

### **President**

**Mr David Cliffe**

### **Honorary General Secretary**

**Mr Rob Stallard**

### **Honorary Editor**

**Mr Ken White**, Yonder Cottage, Ashford Hill, Reading, RG19 8AX

### **Honorary Recorders**

**Botany: Dr Renée Grayer**, 16 Harcourt Drive, Earley, Reading, RG6 5TJ

**Fungi: Position Vacant**

**Lichens: Position Vacant**

**Lepidoptera: Mr Norman Hall**, 44 Harcourt Drive, Earley, Reading, RG6 5TJ

**Entomology & other Invertebrates: Position Vacant**

**Vertebrates: Mr Tony Rayner**, The Red Cow, 46 Wallingford Road, Cholsey, Wallingford, OX10 9LB

## CONTENTS

	page
Presidential Musings	David Cliffe 1
Membership	Norman Hall, Ian Duddle 2
Members' Observations	Julia Cooper, Rob Stallard 2
Excursions 2018	Jan Haseler, Norman Hall, Sean O'Leary, Jerry Welsh, Tricia Marcousé, Sarah White, Ken White 6
Mid-week Walks 2018	Jan Haseler, Julia Cooper, Sue White 18
Away Trips 2018	Jan Haseler 23
Indoor Meetings 2018	Renée Grayer, Rob Stallard, Susan Twitchett, Tricia Marcousé 26
Winning photographs and photographs from outings	RDNHS Members 33-36
Christmas Party and Photographic Competition	Laurie Haseler 39
Presidential Address	David Cliffe 41
Autumn Raptors in Andalucia	Fiona Brown 45
A Sunflower Tale	Sarah White 47
Recorder's Report for Botany 2018	Renée Grayer 47
Recorder's Report for Lepidoptera 2018	Norman Hall 52
Recorder's Report for Vertebrates 2018	Tony Rayner 64
The Weather in Reading during 2018	Roger Brugge 68
Slugs in the Kitchen	Rob Stallard 72
RDNHS Winter Goose and Swan Review	Ken White 72

My special thanks to all the contributors for their thousands of hours of effort in the field, collating data & meeting the deadlines for reports whilst carrying on with their busy lives. The Honorary Recorders and committee do a fantastic job, as well as the many who produce the records of the walks, excursions and meetings, articles and help with validating and proof reading, in particular Julia Cooper and Jan Haseler without whom the task of producing the Naturalist would be impossible.

So now it is time for **anyone** with a passion for natural history to create interesting articles for the next RDNHS Naturalist journal. Another year is here to inspire you in your particular fields of interest. So don't forget to document and photograph all those interesting expeditions and discoveries, whether they are near or far and submit them for publication here. **Ken White (Honorary Editor)**

Copyright © 2019 Reading & District Natural History Society.

Copyright of photographs is indicated in the captions.

## **PRESIDENTIAL MUSINGS by David Cliffe**

I'm writing this on New Year's Day. The festivities are over, I've just eaten the last mince pie, the daylight is beginning to fade, and it seems the ideal time to do a spot of musing.

Being President means that I go to almost every indoor meeting at Pangbourne, including those I wouldn't normally have thought of going to. I'm sorry that I didn't get to many of the field excursions – though I did go on the fungus foray in Pamber Forest. It struck me that there seemed to be one group of members who go mainly to outdoor events, and another group who go mainly to indoor meetings, and a third group who go to both! It was a fine, sunny November day at Pamber, lots of people there, and the bit of the Forest we saw looked splendid. There was no need to walk very far! We saw nothing big or spectacular, but lots of fungi that live on decaying wood, varying in shape, texture and colour. A slime mould was pointed out – the subject of our next indoor meeting. I did an Internet search to find out what a slime mould was, thinking I'd spend five or ten minutes. I emerged from gazing at the screen over an hour later, having been intrigued – especially by the time-lapse photography which showed slime moulds moving about.

Mike Waterman was a first class guide at Pamber. It's a pity we haven't yet found a recorder for fungi – there's obviously a great amount of interest among our members. And, come to that, we need a recorder for lichens and one for invertebrates that aren't butterflies or moths. It's a matter of collecting information sent in by members, and putting together a report and list, once a year. I hope someone will volunteer, and help make our records and our journal complete.

We're planning a coach trip to Dorset on May 4<sup>th</sup>, to look for orchids and seabirds. I know I've seen the Early Spider Orchid many times in continental Europe, but I'd still like to see it in my own country, and I do hope we get enough takers to make it worthwhile booking the coach.

Over the long hot summer last year, like the other three committees on which I serve, your committee had to devote a lot of time deciding what to do about the new General Data Protection Regulations. We'd had conflicting advice. Was it really necessary to obtain written proof from every member that they gave their permission for us to hold their contact details? Or would a published statement under the "legitimate interest" provision in the regulations suffice? I'm sorry we had to bother everyone to obtain permission, but we felt we had to play safe. And I have to say that the other three committees all did it slightly differently!

And I ought to thank all those members who completed the questionnaire that went out with the subscription renewal forms. Doubtless our indefatigable secretary will have them analysed by the time of the January committee meeting. We intend to use the forms to make the society even better!

I will refrain from thanking everyone who has helped in running the Society here, because that's usually done at the AGM in March. But maybe I should mention that Michael and Jose Keith-Lucas will be moving to Worcester at some time in the spring. Over many years, Michael has done just about every job there is for our Society – from being President (several times), to giving talks, to being botanical recorder, to being winter programme secretary, to being excursion leader, to maker of tea and coffee, and probably much else that I don't know about. He told me the other day that he'd been a member for 50 years!

Michael was responsible, at least in part, for my joining the Society. When I was young, I never had any spare money. As I climbed the career ladder, I got round to thinking that I could now afford to support a few worthwhile organisations by subscribing, and one of these was BBONT (now BBOWT). One day, they sent out with their literature a notice about a trip to Bulgaria which Michael was to lead. By this time I'd heard of him, and I asked a long-standing member of the Society whom I happened to know, Meryl Beek, if in theory she would go on a trip led by MK-L. Her response was enthusiastic, and so I came to meet Michael and several other members of the Society, and we became friends, and I joined the RDNHS. And in fact I returned to Bulgaria the next year, with other Society members.



So, farewell Michael and Jose. We hope you'll come back to visit, and we wish you every happiness in your new home in Worcester.

Though I hope to step down as President in March, I shall of course remain on the committee for a further two years as Vice-President. It has been good to be able to play a part in the running of a very successful Society. Our membership is increasing slightly, and we seem to have more younger members. (Perhaps this is like policemen getting younger as one gets older!) As I tend to say at our meetings when I welcome new members of the Society, I hope that they will get from it the experience, the knowledge and the delight that I've had from belonging.

## **MEMBERSHIP by Norman Hall & Ian Duddle**

Paid up Membership figures as they stand as at the end of December 2018

Single members	77	(including 8 Honorary members)
Family/Couples	66	

---

<b>Total</b>	<b>143</b>	
--------------	------------	--

of which we welcomed 21 as new members to the group:

Dr J. & Mrs B. Thacker	Ben Ralston & Julia Hopkinson
Victoria Chadfield	Prof. Helen Walkington & Dr Philip Roberts
Anne & Nigel Dewing	Ester Diaz Leal & Carlos Maeztu Sanchez
Julie Sunter	Zoe Freedman & Ben Robinson
Vicky Barker	Ms L. Fenwick
Angela Mills	Mr A. & Mrs P. Walker
Lorna Woolhouse	John Chapman

## **MEMBERS' OBSERVATIONS 2018 by Julia Cooper & Rob Stallard**

### **2<sup>nd</sup> January**

Tricia Marcousé – has not seen any Buff-tailed bumblebee queens in her Earley garden since the sharp frost before Christmas, which may have killed the bees.

Ken White – 9 Hawfinches and 4 Bramblings at Benyon's Enclosure today. 111 Hawfinches were also reported at Basildon Park today on [berksbirds.co.uk](http://berksbirds.co.uk).

Grahame Hawker – at Maiden Erlegh lake, 30 – 40 Shoveler ducks seen forming tight circles and spiralling round.

Jan Haseler – Hazel catkins with pollen in Sulham Woods a week ago, and 1 Brambling in her Tilehurst garden today. John Lerpiniere reported 2 Bramblings in his garden nearby.

David Rowe – a flock of Ring-necked Parakeets in Slough last weekend.

Andy Bolton – a flock of 42 Pied Wagtails near Axmansford last Saturday.

### **16<sup>th</sup> January**

Ian Duddle – a Goldcrest foraging on bonsai trees in his garden in Tilehurst yesterday.

John Lerpiniere – 2 very young Slow-worms smaller than a £1 coin under a refuge in his Tilehurst garden yesterday.

Fiona Cummins - a Goldcrest in her garden in Sonning Common yesterday.

### **6<sup>th</sup> February**

Fiona Brown – a Goosander on the Thames at Bray on 29 January.

Rachel Woolnough – 2 Egyptian Goose goslings at Whiteknights on 2 February.

Ken White – in the last week at Plastow Green, a recurring male Brambling, and a male Rook which has learnt to use a feeder with a 5mm gap, and then feeds the sunflower hearts to a female.

Tricia Marcousé - a Cowslip now in flower in Earley. Marion Venners also has Cowslips flowering in her garden in Purley.

John Lerpiniere – Oystercatchers have just returned to Hosehill.

David Owens – a Wild Strawberry plant with flowers and fruit in his Reading garden.

### **20<sup>th</sup> February**

Ailsa Claybourn – reports from Moor Copse: a pair of Stonechats in the arable field in November, 1 in December and none in January. In the January survey, a Kingfisher, an Egyptian Goose and a Little Egret which has been there throughout the winter; and 90 Siskins on 29 January. Yesterday in her Tilehurst garden, 2 mating frogs, the first seen this year.

Ian Duddle – a Tree Creeper on the Ridgeway northeast of Hailey last Thursday 15 February, and a Siskin in their Tilehurst garden last Sunday 18 February.

Julia Cox – had felt the earthquake (centre in S Wales, magnitude 4.6) at home in Aldermaston last Saturday 19 February. Isobel Higgins, a visitor who lives in Somerset, had been 30 miles south of the centre and commented that people could record their experience of the earthquake on the British Geological Survey website.

Ken White – a Blackbird has just joined the dawn chorus at Plastow Green.

Brian Sargent – Avocets and Curlew from the comfort of the visitor centre at the Thurrock Thameside Nature Centre near Stanford-le-Hope on 9 February.

### **6<sup>th</sup> March**

**Note:** The weather was unusually cold during week beginning 25/02, with temperatures in Reading remaining below zero from Tuesday 27/02 evening to Friday 02/03 evening and lying snow from 28/02 to 03/03.

Ailsa Claybourn – reports from Moor Copse: on 24 February, 65 Siskins and the Little Egret still there. During the cold weather, approx 20 Fieldfares and 20 Redwings in Norcot Road in Tilehurst, and 1 Redwing in her Tilehurst garden. At least 40 Redwings in an orchard at Sulham Farm

yesterday. Red Kites are showing full courtship display, flying close together.

Tony Rayner – it has been a good year for overwintering Blackcaps, and one was in full song in Cholsey yesterday.

Ian Duddle – a female Blackcap eating apple in Tilehurst yesterday, a first time sighting in the garden.

Sally Rankin – Bramblings have visited their Henley garden regularly, with 5 seen at once.

Tony Myerson – a Fieldfare and a male Blackcap in their Tilehurst garden 03/03.

Ian Esland – no mothing during the cold weather, but on 04/03 in Whitchurch Hill, 31 March Moths and 5 other species in his moth trap.

Grahame Hawker – Bramblings and Fieldfares recently at his home at Brimpton Common, and a Red Admiral in a neighbour's garden today.

Jan Haseler – a chorus of 5 frogs in her pond in Tilehurst today.

Jane Sellwood – Toads started to move at Swallowfield yesterday.

Rob Stallard – Fieldfares sheltering in dead beech leaves at the edge of Sulham Woods on Friday 02/03 afternoon during a snowstorm.

Fiona Cummins – 14 Great Crested Grebes displaying on the Thames at Henley today.

## **20<sup>th</sup> March**

Jan Haseler – 82 frogs in her pond in Tilehurst today. Jan appealed for suitable homes for frogspawn.

Grahame Hawker – the cold weather and snow last weekend brought birds back to his garden at Brimpton Common, notably 4 Bramblings and a Lesser Redpoll.

Ailsa Claybourn – a croaking Raven flying overhead in Tilehurst on 10/03.

Tricia Marcousé – a Hedgehog came into her conservatory during the cold weather last weekend and stayed 2 days.

Susan Twitchett – saw Fox, Badger, Deer and Rabbit tracks in the snow in their Upper Basildon garden last weekend.

Brian Sargent – noted the death yesterday of the last male Northern white rhino, which will lead to extinction of the subspecies.

## **2<sup>nd</sup> October**

Ian Esland – found Hedgehog poo on his front lawn in Whitchurch Hill today, the first evidence of hedgehogs seen in his garden in 11 years.

Brian Waite – a Red-legged Partridge on his Tilehurst lawn approx 2 weeks ago – a first record.

Jane Sellwood – a first sighting in 2 years of a Hedgehog walking on her back lawn in Earley.

Philip Allen – approx 100 solitary mining bees hovering 5cm above the ground in his garden in Tilehurst.

David Cliffe – seen by a neighbour in Caversham on his runner beans and identified by Norman Hall, third instar nymphs of a shield bug *Nezara viridula*. They are tiny (about the size of a match head) and dark with lighter spots. The bug is native to Africa but now widespread in southern Europe, and has been recorded in southern England since 2003 on various food plants particularly cultivated beans.

### **16<sup>th</sup> October**

Ailsa Claybourn – 12 Redwings at Wokingham last Monday, the first seen this autumn, and one Redwing calling over her Tilehurst garden last night.

Ken White – brought an Ash stick, one of more than 20 in an overgrown Ash hedge at Ashford Hill, with the bark stripped off by Hornets, over the summer until two weeks ago. Ken had seen many Hornets this summer and they are still flying. They feed at night and are attracted to light – they can be quite aggressive.

Grahame Hawker - a Blue Underwing in his moth trap at Brimpton Common 12th October. He has had 30 Hornets in the moth trap regularly over the summer, fortunately they are more docile in the morning.

Ian Esland – has also had up to 30 Hornets in his moth trap at Whitchurch Hill most nights, they are now fewer. A Little Grebe between Shiplake and Sonning Locks last Wednesday (11/10); and a Merveille du Jour and a Barred Sallow moth seen this afternoon at Kennet Mouth, Thames Valley Park brought in as live specimens.

Alan Parfitt – Hornets have also been stripping Ash bark at Otmoor, mostly on trees with Ash dieback. In contrast Ken noted his branches were on healthy trees.

Tony Myerson – hundreds of nests of Ivy Bees on a sandy slope at Lousehill Copse near Dee Park, on 30th September. Tony brought in some photographs of the Ivy Bees.

Andy Bolton – Five Merveille du Jour at Axmansford last week.

David Owens – a Mink on the Loddon at Dinton Pastures in June.

Tony Rayner – under one of the reptile refuges in his meadow at Cholsey today, 4 adult Grass Snakes showing mating behaviour, which he has never seen before at this time of year.

David Ruddle – a Grass Snake swimming in a stream near Southcote Lock on 9th October.

### **6<sup>th</sup> November**

Roger Frankum – a Water Rail and a Chiffchaff at Woolhampton yesterday.

Ken White – at Ladle Hill yesterday: 3 Bramblings in a large flock of chaffinches, all feeding on Beech mast; a hornet flying around the beech trees there; and 8 Red Kites and 3 Buzzards all in easy view from the path.

Rob Stallard – a Humming-bird Hawk-moth on Abelia in his Tilehurst garden on 18/10.

John Lerpiniere – some butterflies are still in flight, including a Red Admiral at Englefield yesterday.

### **20<sup>th</sup> November**

Jenny Greenham – a black Pheasant in her garden at Hampstead Norreys today.

Ken White – a Pheasant with distinctive white feathers on its head, seen in their garden at Ashford Hill last winter but not since May has reappeared, with an identical pattern of white feathers.

Dru Kenney – 5 Fieldfares at Stichens Green near Streatley yesterday, and a Woodcock en route from there this evening.

Roger Frankum – a Peregrine and a pair of Shelduck at Lower Farm, Thatcham 14/11.

Brian Sargent – had 2 crops of Parasol mushrooms in his meadow near Aldermaston this year, approx 40 in August and 25+ more in October. He also saw 2 Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers there in July.

Ailsa Claybourn – over Tilehurst on 15/11, a flock of 40 Fieldfares and 6 Redwings, and around 10.30pm on 17/11 Redwings flying over Fairford Road, Tilehurst every 2-3 minutes – a possible sign of cold weather to come. 17 Fieldfares at Moor Copse on 18/11, and tonight, a temperature of 2.5°C.

Marion Venners – a Barn Owl near the A340 at Streatley on 17/11. (Reported after the talk.)

#### **4<sup>th</sup> December**

Grahame Hawker – 20-30 Shoveler ducks at Maiden Erlegh Lake this week, already displaying courtship behaviour.

Tony Rayner – noted the absence of Greenfinches, he had not seen any for ages.

## **EXCURSIONS 2018**

**Reports by Norman Hall, Jan Haseler, Tricia Marcousé, Sean O’Leary, Jerry Welsh, Sarah White and Ken White**

Despite grey skies and steady drizzle, 21 members and guests turned out on the morning of **Saturday 27 January** for another of Lesley Dunlop’s excellent geology walks. The walk started from the front of the church of St Michael and All Angels in **Lambourn, West Berkshire**. In the churchyard were many snowdrops and a few crocuses. Lesley pointed out a high-status house across the road which was faced on one side by dressed sarsen stones, which would have dated from before the time of mechanical cutting tools. It also had both headers and stretchers of the more expensive blue-glazed bricks. Beside the path towards Lynch Wood was a big block of sarsen stone with two characteristic holes formed by tree roots. Lesley explained that sarsens are lumps of hard sandstone, formed by localised patchy cementation of the Tertiary sands which formerly covered the Chalk. Fossil root holes indicate that this cementation occurred near the surface. Evaporation of ground water in the warm Tertiary period would have concentrated dissolved silica to the point where locally it crystallised out, cementing the sand grains together. Subsequent erosion of the uncemented bulk of the Tertiary beds left these hardened blocks behind as sarsen stones.

Normally there are pools and bubbling springs in the lower part of Lynch Wood, forming the headwaters of the River Lambourn. But despite the recent rains, the pools were completely dry, indicating that the aquifers had not yet been replenished following the previous year’s very dry winter. Snowdrops carpeted the lower part of the wood, while Box *Buxus sempervirens* and Hart’s-tongue Fern *Phyllitis scolopendrium* were abundant on the steep slope above the path.

Scarlet Elfcup *Sarcoscypha austriaca* fungi were found, growing up through moss on dead wood. Lesley pointed out the contrast between the steep side of the valley on the right of the path and the much shallower gradient on the left. This is a characteristic feature of dry valleys on the Chalk. During the Pleistocene Ice Age, when permafrost prevented water from draining through the Cretaceous Chalk, rivers of meltwater carved out dry valleys: south and west facing slopes warmed up more quickly and suffered more erosion. The walk continued along a track which led northwards along the top of the ridge. The root plate of a fallen tree showed a shallow layer of Clay-with-flints above the Chalk, and the top layer of Chalk had been crumbled by frost action into small stones. Looking across the valley, Lesley pointed out clumps of trees on the ridge tops. These mark patches of Clay-with-flints, formed by freeze-thaw at the top of the Chalk. Lower down the valley of the River Lambourn, ridge-top trees mark layers of the sandy Lower Eocene Lambeth Beds lying above the Chalk. A Fox *Vulpes vulpes* was spotted in the field beside the track. The route continued down to Upper Lambourn, where there were some interesting walls and cottages. One cottage had big coigns (corner stones) of chalk blocks at the top of the wall, but with a big sarsen block at the bottom. Another cottage had been extended several times. Part of it had grey knapped sarsen stones, while another section had orange-coloured rough sarsen stones.

A dramatic red sky in the morning on **Saturday 10 February** was the sure sign of a shepherd's warning, as 10 indefatigable members, led by Ken and Sarah White, converged on **Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve**, just west of Gosport on the Solent. The reserve has the fabulous combination of a visitor centre and cafeteria, plus 7 strategically placed hides overlooking the freshwater river, lagoons and meadows of the River Meon, right next to the high water level of the Solent coast. Those who arrived early at the beach-side car parking found groups of waders sitting out the early morning high tide on the shingle foreshore, including Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Sanderling *C. alba* and Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. A 30-strong flock of very confiding Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* joined groups of Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* at the Meon sluice gates in the small Hill Head Harbour, awaiting food handouts from sympathetic passers-by. Once assembled, the group set off for the southernmost Meon Shore lagoon hide; large numbers of Teal *Anas crecca* filled the pool. Some were roosting, some were feeding but quite a few were in small groups frantically displaying to each other, the males expanding their head feathers into amazing shapes while exaggerating the striking yellow triangle on their black rear ends. Amongst them pairs of Mallard and Gadwall *A. strepera* dabbled calmly around the pool margins, while a small group of Shoveler *A. clypeata* were, like the Teal, amorously displaying, resulting perhaps surprisingly for early February, in one pair mating! Careful scrutiny of the myriad islands and reedy margins led to the discovery of several Snipe *Gallinago gallinago*, who kindly moved onto a grassy bank while feeding, allowing everyone to observe the ease with which they work their extraordinary bills. A graceful trio of Avocets *Recurvirostra avosetta* were busily feeding by sweeping their finely upturned bills from side to side. Good numbers of Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* were roosting amongst the Teal in the safety of the islands. A sprinkling of Redshank *Tringa totanus* and Ringed Plover left for the foreshore when a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* floated across the back of the lake in a very harrier-like manner.

At the next hide, the Pumfrett, there were distant views of Great Black-backed Gulls *Larus marinus*, with their 5-ft wingspans, patrolling up and down the River Meon in the strengthening winds, demonstrating their command of the aerial environment. On the way to the Spurgin Hide, the final hide of the morning, a Water Vole *Arvicola terrestris* was spotted swimming up a water channel next to the path. The trio of Avocets had changed pools to just in front of the hide, initially on their own, but within minutes, ALL the birds from the first lagoon became airborne, spooked presumably by the Buzzard, and many of them settled in front of the hide. Rival pairs of Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* postured and displayed to each other, a lovely sight and sound. On the

way back, the Water Vole was still there, giving a second chance to watch it sampling the marginal vegetation. The group were later told by the warden that the Water Vole had been recently successfully re-introduced, following earlier eradication by American Mink *Neovison vison*. Back on the foreshore, in increasingly wet and windy conditions, the group caught up with one of the star winter bird species here, the Russian Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla* ssp. *bernicla*. These birds breed on the Taimyr Peninsula at about longitude 90° East, and every autumn they fly over 3,500 kms to spend the winter in the south of England and the Low Countries. Small flocks of Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, Redshank, Sanderling and Dunlin raced past, disturbed by walkers and wind surfers on the shoreline. Amongst the many gulls were three Common Gulls *Larus canus* and a Mediterranean Gull *Ichthyaeetus melanocephalus*.

After a warm and much needed lunch break, the group set off up the east side of the reserve to visit 3 more hides; with the wind-driven now horizontal rain, the hides were a great asset. The Suffern Hide overlooks the River Meon, but the water levels were high and no muddy bank margins were visible. However, some Coot *Fulica atra* and Little Grebes *Tachybaptus ruficollis* were worth the stop. The next hide, the Meadow Hide, was the most productive, giving good views up and down the valley. There were flocks of Wigeon *Anas penelope*, Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa*, Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Canada Geese *Branta canadensis*, together with Teal, Gadwall, Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Mallard and Lapwing. Two Ravens *Corvus corax* mobbed another Buzzard. On the way to the final Knights Bank hide, a sprinkling of passerines in the trees and scrub included Goldfinch *Carduelis carduelis* and Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, and there was a nice specimen of Scarlet Elfcup. In increasing wind and rain and decreasing light, the day of winter birding was concluded at the nearby Osborne View pub. The final tally was a very satisfying 55 species of bird, many from distant lands, together with some very fine viewing.

Jan and Laurie Haseler led 17 members on a walk around **Inkpen Crocus Field**, a nature reserve of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT), on **Saturday 10 March**. It was a grey, damp morning, but the thousands of Spring Crocuses *Crocus verna* still managed to put on a fine display. The entrance to the field was a haze of purple, with the occasional white specimen scattered around. Bright green feathery leaves of Pignut *Conopodium majus* pushed up through the grass. The path led across the valley of a small stream and up onto the far side of the field, where there were much lower numbers of Crocuses. Greenfinches *Chloris chloris* flew along the hedge and a Great Spotted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos major* drummed nearby. The origin of a skull attached to a long robust neck was discussed, with some sort of small deer the most likely candidate.

The walk continued along trackways to BBOWT **Inkpen Common Reserve**. The first footpath led past a thatched cottage with two saddle stones in front of its gateway. The tops of the stones were covered in mosses, including grey-green cushions of *Grimmia pulvinata* and brighter green patches of *Tortula muralis*. The footpath led through a Beech *Fagus sylvatica* wood and down into a stream valley. The stream had carved a deep channel and on the banks were a selection of ferns, including Common Polypody *Polypodium vulgare*, Hard-fern *Blechnum spicant*, Scaly Male-fern *Dryopteris affinis* and Soft Shield-fern *Polystichum setiferum*. At the first stop inside the reserve there was a big clump of daffodils. Their small size, narrow grey-green leaves, golden yellow trumpets and pale yellow outer perianth segments all indicated that they could be genuine Wild Daffodil *Narcissus pseudonarcissus*. The yellow jelly fungus *Tremella mesenterica* was found on a dead Gorse *Ulex europaeus* branch nearby. Gorse and Bracken *Pteridium aquilinum* had recently been cleared from a sizeable area on the south-west side of the reserve. The walk continued along

a boardwalk which crossed a stream and an area of mire, where the leaves of Bog Pimpernel *Anagallis tenella* were spotted. Two ponds on the south-east side of the reserve showed no signs of life, perhaps not surprising, since a week before they had been covered by thick ice. The walk continued around the common, following wide grassy pathways through sections of heather and managed Gorse. Grazing livestock are used to help maintain the open structure of the common. The footpath back to the sports field led first through a Beech wood, then through a very muddy section where a dense thicket of birch trees had grown up amongst planted pines.

Eleven members met on **Saturday 24 March** for the Annual Moss Walk, led by Sean O'Leary. The chosen venue was the hidden treasure of **Greenfield Copse**, bordering on **Watlington Park** and owned by the National Trust. The small door in the wall opposite the Tree Barn leads to a truly beautiful ancient woodland, often missed by passers-by. The first signs of spring were clear, with Hazel *Corylus avellana* catkins in flower, Bluebell *Hyacinthoides non-scripta* leaves showing and, at the bottom of the valley, some possible Wild Daffodils prompted discussion. The mosses were fairly typical for such a site. Acid loving species such as *Mnium hornum*, *Dicranella heteromalla* and *Pseudotaxiphyllum elegans* were present on the surface soil higher up, together with some common 'epiphytes' (those growing on trees) such as *Orthotrichum affine* and *Cryphaea heteromalla*. On the exposed chalkier soil lower down the valley *Cirriphyllum crassinervium*, *Thamnobryum alopecurum* and *Plagiomnium undulatum* were found. Some species such as *Brachythecium rutabulum* were ubiquitous and, in fruit, provided a beautiful demonstration of the amazing 'peristome' structure, the minute teeth arranged around the capsule mouth, which open and close according to humidity to release the moss spores. Greenfield Copse is a beautiful location, with a luxuriant range of mosses.

Following a week of unremitting cold and rain, the warm sunshine on the afternoon of **Saturday 14 April** was a welcome change when Renée Grayer led a walk at **Maiden Erlegh Local Nature Reserve**. While the 16-strong group were gathering at Instow Road, Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*, Comma *Polygonia c-album* and Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* butterflies were seen and Peacock *A. io* was soon added to the tally. A number of native species have been planted around the reserve, and specimens seen in the garden of the Interpretation Centre included the leaves of Shining Cranesbill *Geranium lucidum* and flowering Cuckooflower *Cardamine pratensis*. The walk started out through Old Pond Copse, the strip of woodland in the valley of the stream which flows out below Maiden Erlegh Lake. The rich ground flora indicates that this is ancient woodland and flowers included Primrose *Primula vulgaris*, Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana*, Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella* and Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*. The first Bluebells were just coming into flower. Leaves of Wood Speedwell *Veronica montana*, Three-nerved Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia* and Ramsons *Allium ursinum* were also noted. The small yellow flowers of Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* were found in the wetter parts of the wood, together with Marsh-marigold *Caltha palustris*. The leaves of Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, Fringecups *Tellima grandiflora* and Wild Angelica *Angelica sylvestris* were seen by the stream. There were several clumps of Summer Snowflake *Leucojum aestivum* subsp. *pulchellum* in a pond in the valley bottom. It was suggested that these might be the wild Loddon Lily *L. aestivum* subsp. *aestivum*, but closer inspection of the stem edges revealed that they were smooth, as in the garden plant, rather than with the minute teeth of the wild plant.

Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybita*, Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla*, Nuthatch *Sitta europaea* and Green Woodpecker *Picus viridis* called and two Buzzards soared overhead. After walking through Old Pond Copse and Moor Copse, the route led back to Maiden Erlegh Lake and through Oak Wood



on the south shore. Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, Coot *Fulica atra* and Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* were amongst the sightings on the lake, while a Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* perched in a tree above the water. A sunny bank of Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* blossom at the end of the lake proved a magnet for butterflies, with several more Peacocks and Commas and a newly-emerged Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*. Finally, in a nettle patch by the road, a tiny 24-spot Ladybird *Subcoccinella vigintiquatuorpunctata*—was seen on a sunny nettle leaf, with a much larger 7-spot Ladybird *Coccinella septempunctata* nearby for comparison.

On **Sunday 29 April** Michael Keith-Lucas led 20 members on a walk which started from the top of **Winter Hill, Cookham**. It was a grey afternoon with a chilly wind. The walk started out along a track down the hillside. Garlic Mustard *Alliaria petiolata* was flowering beside the path and a patch of Crosswort *Cruciata laevipes* was noted. A sea of Bluebells could be seen in a large garden which backed on to the track. The walk continued along the bottom of the steep chalk hillside, with flowering Glaucous Sedge *Carex flacca* and Cowslips *Primula veris*, with leaves of Salad Burnet *Sanguisorba minor* and Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium*. Further along the hillside, many clumps of Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata* were just coming into flower. Michael then led the group down to Cock Marsh, with its string of pools and wet grassland. At the centre of the first pool was a big patch of flowering Water-violet *Hottonia palustris*, but frustratingly, the water was a little too deep for closer inspection. Other pools had flowering Water-crowfoot and the leaves of Water Dock *Rumex hydrolapathum*, with Cuckooflower and Marsh-marigold flowering nearby. Unbranched horsetail spikes were poking up through the wet grass. High above, a Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* hung in the wind, while a Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* sang from a patch of scrub and the alarm call of a Blackcap was heard. Returning along the bottom of the chalk hillside, a number of small, bright yellow, conical Yellow Fieldcap *Bolbitius titubans* fungi were spotted. Then on the track back up to the start, a big patch of Sanicle *Sanicula europaea* was found, with the first flowers just opening up.

Following his inspiring talk earlier in the year, Tony Rayner kindly invited members of the Society to walk round the meadow and garden of his wildlife haven in **Cholsey, South Oxfordshire**, on the hot and sunny morning of **Saturday 5 May**. Tony and his wife Ro have created the garden, meadow and orchard from scratch, including features such as half a mile of native-species hedges and several ponds. The meadow and orchard were yellow with a sea of Cowslips. Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*, Brimstone and Large White *Pieris brassicae* butterflies patrolled the hedge line, while bees and other insects visited the flowers in the meadow. The hedges are protected by fencing and longer unmown grass is left at the field margins, and this is the preferred habitat of the reptiles. A series of corrugated iron refuges were inspected and 47 Slow-worms *Anguis fragilis* and 3 young Grass Snakes *Natrix natrix* were seen. The Grass Snakes darted quickly away, but some of the Slow-worms were more reluctant to move. Tony gently encouraged them to leave, so that they would not be damaged when the iron was put down again. Some buried themselves in holes in the ground, while others slid into the surrounding vegetation. A 3-legged Muntjac *Muntiacus reevesi* deer was spotted on the far side of the meadow, several House Martins *Delichon urbica* and Swallows *Hirundo rustica* flew overhead and a Common Lizard *Zootoca vivipara* was basking on an old oil drum. There is a good-sized pond at the side of the meadow. A Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* was running around on the floating vegetation, springing up into the air and twisting in pursuit of insects above the water.

The group of 16 members then walked round the garden. At the far side is a big patch of Meadow Saxifrage *Saxifraga granulata*, established more than 10 years ago from a rescue turf. Tony showed another patch which appeared in the lawn by the house last year at a considerable

distance from the original plants. It was suggested that perhaps ants are moving the seeds around. Within the garden are 2 more ponds. One had an impressive display of flowering Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata*. Several Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus* butterflies were flying in the garden. Tony had run his moth trap overnight and the visit ended with an inspection of the catch. There were a large number of big Cockchafers *Melolontha melolontha* in the trap. Moth highlights included Maiden's Blush *Cyclophora punctaria*; Pebble Prominent *Notodonta ziczac*, Pale Prominent *Pterostoma palpina* and Swallow Prominent *Pheosia tremula*; Common Carpet *Epirrhoe alternata* and Green Carpet *Colostygia pectinataria* and Nut-tree Tussock *Colocasia coryli*. A very tame Robin *Erithacus rubecula* lurked nearby and managed to pick up some of the released moths.

Michael Keith-Lucas led 10 members on a walk at **Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve** on the hot and sunny afternoon of **Sunday 20 May**, starting from the Cowleaze Wood car park. The walk started out down an ancient trackway, bordered by a ditch and bank with old multi-stemmed trees. Woodruff *Galium odoratum* was in flower, and Michael pointed out big adjacent patches of male and female Dog's-mercury *Mercurialis perennis* plants. The female plants had wider leaves and were of a more blue-green hue. On the walk back, three flower spikes of White Helleborine *Cephalanthera damasonium* were spotted. The Privet *Ligustrum vulgare* beside the path had the narrower leaves of the true wild plant. The walk continued onto the open western slopes of Bald Hill. There were abundant Cowslips and Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula*, plus Salad Burnet, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* and the first flowers of Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa*. The anthills had their own flora, including Germander Speedwell *Veronica chamaedrys*, Early Forget-me-not *Myosotis ramosissima*, Thyme-leaved Speedwell *Veronica serpyllifolia* and several different chickweeds. A Green Hairstreak butterfly *Callophrys rubi* was spotted, together with small brown Dingy Skippers *Erynnis tages*, a dull orange Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus* and tiny little Small Purple-barred *Phytometra viridaria* moths. A fenced-off inclosure contained both male and female Juniper *Juniperus communis* bushes. At the edge of the open grassland, a Whitebeam *Sorbus aria* tree was covered with a mass of creamy blossom. The walk continued back up the track and across to Linkey Down. The grass here had been cropped more closely by sheep. There was more Horseshoe Vetch, the first flowers of Common Rock-rose, and a small patch of Hairy Rock-cress *Arabis hirsuta*.

On **Saturday 2 June** Trevor Smith ran a bee identification day at the **BBOWT Environmental Education Centre, Woolley Firs, Maidenhead**. The event was run jointly for members of BBOWT and Reading and District Natural History Society (RDNHS) and had 22 attendees. In the morning, Trevor gave a series of presentations, outlining the earliest origins of bees, the different families of bees, their lifestyles and their environmental requirements. He talked about social and solitary bees, the differences between male and female bees, cuckoo bees and much more. After lunch, the group went outside into the warm sunshine to look for bees. In front of the building, Comfrey *Symphytum officinale* and Catmint *Nepeta* sp. flowers were magnets for bumblebees. These included Common Carder Bee *Bombus pascuorum*, Early Bumblebee *B. pratorum* and Tree Bumblebee *B. hypnorum*, which was first recorded in this country in 2001 and has since spread rapidly. A large specimen with long antennae, a long abdomen and no pollen baskets was identified as a male Garden Bumblebee *B. hortorum*. A *Deutzia* bush which was covered in white bell-shaped flowers had also attracted large numbers of bees including a queen Red-tailed Bumblebee *B. lapidarius*, a queen Buff-tailed Bumblebee *B. terrestris*, a large Southern Cuckoo Bumblebee *B. vestalis* and a few solitary bees. Blossom of Bramble *Rubus*, Green Alkanet *Pentaglottis sempervirens*, *Cotoneaster* and *Philadelphus* were also good places to find bees. An all-black specimen was identified as a Hairy-footed Flower Bee *Anthophora plumipes*.

The group then walked to the pond, which was inhabited by many tadpoles and a few newts. Blue male and yellow female Broad-bodied Chasers *Libellula depressa* were active above the pond and an Emperor Dragonfly *Anax imperator* patrolled around. Honey Bees *Apis mellifera* were drinking water at the shallow edges of the pond. Nearby was a bee 'hotel'. In his morning talk, Trevor had warned about these structures. If normally solitary species are encouraged to live in bigger groups, there is a danger that this will increase the spread of pathogens and parasites. Any parts which cannot be cleaned should be removed. The final part of the walk was back through the meadow, where Common Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* was in flower. Common Blue butterflies were seen here, together with a single Meadow Brown.

Sally Rankin organised a visit to two Oxfordshire BBOWT reserves on **Sunday 24 June**. The 14 members were also joined by Camilla Lambrick, an expert on the flora of Oxfordshire. The first site was **Asham Meads Reserve**, which lies to the north-east of **Otmoor** in the R.Ray valley. The meadows were once ploughed and the old ridge and furrow profile can still be seen. In the first field, the top of the vegetation had a wavy silhouette against the darker hedge on the far side of the field, but, counterintuitively, the higher parts were the tall Tufted Hair-grass *Deschampsia cespitosa* in the furrows, while the lower parts were the ridges. The meadow had a carpet of flowers, including the rayed form of Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Red Clover *Trifolium pratense* and yellow Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Yellow-rattle *Rhinanthus minor*. In some parts, the ridges were pale yellow with Pepper-saxifrage *Silene acaulis*, while in others they were bright yellow with Lady's Bedstraw *Galium verum*. Grasshoppers kept up a constant background churring. Yellowhammer *Emberiza citrinella*, Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Skylark *Alauda arvensis*, Raven *Corvus corax* and Bullfinch *Pyrrhula pyrrhula* were heard and butterflies were abundant, particularly Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina* and Marbled White *Melanargia galathea*, together with lower numbers of Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus*, Large Skipper *Ochlodes sylvanus* and Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae*. False Fox-sedge *Carex otrubae*, with a long bract below the ginger-coloured inflorescence, was inspected carefully here before heading into The Spinney, where there are a few clumps of the nationally scarce True Fox-sedge *Carex vulpina*. The route then led along the edge of Upper Marsh field, where Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* was in flower. In other habitats, this plant usually flowers later in the year, but this seems to be a special adaptation to flower before the hay is cut. The next field, Rowbottom, had a particularly rich assemblage of plants, including Great Burnet *Sanguisorba officinalis*, Saw-wort *Serratula tinctoria*, Dropwort *Filipendula vulgaris*, Meadowsweet *F. ulmaria*, Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Meadow Thistle *Cirsium dissectum*, Dyer's Greenweed *Genista tinctoria*, Sneezewort *Achillea ptarmica*, Betony *Stachys officinalis*, Ragged-Robin *Silene flos-cuculi*, Quaking Grass *Briza media* and Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus*.

In the afternoon, the group drove on to **Wendlebury**, for a rather hot walk in the second BBOWT site **Woodsides Reserve**, another ancient hay meadow. Common Meadow-rue *Thalictrum flavum*, Spiny Rest-harrow *Ononis spinosa*, Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and Fragrant-orchid *Gymnadenia conopsea* were amongst the flowers which had not been seen in the morning and Meadow Thistle was more abundant than at Asham Meads. A Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* bounded across the meadow. The ridges were wider than at Asham Meads, and the ridge and furrow system showed the S-shaped curve at the field edge that was typical of ploughing with a team of oxen, indicating that this was an older field system. The margin in the adjacent arable field had a number of interesting plants, including both Round-leaved Fluellen *Kickxia spuria* and Sharp-leaved Fluellen *K. elatine*.

Berkshire County Dragonfly Recorder Mike Turton led 17 members on a dragonfly walk at **BBOWT Decoy Heath** reserve on **Saturday 7 July**. It was a hot and sunny morning – too hot for some of the humans, but ideal for dragonflies. Emperor Dragonflies and Brown Hawkers *Aeshna grandis* patrolled across the first big pond, while a Four-spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* flew out across the open water, then returned to its perch. There were abundant Azure Damselflies *Coenagrion puella* in the poolside vegetation. Mike netted a specimen, to show the narrow blue stripes on the thorax. An Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa* was perching with its wings held open sideways, rather than closed together, like most of the other damselflies. A Black Darter *Sympetrum danae* perched nearby. Out on the open water, Red-eyed Damselflies *Erythromma najas* and Small Red-eyed Damselflies *E. viridulum* rested on floating pondweed leaves. The Small Red-eyed Damselflies had a characteristic resting position with the tip of the abdomen raised. A pair of linked Common Darters *Sympetrum striolatum* was flying over the open water, with the female dipping her abdomen under the surface to lay her eggs. A male Slow-worm was found nearby. In open heathland on the way to the next pond, a Common Blue Damselfly *Enallagma cyathigerum* was netted for closer inspection. It had broader blue stripes on the thorax than the Azure Damselflies which had been seen earlier. The second pond was rapidly drying out. A female White-legged Damselfly *Platycnemis pennipes* and a Blue-tailed Damselfly *Ischnura elegans* were found here. Amongst the vegetation were a number of **exuviae** of the Emperor Dragonfly, showing the hole at the top of the thorax through which the adult dragonfly had emerged. On the way back, a perched worn and rather slim Broad-bodied Chaser had the group puzzled for a while, until the faded yellow dots on the side of the abdomen were seen. The third pond had more open water, again with patrolling Emperor Dragonflies and Brown Hawkers. A Ruddy Darter *Sympetrum sanguineum* and a Common Darter perched nearby, allowing for comparisons between the two. The Ruddy Darter was a bright scarlet with a waisted abdomen and all-red thorax. The Common Darter was a duller orange-red with stripes at the side of the thorax and a straight abdomen. The return walk was over the grassy bank, looking for butterflies. There were many Meadow Browns, a few Marbled Whites, a single Common Blue and tiny Skippers which were too active for exact identification.

A very successful mothing event, organised by Norman Hall, took place at **BBOWT Hartslock Nature Reserve** on the night of **21-22 July**. Three mercury vapour (MV) traps were set up by Norman and Paul Black, together with two MV lamps over white sheets. Additionally, Matt Harrow set up an LED array over a sheet which was powered by a battery pack and specially designed to attract insects. He also helped the others to deploy their equipment. All the moths at the traps and sheets were counted in the morning, starting at about 04:30, but the counting had barely finished by the time other members came to see the catch at 09:00. 104 macro species were seen. With pyralid moths and micromoths, the grand total was over 150 species. Norman's personal database contains records for mothing evenings at Hartslock in 1997, 1999, 2008, 2009 and 2014 (four of which were RDNHS events), so it was easy to find out which species had been seen by the Society there before, and which had not. The following macromoth species were new to the site for us: Scalloped Hook-tip *Falcaria lacertinaria*, Mocha *Cyclophora annularia*, Phoenix *Eulithis prunata*, Maple Pug *Eupithecia inturbata*, White-spotted Pug *E. tripunctaria*, Tawny Speckled Pug *E. icterata*, Bordered Pug *E. succenturiata*, Yarrow Pug *E. millefoliata*, Common Wave *Cabera exanthemata*, Tree-lichen Beauty *Cryphia algae*, Olive *Ipimorpha subtusa*, Lunar-spotted Pinion *Cosmia pyralina*, Mottled Rustic *Caradrina morpheus*, Gold Spot *Plusia festucae* and Marsh Oblique-barred *Hypenodes humidalis*. Of these, Marsh Oblique-barred was the most unexpected because it is so local. It is also very small and likely to be dismissed as 'only a micro' by those only interested in the larger moths. In fact, it is a macromoth related to the Snout *Hypena proboscidalis*. Tree-lichen Beauty was good to see, because it is a relatively recent arrival in this country and was very scarce at the time of our earlier visits. Common Wave was an

unexpected addition because it is so common that it is amazing that it had not been recorded before. A general observation was that some of the larger moths that one might expect to be common at this time of year were present in remarkably small numbers, or completely absent. It was suggested that some of them might emerge in numbers after the next rains. There's no point in laying eggs if your larvae on hatching will have nothing lush to feed on. On Sunday morning, those present were able to look at examples of most of the macromoths in glass tubes or to photograph them. The organisers did not get away before mid-day when it was rather hot, but they had deliberately set up the examination table in a shaded spot and could leave satisfied and still comfortable.

On **Saturday 4 August**, another hot and cloudless day, a party of 15 walkers met in the lay-by at **Gangsdown Hill** to the west of Nettlebed on the A4130 for a walk led by Jan and Jerry Welsh. A shady start through the woods on the old road soon gave way to an arable landscape bounded by a species-rich hedge with Traveller's-joy *Clematis vitalba*, Wayfaring-tree *Viburnum lantana* and a mysterious shrub with four-sided stems, eventually disclosed to the party by the leaders as Spindle *Euonymus europaeus*. This section of the walk was herb-rich, with Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, Red Bartsia *Odontites vernus*, Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis*, St. John's-worts *Hypericum* spp, Bladder Campion *Silene vulgaris* and White Campion *S. latifolia*, Common and Greater Knapweed *Centaurea scabiosa*, Common Toadflax *Linaria vulgaris* and Wild Teasel *Dipsacus fullonum*, with the arable margin having some cut-back Chicory *Cichorium intybus* in flower, Sun Spurge *Euphorbia helioscopia*, Small Toadflax *Chaenorhinum minus* and Dwarf Mallow *Malva neglecta*. The route turned north beyond Harcourt Hill then east towards Ewelme Park. Above the path on the return section of the walk, a chalk exposure had Fairy Flax *Linum catharticum*, Wild Thyme *Thymus polytrichus* and Wild Candytuft *Iberis amara*, its finding put down by one of the party to the society's GPS, but by the leaders to their observational skills. On the fence margin was a magnificent display of Weld *Reseda luteola* two metres high. Continuing past a field of cultivated legumes, the highlight of the walk, a single Clouded Yellow *Colias croceus* butterfly, added to the list of Common Blue, Meadow Brown, Small Skipper, Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*, Holly Blue, Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus*, Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* and Whites seen previously. Small Nettle *Urtica urens* was seen by buildings around Ewelme Park and, while cooling off after the climb, a flock of Swallows added to the pleasure of the walk. Two members of the party rested in the shade to be picked up later, the remainder of the group made their way due south back to the lay-by via a wood with Nettle-leaved Bellflower *Campanula trachelium* and Enchanter's Nightshade *Circaea lutetiana*, some moving on to the leader's house for a welcome drink.

On **Saturday 19 August**, together with Andy Bolton, Sarah and Ken White led an afternoon visit to **The Warren at Tidgrove** near **Kingsclere**, by kind invitation of the owner Raleigh Place. The farm, comprising some 200 acres, is managed for wildlife under Higher Level Stewardship. After a brief introduction, Raleigh escorted the group firstly through an area of reverting chalk grassland and scrub to the highest point on the farm, from which Stone Curlews *Burhinus oedicephalus* were viewed through a telescope, on an adjacent area of cultivated ground. Initially, only two birds were seen as they hid behind the vegetation, but when they eventually flew off, a total of nine were counted. From the same viewpoint we saw Brown Hares *Lepus europaeus*, Skylarks *Alauda arvensis*, adult and newly-fledged juvenile Buzzards and two Kestrels, while at least four Red Kites *Milvus milvus* could be seen simultaneously in the sky around the farm. The next stop was a brief one to view the archaeological excavations of the palace of Henry II and then on to see a new scrape created to attract butterflies. Butterflies here included Common Blue, Brown Argus *Aricia agestis* and Small Heath. There were also Treble-bar *Aplocera plagiata* and Silver-Y *Autographa gamma* moths, as well as some interesting arable plants including Small

Toadflax and Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia peplus*. The last stop was an area of arable land with a very rich flora, most notably good numbers of Red Hemp-nettle *Galeopsis angustifolia*, classified as Critically Endangered and now very uncommon. Other plants found included Scented Mayweed *Matricaria recutita*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*, Common Fumitory *Fumaria officinalis*, Field Madder *Sherardia arvensis*, Slender Sandwort *Arenaria serpyllifolia* subsp. *leptoclados* and both Round-leaved and Sharp-leaved Fluellen. Raleigh had planted seed crops here including Sorghum, Flax and Millet to provide food for wintering finches and the area will not be cultivated until the early spring, allowing late-flowering arable plants plenty of time to shed seed. Flocks of Linnets *Carduelis cannabina*, numbering up to 60 birds, were already frequenting this area. The group then retired to the comfort of the fishing hut where Raleigh had generously provided tea and coffee. Swallows and House Martins fed over the lake in front of the hut, where there were large numbers of pond skaters *Gerris lacustris*, and various dragonflies and damselflies. Stock Doves *Columba oenas* and a Grey Heron were seen passing by. Along the new lake edge were Marsh Yellow-cress *Rorippa palustris* and Celery-leaved Buttercup *Ranunculus sceleratus*.

Julia Cooper and Ian Duddle led 15 members on an afternoon walk on **Saturday 1 September at Bartley Heath** near **Hook**, a nature reserve of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust [HIWWT]. The last time that the Society visited the reserve, back in 2011, the heathland was wet and the ponds were full of water. After this year's hot and dry summer, the heathland was very dry and the ponds were empty. But despite the dry conditions, most of the target species were found, though some were not flowering and some were smaller than usual. The walk started out through open woodland, where flowering Common Fleabane *Pulicaria dysenterica* and the leaves of Sneezewort and Betony were noted. A Common Dog-violet in flower was a surprise find here, as was Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*. The route then led out onto the open heath, where Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Cross-leaved Heath *E. tetralix*, Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* were in flower. Creeping Willow *Salix repens*, both Downy Birch *Betula pubescens* and Silver Birch *B. pendula* and the leaves of Meadow Thistle were also seen here. There were a few plants of Petty Whin *Genista anglica* and one of them had several plump seed pods. Star plants of the afternoon were the Marsh Gentians *Gentiana pneumonanthe*. About 15 plants were found, some with single flowers, a few with up to 5 flowers. Back in 2011, the official count had been of almost a thousand plants, but apparently numbers have been much lower in recent years. Common Blue, Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* and Small Heath butterflies were seen here.

Next stop was a series of small dried-up ponds which had been formed by the small-scale extraction of gravel by the commoners. Bog Pimpernel, Lesser Skullcap *Scutellaria minor*, Marsh Pennywort *Hydrocotyle vulgaris*, Creeping Jenny *Lysimachia nummularia*, Water Mint *Mentha aquatica* and Lesser Spearwort were amongst the sightings here, and a Ruddy Darter flew between perches nearby. The walk continued along a woodland ride where Tufted Forget-me-not *Myosotis laxa*, Water-purslane *Lythrum portula*, Water-pepper *Persicaria hydropiper* and Marsh Cudweed *Gnaphalium uliginosum* were found in a damper section. Clumps of Broad Buckler-fern *Dryopteris dilatata* and Narrow Buckler-fern *D. carthusiana* were growing close together, the latter with pale brown scales at the base of the stalk, the former with leaf scales with a dark line down the centre. The ride led to another open area of heathland, where there were many more Betony plants, but only a few small flowers. The final section of the walk was along the old road, leading to a sunny clearing where Purple Hairstreak *Favonius quercus* butterflies can reliably be found earlier in the summer, flying around the oak trees in late afternoon. A Southern Hawker *Aeshna cyanea* dragonfly and a Speckled Wood butterfly were seen here. Finally, a member who had returned ahead of the main group reported a Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* in the trees by the car park.

Attended by 10 members, Ken and Sarah White organised a return visit to **Titchfield Haven National Nature Reserve** on **Wednesday 26 September**. Those who arrived early morning were treated to a Hirundine lift off the reserve reed beds of over 1,000 Swallows, the majority of which were juvenile birds. Amongst them were the occasional House Martin and Sand Martin *Riparia riparia*. In the early morning sunshine they all had only one thing in mind - they all headed off across the Solent towards the east end of the Isle of Wight, and an hour later they had all gone. Together with the Swallows, a late solitary Sandwich Tern *Sterna sandvicensis* represented the last of the summer migrants on their way south, but a delightful surprise was the newly arrived first family of four wintering Russian Dark-bellied Brent Geese flying up the Solent, emphasising the change of the seasons. As the tide came in, distant shore birds were pushed up the beach, most of which were Turnstone and Ringed Plover. After meeting at the reserve visitor centre, the group made their way to the southernmost hide, a short walk along the coast road and past the sluice, around which Turnstones posed for close scrutiny, allowing the juveniles to be picked out. Gadwall were on the beach dabbling in the mud, alongside roosting gulls which included Common Gull and the odd Mediterranean Gull. The freshwater lakes in front of the Meon Shore Hide afforded close views of Snipe, Black-tailed Godwit, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos* and Lapwing. Keeping the full sun at their backs, the group walked up the eastern side of the reserve to the Knights Bank Hide, which overlooks the Frying Pan Lake and the adjacent meadows. Every effort was made to see one of the star-bird attractions here of Cattle Egrets *Bubulcus ibis* that were keeping the reserve cow herd company, but only glimpses were possible due to the tall vegetation in the meadows. En route Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* were clearly heard, and Kingfishers *Alcedo atthis* dashed up and down the waterways; a patient stalking Heron provided an interesting contrast to the agitated and lively feeding action of a Little Egret viewed from the Suffern Hide. The warm temperatures encouraged noticeable levels of activity from numerous Common Darter and Migrant Hawker *Aeshna mixta* dragonflies; this perhaps was the most important factor for the appearance of the other star-bird later in the afternoon!

First stop after lunch at the visitor centre was the Meon Shore Hide again, where there was a different blend of shore birds roosting on the high tide: a small flock of Sanderling adults with this year's juveniles, confiding views of juvenile Black-tailed Godwits, plus one or two Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, a wader that always seems to cause confusion! The group continued up the west side of the reserve to the Spurgin Hide, from where strips of low growing yellow-flowering plants along the scrape margins were close enough to be identified by telescope as the naturalised alien Buttonweed *Cotula coronopifolia*. The highlight of the day was a brief but exciting view of a juvenile Hobby *Falco subbuteo* gliding in front of the hide devouring one of the unlucky dragonflies, before resuming its normal fast hunting flight straight over the hide and off to the west and behind the trees out of sight. While wandering back to the car parking along the beach, a distant group of Common Scoter *Melanitta nigra* were found off shore with a couple of Great Crested Grebes. Noisy groups of Oystercatcher on the shore were accompanied by another group of three Brent Geese, a poignant reminder that winter was not far around the corner. Some members stayed for supper at the nearby Osborne pub, and were treated to a spectacular evening-long sunset.

Michael Keith-Lucas led 18 members on a walk at the **National Trust Watlington Hill** on the warm and sunny afternoon of **Sunday 21 October**. There were a few fungi in the wood next to the car park, including the poisonous Yellow Stainer *Agaricus xanthodermus*. The track led out into open chalk grassland, with distant and slightly hazy views across a large section of Oxfordshire. Many plants were still in flower, including Rough Hawkbit *Leontodon hispidus* and Autumn Hawkbit *L. autumnalis*, Wild Basil, Carline Thistle *Carlina vulgaris*, Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata*, Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acer*, Dwarf Thistle *Cirsium acaule* and

Dewberry *Rubus caesius*. A line of small, off-white fungi with an incense-like smell in the short turf were identified later as Cedarwood Waxcaps *Hygrocybe russocoriacea*. Michael pointed out the different plants on the sides of the ant hills, with Common Rock-rose and Wild Thyme on the south side and Wild Strawberry *Fragaria vesca* on the north side. There were cushions of Common Rock-rose, with a few plants still in flower. The walk continued into an area of Yew *Taxus baccata* woodland. At the base of some of the trees were branches from long-dead Juniper bushes which had the distinctive smell of freshly-sharpened pencils. Michael explained that the hillside would originally have been tightly grazed by sheep, but the Juniper bushes would have given protection from browsing animals to young Yew seedlings. These eventually grew into spreading trees which deprived the Junipers of light and killed them. Below the Yew wood was another open area of grassland. A Peacock butterfly was seen here, together with the flowers of Wild Candytuft, Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria*, Clustered Bellflower *Campanula glomerata* and Eyebright *Euphrasia*. Glossy black berries of Wild Privet were noted beside the path. Also seen here was the last surviving Juniper bush on Watlington Hill. It had a good crop of berries, but there were no signs of rejuvenation. The route led back into dark Yew woodland. In a more open clearing there were plants of Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna* and Bittersweet *Solanum dulcamara*. Emerging from the dark woodland, the path led up onto a section of hillside where there were abundant berries on Buckthorn *Rhamnus cathartica* and Dogwood *Cornus sanguinea*. A small group of Grisettes *Amanita vaginata*, greyish fungi growing out of bag-like volvas and with finely grooved cap margins, were found here. A Red Admiral butterfly was disturbed and Pale Toadflax *Linaria repens* and Lady's Bedstraw *Gallium verum* were added to the flower count.

Mike Waterman led 21 members on a fungus identification walk at **Pamber Forest** on the afternoon of **Saturday 17 November**. It was a sunny but cool day and the autumn colours were close to their best. After a long, hot and dry summer and a mainly dry autumn, the fungus season had been slow to get going. Recent rain had encouraged more species to appear, but the numbers of ground-growing fungi still seemed to be depressed. The walk started out along the bridleway which runs southwards from the Impstone Road car park, before turning right through an open gateway into a grassy field. A small group of earthballs with distinct stem-like structures at their bases were identified as Scaly Earthball *Scleroderma verrucosum*. The field sloped down into a wood which was predominately of oak, but with a scattering of other species, including Birch, Sweet Chestnut, Willow and Scots Pine. Butter Caps *Rhodocollybia butyracea*, with two-toned brown, greasy caps, were found at the top of the wood. A stump was covered in pale grey Candlesnuff Fungus *Xylaria hypoxylon*, there were Birch Polypores: *Piptoporus betulinus* on a fallen birch trunk and Turkeytail *Trametes versicolor* was found on a fallen branch. Bleeding Oak Crust *Stereum gausapatum*, which stains red when cut, was found on dead wood. It was suggested that tiny white blobs on a dead branch might be some sort of slime mould. A fallen log showed the characteristic turquoise-green staining of Green Elfcup *Chlorociboria aeruginascens*.

One of the most unusual sightings of the afternoon was a dark brown, folded jelly fungus on a fallen tree trunk which was identified as Leafy Brain *Tremella foliacea*. A two-toned tufted fungus with a ring that was found on a dead branch was identified as Sheathed Woodtuft *Kuehneromyces mutabilis*. A fallen stick had small creamy-white fan-like specimens of the Variable Oysterling *Crepidotus variabilis*, while the less common *C. epibryus* was found on an oak leaf. A fan-like gilled fungus on a dead oak branch was identified as Bitter Oysterling *Panellus stipticus*. There were a number of specimens of the orange Common Rustgill *Gymnopilus penetrans* under a big Scots Pine. Nearby was a pale yellow False Deathcap *Amanita citrina*. Mike commented that the dark brown Oak Curtain Crust *Hymenochaete rubiginosa* always looks old, even when it is actually still fresh. Apart from the fungi, a Goldcrest *Regulus regulus* was singing in the canopy, a Dor Beetle *Geotrupes stercorarius* and a bright green female Oak Bush-cricket *Meconema thalassinum* were



spotted and clumps of Hard Fern *Blechnum spicant* were noted. A clump of Sulphur Tuft *Hypholoma fasciculare* was found on a tree stump and small round specimens of Snowy Disco *Lachnum virgineum* were found on a dead branch. Walking back up to the top of the wood, a Blushing Bracket *Daedaleopsis confragosa* was seen on Goat Willow. Nearby was an Ochre Brittlegill *Russula ochroleuca*, whose identity was confirmed when its stem stained blue after a drop of resin in alcohol was applied. A drop of latex from the Mild Milkcap *Lactarius subdulcis* was put on white paper, where it did not change colour. Back in the field above the wood, several specimens of the yellow Butter Waxcap *Hygrocybe ceracea* were found. The final sighting of the afternoon, in the wood by the car park, was a Parasol Mushroom *Macrolepiota procera* which was somewhat past its best. Mike showed how the ring could slide up and down the stem.

## MID-WEEK WALKS 2018

### Reports by Jan Haseler, Julia Cooper and Sue White

Armed with a copy of Dick Greenaway's 'Veteran Trees for the Future' map, John Lerpiniere led 11 members on a walk round **Ashampstead Common** on the morning of **Tuesday 23 January 2018**. Following severe winds the previous weekend, a number of trees had fallen across paths, making progress tricky. The first notable tree was a 200-year-old Sweet Chestnut. This was followed by a big Holly, a 400-year-old Beech and some big old Oak pollards. Nuthatch, Marsh Tit and numerous Great Tits were heard. After crossing the road, the next section had a number of tall conifers, including a Cedar with chunky round cones, a number of Scots Pines and a Douglas Fir, where the cones had distinctive antler-shaped bracts which were much longer than the scales. Bright green Bluebell leaves were peeping up above the leaf litter. The path led to the edge of the woods, where there were flowers on the Dog's Mercury and many Snowdrops were coming into flower. Veteran trees in this part of the Common included Oak, Yew and Sweet Chestnut. In a puddle in a wet part of the path were Brooklime and a Starwort. Two Roe Deer ran through the woods and two Muntjac Deer were spotted.

Crossing back over the road, a thicket of young Ash trees showed signs of Ash Dieback disease. A very steep-sided chalk pit was circumnavigated in an unsuccessful hunt for a notable Sycamore. The next path led to a wide ride which is kept open by volunteers. The Hazel bushes at the sides were covered in catkins and the first of the red female flowers were seen. Towards the lower boundary of the wood was a big bank with a ditch on the inside, showing that this had once been a deer park and the bank was there to keep the deer in. A big Beech pollard was 5.5 metres in girth and at least 350 years old. The map showed Wild Service-tree beyond the bank but just inside the wood. Careful searching revealed many Wild Service-tree leaves on the ground, but it took a bit of detective work to work out which were the trees themselves. Pale-backed leaves revealed the presence of Whitebeam in the chalky part of the wood, but not much further along the path acid-loving Gorse was in flower. A Buzzard flew low above people's heads and along the path ahead. The route led back to the car park and the group then continued to the Red Lion at Upper Basildon for lunch.

On **Wednesday 21 February**, a dull but dry day with light winds, 15 members met at the junction of **The Ridgeway and Swan's Way**. Julia Cooper and Ian Duddle led the group south towards **Hailey**, and then east towards Woodhouse Farm, where the attractive metal farm sign was admired. A Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming in the nearby wood. The footpath continued up the hill through arable fields. In contrast to the almost weed-free wheat crop, arable weeds were growing in the oilseed rape, and Corn Parsley was identified. There were a few Fieldfares in the valley, a Yellowhammer was seen in the hedgerow by the track, a Skylark was singing overhead and two Cormorants flew southwards, while Red Kites and a Buzzard were

soaring at the top of the hill. In Mongewell Woods, there was a carpet of Bluebell leaves but no sign of flowers, and Primrose plants were abundant, with one in flower found in a sheltered spot. There were several Green Hellebore plants to the left of the path in a position recorded in 2006 by Jan and Jerry Welsh. A Marsh Tit was seen and a Jay was heard calling. Several pits of various shapes and sizes near the path prompted speculation on their origins as chalk pits, sawpits, sink holes or bomb craters. After passing Upper House Farm, the walk continued along the footpath towards Nuffield. In a strip of woodland were a clump of Sanicle leaves, and a patch of wild Gooseberry just coming into leaf. The route then turned left onto the Ridgeway path - this section runs along Grim's Ditch and is a diversion from the original Ridgeway. There was a single Green Hellebore plant by a large fallen tree, and a fine display of many more plants, some in full flower, further down the path in Morrell's Bottom. This site was last visited by the Society in March 2003 and it was good to see the plants thriving here. Continuing along the Ridgeway to complete the circuit, there was a Yew Tree in flower, a Raven was heard calling and a flock of about 100 Fieldfares and Redwings flew overhead. Afterwards all the walkers and 2 other members enjoyed lunch at the King William at Hailey.

On **Wednesday 21 March**, Fiona Brown led 17 members on a circular walk which started from the Dew Drop pub, between **Hurley and Burchett's Green**. After a frosty start, the morning was bright and sunny. The walk started out through the woods below Ashley Hill, where flowering Primroses, glossy Bluebell leaves and a clump of Soft Shield-fern were seen. Continuing through Warren Row, Sweet Violet and Lesser Celandine were in flower on the bank beside the road. The next path led through the woods on the north side of Bowsey Hill, which were quite wet in parts. Nuthatches and Great Tits called and Spurge-laurel and Hard Shield-fern were added to the sightings. A log had claw marks, perhaps of a Badger, and Muntjac droppings were noted. After a stretch of lane, the route continued along tracks between the manicured hedges of a stud farm. A row of apple trees were smothered in Mistletoe, while at the roadside Whitlow-grass, Hairy Bitter-cress and a speedwell were in flower. Footpaths led to Hurley Chalk-pit, a reserve of the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT). Just below the sunny chalk face, a number of clumps of Hairy Violet were in flower. Solitary bees and spiders were active on the steep slope of chalk rubble. There were heads of Carline Thistle from last year and leaves of Common Rock-rose and Salad Burnet. The route continued along trackways and across a grassy field, where there were superb views across the valley of the Thames to the Chilterns beyond. Afterwards, lunch was enjoyed at the Dew Drop Inn.

Rob Stallard led 20 members and guests on a walk through some of the **Tilehurst** copses and parks on the hot, sunny morning of **Wednesday 18 April**, starting from Tilehurst Recreation Ground. The first stop was in an alleyway, where two spiky black and yellow caterpillars of the Scarlet Tiger moth were feeding on the leaves of Green Alkanet. The route continued across Blagrove Recreation Ground to Blundell's Copse. Wood Anemones were at their peak and the first Bluebells were coming into flower. Other flowers included Wood-sorrel, Early Dog-violet, Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage, Wavy Bitter-cress and Moschatel. A few clumps of Hairy Wood-rush were in flower beside the path, a number of Scarlet Elf-cup fungi were spotted and Soft-Shield-fern and Hart's-tongue Fern were identified. Newly-emerged Speckled Wood and Holly Blue butterflies were seen, together with Brimstone, Peacock and Comma butterflies which had over-wintered as adults. Turning over a stone in the stream which runs through the copse revealed a small grey freshwater shrimp *Gammarus pulex*, an indicator of good water quality. In the north-east corner of the wood, there was a big patch of flowering Three-cornered Garlic. The walk continued along roads to Lousehill Copse, passing a patch of grass with the pink flowers of Common Stork's-bill. The route led steeply down through the copse to a large pond at the bottom. Several Orange-tip butterflies were on the wing, and plant species added to the tally included Yellow Archangel, Wood Speedwell, Common Dog-violet, Brooklime, Gooseberry, Colt's-foot and Woodruff. A Treecreeper, Jays and a Great Spotted Woodpecker were seen, and Chiffchaff, Blackcap and Stock Dove were heard.

After crossing Norcot Road, the next part of the walk went through Mcllroy Park. A number of old trackways lead through the park. On the banks of the entrance track were Greater Stitchwort and Bush Vetch and more Speckled Wood and Brimstone butterflies were seen here. The track along the west side of the park led through big old Beech trees, with some large multi-stemmed specimens growing on the bank beside the track. After a short steep climb, the group emerged on the grassy area at the top, with splendid views down into Reading and across the Thames. The route led along the grassy top, past Wild Cherry trees covered in white blossom, and back into the woods at the north-west end of the park. A sunny stretch of woods here had the best display of Bluebells of the morning and a big black and orange Red-tailed Bumblebee queen was visiting the flowers. After a steep descent and a long climb, the next destination was Arthur Newbery Park. English Elm trees in the south-east corner of the park had flowered a few weeks previously and their green seed clusters were inspected. At the south-west corner of the park is an old thatched cottage, next to a spring which feeds a small stream, which soon vanishes as it drops down into drains near the boundary with the top of the Chalk. The walk continued back through allotments, with an unsuccessful hunt for Slow-worms under old carpet and in compost bins, before heading back to the Victoria pub for lunch.

The Perch and Pike at **South Stoke** was the starting point for a circular walk led by Ian Esland on the warm and sunny morning of **Tuesday 22 May**. 15 members set out past the school and church, then eastwards out of the village along the Woodcote Road. Cow-parsley and Hawthorn blossom were a constant theme throughout the walk. On the roadside banks were Hedgerow Crane's-bill and White and Bladder Campion. Two Corn Buntings were calling from the tops of low bushes and Skylarks were singing overhead. A narrow footpath across the fields led first through winter wheat, then through spring barley, then onto a flowery and grassy area where Small Heath and Common Blue butterflies were seen. At the end of the next wheat field was a bank, where 2 years ago there had been an interesting collection of arable plants. Sadly none were to be seen this time, following ploughing right up to the field edge and spraying. The route then turned westwards along the Swan's Way. Yellowhammer, Blackcap and Whitethroat were heard and seen along this stretch. At times, the petals of May blossom blowing in the strong breeze looked like snow. The walk continued to Littlestoke. Long-headed Poppies were flowering on top of an old flint-and-brick wall and Dwarf Elder, an uncommon plant in South Oxfordshire, was found at a known site on a lane-side verge. A pair of Brimstone butterflies zig-zagged upwards together, keeping a constant distance apart, as if joined by invisible wire, with the female above and the male below. The route then led through the garden of Littlestoke Manor, down to the River Thames and along the footpath which followed the riverbank southwards. The explosive call of a Cetti's Warbler was heard, a Kingfisher flew downstream and Hobby and Kestrel were seen. Comfrey and Meadow Crane's-bill were in flower, Water Dock was noted on the bank and there were tall stands of Hemlock. Banded Demoiselles were perched on the riverside vegetation. Finally, a Sedge Warbler was watched as it sang from a tall seed head above a marshy area. The walk was followed by lunch at the Perch and Pike.

Rob Stallard led 23 members on a circular walk which started from BBOWT's **Seven Barrows Reserve** near Lambourn on **Wednesday 20 June**. The route started out up the road towards Crog Hill. On the verge at the side of the road were Dropwort and three yellow members of the Daisy family – Rough Hawk's-beard, Mouse-ear-hawkweed and Rough Hawkbit. Rob told the group that long barrows belong to the oldest surviving architectural tradition in England and that the Crog Hill barrow is one of the earliest, thought to date back to about 3700 BC. Beech trees grow around the barrow site. On the other side of the track was a White Helleborine which had gone to seed, together with a number of Pyramidal Orchids and Common Spotted-orchids. The track continued westwards along the county boundary between West Berkshire and Oxfordshire. Sightings along this stretch included Horseshoe and Kidney Vetch, Greater Knapweed, Fairy Flax, Goat's-beard, Meadow Crane's-bill, Common Broomrape and Field Scabious. The commonest butterfly was Meadow Brown, but Common Blue, Small Blue, Small Heath and a single very fresh Marbled White were also seen here. The route then turned southwards, along a track which ran beside racehorse gallops. Kidney Vetch and Fairy Flax were particularly abundant here, together with

Large Skipper butterflies and Narrow-bordered Five-spot Burnet moths. Yellowhammers and Corn Buntings sang from the tops of scattered Hawthorn Bushes. The track passed into a less open section, where Bramble, Dog-rose and Privet were in flower. Speckled Wood and new generation Brimstone butterflies were seen here and a herd of nine Fallow Deer was disturbed. Passing Hangman's Stone, the route turned sharply back north-eastwards onto another track. There were several big patches of Comfrey here which were being visited by bees and a Scarlet Tiger moth. 23 tall brown Knapweed Broomrape plants were counted along this section of the track, and Ringlet and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies were seen. The final part of the walk was spent on the Seven Barrows reserve. The reserve had become very overgrown. To correct this, it had been heavily grazed by cattle earlier in the year. Sightings here included Chalk Fragrant-orchid, Long-stalked Crane's-bill, Saw-wort, Common Rock-rose, Wild Thyme, Squinancywort, Hoary Plantain, Dropwort, Quaking-grass, Lady's Bedstraw, Bladder Campion, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Horseshoe Vetch, and five Ravens flew calling nearby. The walk was followed by lunch at the George Hotel in Lambourn, where screaming Swifts were flying overhead.

On **Wednesday 11 July**, Fiona Brown led 14 members on a walk which started from **Dorney Court** Garden Centre. The first part of the route was along the south bank of the **Jubilee River**. Following a month with high temperatures and no rain, the grass was dry and brown. The river bank, in contrast, was green and lush, with flowers including Purple-loosestrife, Great Willowherb, Marsh Woundwort, Meadowsweet, Water Forget-me-not, Hemp-agrimony, Hoary Ragwort, Orange Balsam, Common Valerian and Wild Angelica. Branched Bur-reed, Reed Sweet-grass, Reed Canary-grass and Water Dock were also noted. Apparently the vegetation had been left to develop naturally, without additional planting, when the Jubilee River was constructed. Swifts, Swallows, House Martins and a Common Tern flew above the water, while Sedge Warbler, Reed Bunting and Cetti's Warbler were heard. Many butterflies were on the wing, including Large, Small and Green-veined White, Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Ringlet, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Essex Skipper. Flowers higher up the bank included Wild Carrot, Lady's Bedstraw, Bristly Oxtongue, Common Knapweed and Great Burnet. A mating pair of Six-belted Clearwing moths was spotted on a dried-up flower head and two other moths, presumably males, flew up to investigate. The walk continued under the M4 then across to the east bank of the River Thames, with Red Admiral, Comma, Peacock and Speckled Wood butterflies seen along the way. A fossil sea urchin was found amongst the gravel on the riverside path and Gypsywort, Water Figwort and Water Mint were seen on the riverbank. The walk was followed by lunch at the Garden Centre, and afterwards some of the group walked round the gardens, where there were an impressive number of bees visiting the lavender.

Jan and Laurie Haseler led 17 members on a walk round **Crookham Common** and **BBOWT Baynes Wood** reserve on **Wednesday 15 August**. Following several months of hot, dry weather, the grass on the common was crisp and brown, dotted with the yellow flowers of Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and Lesser Hawkbit. Heather and Dwarf Gorse were also in flower. Common Blue butterflies were quite numerous and a few Small Heaths were seen. The walk started out past a series of ponds which were edged with the invasive New Zealand Pigmyweed. Flowers on the banks included Viper's Bugloss, Eyebright, Common and Blue Fleabane, Red Bartsia, Common Cudweed, Centaury, Sticky Groundsel, Dwarf and Carline Thistle and Common Knapweed. A flock of Linnets moved around the bushes. No fungi at all were seen on the common. Baynes Wood, in contrast, was green and lush. The first path led steeply downhill, edged with a plentiful supply of ripe blackberries. Enchanter's Nightshade and Yellow Pimpernel were in flower here. After crossing a stream near the bottom of the wood, the route continued back up the valley, following first the stream, then the clearing under the power lines. Here there were dense patches of Wood Club-rush and Water Mint, the latter attracting bees, Hornets, Common Blue Damselflies and Green-veined White and Common Blue butterflies. A single Silver-washed Fritillary flew up into the trees. Other flowers seen here included Hemp-agrimony, Common Hemp-nettle, Wild Angelica, Marsh Thistle and a scattering of Himalayan Balsam. The route continued back onto the common. Dodder, with its tiny clusters of pink flowers, was spotted growing on Gorse. A boardwalk on the slopes below the southern side of the common crossed a boggy area where

Wood Horsetail, Bog Pimpernel, and a plant that was later identified as Sensitive Fern *Onoclea sensibilis* were seen. Further on was a pond with Bogbean, Purple Loosestrife, Lesser Spearwort and Common Calamint. On the walk back across the common, a Little Egret was spotted at the edge of one of the ponds. Lunch followed at the Traveller's Friend at Crookham.

Marion Venners and Maggie Bridges led 11 members on a walk which started from the Cherry Tree Inn at **Stoke Row** on **Wednesday 19 September**. The route led steeply down through Beech woodland where, despite the prolonged dry weather conditions, a few Parasol Mushrooms were found. Pale leaves and a few stout red berries on the ground betrayed the presence of a Whitebeam tree next to the path. After crossing Newnhamhill Bottom, the walk continued along the lane towards Nott Wood. A Crab Apple tree, Scaly Male Fern, Wall Lettuce and Nettle-leaved Bellflower were noted here. A Raven was calling from the tops of the trees in Nott Wood and a fresh Puffball was found. Near Howberrywood, there was an arable field whose surface was covered with flints. Star finds here were a number of plants of Corn Spurrey, which is listed in the Oxfordshire Rare Plants Register and classed nationally as Vulnerable. The next footpath led through several more arable fields, with far-reaching views on both sides. Red Bartsia and Chicory were found here. One of the fields had more Corn Spurrey growing up between the crop. The path then ran next to a small wood which had a deep chalk pit. A herd of brown and white longhorn cattle were grazing in a field beside the track. The walk continued past English Farm, which had a range of attractive flint and brick buildings and a magnificent old barn. Turning back south-eastwards, the next track led gently down the valley bottom and into woodland. In the hedge beside the path was a thornless wild plum with sweetish purple fruits, and a Speckled Wood butterfly was spotted in a sunny sheltered spot. Common Hemp-nettle was in flower beside the path. The final section of the route climbed steeply back up towards the village. The walk was followed by lunch at the Cherry Tree Inn.

13 members joined Renée Grayer on the still, damp morning of **Wednesday 17 October** for a walk starting from the Plowden Arms at **Shiplake**. First stop was the churchyard of Shiplake Church, which had a fine Indian Bean Tree. Over the wall in the grounds of Shiplake College was a strange flint and brick building which had apparently been built as a water tower in Victorian times. Calls of Ring-necked Parakeets were heard for the first time – there would be plenty more during the morning. A short diversion led to a pond with clear water near the river. Small fish could be seen, together with flowers of Water Forget-me-not and Water Mint. Guelder-rose berries were waxy red in the hedgerows and there were curtains of Hops and strings of White Bryony berries. A clump of Shaggy Inkcaps was found near the College boatyard. The walk continued downstream along the bank of the Thames. Two Mute Swans were busy feeding on the river and there were many pond skaters on the surface of the water. Lesser Water-parsnip and Gypsywort were found in wet woodland beside the path and the leaves of Loddon Lily were just beginning to poke up through the mud. One by one, three small mice emerged from somewhere close to people's feet and scampered into thicker vegetation. Continuing downstream, the path led past two enormous plane trees. Upright Hedge-parsley, Bristly Oxtongue and Common Fleabane were still in flower and there were seed spikes of Purple Loosestrife. A Marsh-mallow plant on the river bank had a single flower. When the plant was discovered last year, it was a new species for Oxfordshire. Since then, it has also been found at a second site closer to Oxford. Seed heads of Flowering Rush could be seen at the water's edge. The route led away from the river for a brief stretch, first past houses and then below the elevated section of the Henley railway line, before returning to an open section of river bank. A Kingfisher flew low over the water. Flowers of Lady's Bedstraw and Common Toadflax and plants of Water Figwort and Square-stalked St John's-wort were also seen. The return route led away from the river, following lanes and tracks back to the Plowden Arms.

Sarah and Ken White led a walk on the cold but sunny morning of **Wednesday 21 November**, starting from the Butt Inn at **Aldermaston Wharf**. A female Blackcap was seen in the car park while the group were assembling. 14 members set out along the road to the Kennet and Avon

Canal, then turned downstream along the towpath, where a crane had just lifted a boat out of the water. At the next lock, the group crossed the lock gate carefully, noted a Welled Thistle which was still in flower, and followed a narrow path around the edge of a secluded gravel pit. A group of Shoveler had joined the usual Mallard, Coot and Mute Swan. The low vegetation by the path was covered in feathery moss, making it look like a forest of tiny Christmas trees. The route led past Padworth Mill and then followed the River Kennet downstream. Ken pointed out a Swamp Cypress in the garden below the mill. A Dabchick was spotted amongst the vegetation on the far side of the river. One of the bankside Alders was inspected carefully. The dark red male catkins were already fully formed. Ken pointed out the smaller female buds which were currently pointing downwards, but would turn upwards when the pollen was being released next spring. The 'cones' which held this year's seeds are not true cones - the Alder is not a conifer. Gadwall, Pochard, Goldeneye, Tufted Duck and Great Crested Grebe were amongst the sightings on the adjacent gravel pit, together with a flock of about 120 Greylag Geese. A female Kestrel surveyed the bankside vegetation from an overhead wire. After a short stretch of road, the route continued up a track to Old Farm at Padworth, then through horse paddocks to a former nursery site with some interesting conifers. These included a Bhutan Pine *Pinus wallichiana* and a Monterey Pine *P. radiata*. The next footpath led down to Padworth College, then on to Padworth Church. A flock of Redwings flew out of the trees by the churchyard and Fieldfares were heard calling. The Norman archway on the north side of the church and the big Yew in the churchyard were admired. The route then led back down into the river valley, crossing a fast-flowing stream where Water Forget-me-not was still in flower. Guelder-rose berries shone waxy red in the field edge by the river. After crossing the Kennet again, the track led back to Aldermaston Wharf and a welcome lunch at the Butt Inn. A Sparrowhawk which flew over the car park brought the morning's bird tally to 39 species.

Sue White led a walk at **Snelsmore Common** on the chilly but dry morning of **Wednesday 12 December**. On heathland north of the car park, two types of fungus were found on pony dung: the endangered Nail Fungus *Poronia punctata* and the commoner but prettier *Coprinus ephemeroides*. Carpets of mosses and lichens made an attractive setting for flowering Gorse and Cross-leaved Heath. The route led down a wooded valley where the stream bed disappeared into a sinkhole in the underlying chalk. There were some interesting ferns here. Fungi ranged from large brackets of *Ganoderma* and Birch Polypore to tiny Coral Spot, all turning dead wood into a feast for invertebrates and the birds that feed on them. Leaving the Common by a woodland path, a male Winter Moth was found resting between nights spent looking for the flightless females. The path followed a field headland where various hedgerow plants and arable weeds were still in flower, including Spurge-laurel, Ivy, Germander Speedwell, Red and White Dead-nettle, Yarrow, Groundsel and Field Madder. The orange berries of Stinking Iris were seen here too. Returning to the Common, the route skirted a valley mire where colourful Sphagnum and other mosses were recovering from the summer drought. At the drier top of the slope, sightings included Bell Heather with flowers, *Cladonia floerkeana* lichen with bright red fruiting bodies, and a handsome little toadstool *Lichenomphalia umbellata* which is the fruiting body of an unusual lichen. A flock of Siskins was feeding at the edge of a small pond where Water-crowfoot leaves invited a summer visit to see which species it is. There was still plenty to be seen, but the promise of lunch moved the group on to the nearby Fox and Hounds pub.

## **AWAY TRIPS 2018    Reports by Jan Haseler**

Ken and Sarah White organised two residential trips in 2018 which were attended by various members of the Society. **The first trip** was a visit to the northern **Solway Coast** in January, staying at the Mabie House Hotel near Dumfries. Target species for the expedition were Whooper Swans which breed in Iceland, Pink-footed Geese which breed in Eastern Greenland and Iceland, Barnacle Geese which breed on Svalbard, Greenland White-fronted Geese which breed in western Greenland and Pale-bellied Brent Geese, which breed on Ellesmere Island in Arctic Canada and

migrate over the Greenland ice-cap. The party of 14 gathered on Sunday 7 January at **WWT Martin Mere**, a Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve in Lancashire. Regular feeding attracts large numbers of wild birds to a big pool in front of a viewing hide. There were good numbers of Whooper Swans, and many ducks and geese, including feral Greylag Geese, Shelduck, Wigeon, Teal and Pintail. There were also close views of Ruff and a Black-tailed Godwit. Amongst the many finches and tits on the feeders at the edge of the woodland which borders the reserve were a few Tree Sparrows, with rich brown caps and dark cheek spots.

The destination on Monday, a day of bright sunshine but hard frost, was the **WWT Caerlaverock** reserve. Flocks of Pink-footed and Barnacle Geese were feeding in fields on the way to the reserve. Once again, regular feeding in front of a viewing hide had attracted a good sized flock of Whooper Swans, this time together with Mute Swans and duck including Wigeon, Teal, Shoveler and a single female Scaup. Pools on the reserve which would normally have been alive with wildfowl were frozen over and deserted, but out on the salt marsh there were geese and waders including Curlew, Redshank, Lapwing, Golden Plover and Dunlin. A Water Rail was spotted below the feeders in the reedbed and woodland area where the waste water from the Visitor Centre is processed, and there were Yellowhammers and more Tree Sparrows here too. The afternoon was spent at the Saltcot Merse Observatory hide, overlooking saltmarsh and the estuary, where the tide was out. Small groups of Barnacle Geese and Whooper Swans fed nearby, but the star bird was a silvery grey male Hen Harrier which flew close to the hide.

On Tuesday, a grey day with a strengthening wind, the group headed west to **Loch Ryan** near Stranraer. A flock of Scaup were just off-shore on the eastern side of the loch, while Turnstone, Dunlin, Ringed Plover, Curlew, Oystercatcher and Bar-tailed Godwit were feeding on the beach. Red-breasted Merganser, a male Eider and more Scaup were seen in the sheltered waters of Stranraer harbour. In the afternoon, the group drove to **Kirkcolm**, where a grassy peninsula juts out into the western side of Loch Ryan. A flock of about 100 Pale-bellied Brent Geese were feeding in the field beside the track. They remained in a tight flock as they waddled a little further away, but never threatened to fly. Final stop was the sheltered coast road at Stranraer, where Common Scoter and Goldeneye were added to the tally.

The **RSPB Ken-Dee Marshes** reserve was the first destination on Wednesday. The group set out along a track which led through sheep-grazed pasture where Fieldfares and Redwings were seen and into an area of woodland. On one side were big old Beech trees on a steep hillside; a flock of Chaffinches were feeding below the trees and a Red Squirrel was spotted. On the other side, wet woodland led down to the banks of Loch Ken. The first hide overlooked the water. Its three feeders were in constant use by a stream of Blue, Great and Coal Tits, a Nuthatch and two Great Spotted Woodpeckers, but not the hoped-for Willow Tits. But at the next hide, two Willow Tits joined the queue at the feeder, showing their chunky necks and pale primaries and making their distinctive wheezing call. On the walk back, a flock of geese flew in to a field by the car park, and these turned out to be the Greenland White-fronted Geese, with characteristic orange bills. The afternoon was spent at the **RSPB Mersehead** reserve. A Kingfisher was seen on the walk round the reserve. As dusk fell, the group were positioned in the Meida hide, overlooking an extensive reedbed. Small groups of Starlings gradually coalesced into a large murmuration, which passed to and fro, until a Peregrine made two unsuccessful passes through the flock, at which point the Starlings dropped down into the reeds. On the walk back to the cars in the fading light, skeins of Pink-footed Geese flew overhead, heading out to the estuary.

**The second trip**, attended by 12 members and starting on Sunday 13 May, was to **Upper Teesdale**, staying at the Langdale Beck Hotel. The following morning, there was a 6:30 am start to view a nearby Blackcock lek. 19 males were involved, fanning their white tail feathers and holding their wings in an outstretched drooping position. In the background, Curlew, Redshank, Lapwing and Oystercatcher called and Snipe drummed. Higher up the valley, a Golden Plover was seen. After breakfast, there was a short drive to **Widdybank Farm on Moor House – Upper Teesdale National Nature Reserve (NNR)**, where Natural England Senior Reserve Manager Martin Furness was waiting to show the group around Cetry Bank and Widdybank Pasture. Cetry Bank slopes steeply above a bend in the River Tees. Spring Gentian, Bird's-eye Primrose, Alpine Bartsia, Mountain Everlasting, Bitter-vetch, Common Butterwort and Early-purple Orchid were amongst the sightings here, while down by the river, Common Sandpipers were flying between rocks in the

fast flowing water. Up on the acid grassland above Cetry Bank were a different suite of flowers, including Mountain Pansy, Marsh Lousewort and Devil's-bit Scabious. Martin then led the group round a damp field with Wood Anemones and Globeflowers, where he revealed two superbly camouflaged Snipe chicks in the flowery sward. After thanking Martin, the group continued up the valley, seeing Wheatear and Red Grouse on the way to a picnic spot from which a pair of Ring Ouzels were watched. The afternoon destination was **Cow Green Reservoir**. The nature trail leads past exposures of Sugar Limestone, which was formed when the molten rock intrusions which cooled to form the hard dark Dolerite of the Whin Sill forced their way between layers of Carboniferous Limestone. The layers of Limestone immediately above and below the hot rock baked to a crumbling granular consistency and it is on this rock that the rare assemblage of arctic alpine plants is found, including Spring Gentian, Bird's-eye Primrose and Spring Sandwort. The walk continued below the dam wall and along the Pennine Way beside Cauldron Snout waterfall. Pitiful bleating came from the other side of the river, where a lamb was trapped just above the water at the bottom of a precipitous slope. We were relieved to hear later that the lamb had been rescued. In the evening, Phill Warren of the Game and Wildlife Conservation Trust gave a talk on Black Grouse and other birds of the area. Intensive predator control by the grouse moor managers has led to one of the highest densities of breeding waders in the country, but raptor numbers are lower than might be expected.

First stop on Tuesday morning was the car park of **Bowlees Visitor Centre**, where the heads of two baby Mistle Thrushes poked up above the sides of a nest in the fork of a tree. The morning's walk was along the south bank of the River Tees, between the **Low and High Force waterfalls**. Two Common Sandpipers and a Grey Wagtail were seen at the pool below Low Force. The footpath ran between the river and a fence which protected the bankside vegetation from grazing. There were wonderful displays of Globeflowers, and other plants included Sweet Cicely, Water Avens, Shrubby Cinquefoil, Early-purple Orchid, Wood Cranesbill and both Shady and Wood Horsetail. Several families of Lapwings were seen in the fields beside the path. The route then led into the NNR, below a Juniper-covered slope. While inspecting Wood-sorrel flowers beneath a Juniper bush, a sharp-eyed member of the group spotted a Herb-Paris plant, which turned out to be a significant local botanical record. The path led to a dramatic viewpoint overlooking High Force, which drops over an outcrop of the Whin Sill. A rare Rock Whitebeam tree was growing on the cliff nearby. Siskins were feeding on the bird feeders back at the Visitor Centre, a Dipper flew under the bridge and large numbers of Common Twayblades were seen. In the afternoon, the group drove over the fells to **Stanhope** in Weardale. The font in the church is made of the local shining black Frosterley Marble and in the churchyard is a fossil tree from the Carboniferous period. Final stop was a small nature reserve at the spoil heaps of the **Whitesyke and Bentyfield** lead mining complex. Sightings here included Alpine Penny-cress, Pyrenean Scurvygrass, Spring Sandwort and Thrift. Drifts of Water Avens in the damper parts were a magnet for bumblebees. Ferns included Oak Fern, Brittle Bladder-fern and, after much searching, six tiny plants of Moonwort.

**Cronkley Fell** was the destination for Wednesday's walk, starting from Hanging Shaw car park. The walk started out across the valley of the Tees through fields which were yellow with Marsh-marigolds, then continued up over a steep slope of the Whin Sill through a bank of Juniper and out onto the open fells. Red Grouse and Common Heath moths were seen during the climb up through heather moorland. At the top of the ridge were a number of exclosures on exposures of Sugar Limestone. These contained abundant Spring Gentian and Bird's-eye Primrose, plus Spring Sandwort and a few Mountain Avens plants which were not yet in flower. Cloudberry flowers were found nearby and close inspection of the short turf near the picnic stop revealed about 20 specimens of Moonwort. Some of the party then returned by the same route, getting good views of Golden Plover and Red Grouse on the way. The rest dropped down to the Tees, then followed a rocky path along the river bank, where Stonechat, Wheatear, Common Sandpiper, Oystercatcher, Curlew and Tree Pipit were seen.



## INDOOR MEETINGS 2018

### Reports by Rob Stallard, Renée Grayer, Susan Twitchett & Tricia Marcousé

2<sup>nd</sup> January

#### Conservation - My way by Tony Rayner

A few years ago Tony Rayner gave us a talk about creating a nature reserve from scratch in 1991 on a three acre formerly arable cereal plot adjacent to his house in Cholsey following his belief that small projects such as his are necessary due to the general loss of natural habitat. His talk looked at the successes, some failures and the changes seen over the last 20 years.

The basic principles were to grow organically, provide a wildlife haven and to enclose the area with a mixed native species hedge with removal of some Leyland's Cypresses across part of the length. A native seed mix was planted across the site with an additional cornflower mix over one of the acres which provided colourful annuals for two years. The meadow links into the garden which is also planted for wildlife. There is a minimal disturbance margin adjacent to hedge lines that are never mown. Management of the meadow was through grazing initially and it is now cut for hay.

In 2017 the meadow was a mass of Cowslips *Primula veris* in May, Ox-eye Daisy *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum* in June, and for later in the summer Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, Bird's foot trefoil *Lotus corniculatus* for the Common Blue butterflies *Polyommatus icarus*, and Lady's Bedstraw *Gallium verum* supporting the Small Elephant Hawk-moth *Deilephila porcellus*. An unexpected arrival was Common Broomrape *Orobancha minor*; Field Scabious *Knautia arvensis* came in on its own after the planting period and seed of Pyramidal Orchid *Anacamptis pyramidalis* taken from a roadside verge has now produced more than 100 plants. The half a mile of hedgerow contains over 30 native species, most of which were successful although the Alder Buckthorn didn't like the soil conditions and the proportion of Blackthorn, Dogwood and Field Maple in the original mix was too great and those are now invasive and need control.

Extensive monitoring since inception has shown the range of species at the site to have included a total of 34 butterfly species, over 400 macromoths and at least 164 micromoths. Small Copper *Lycaena phlaeas* are numerous together with Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* and Dark Green fritillaries *Argynnis aglaja* on Knapweed. There is a small colony of Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*; Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* and Chalkhill Blue *Lysandra bellargus* come occasionally. 81 species of birds have been recorded with Green Woodpecker every day, Lesser Redpoll on the Silver Birch and bird feeders, the occasional Black Redstart and Woodcock, with just one sighting of a Corncrake and of a Jack Snipe. Buzzards and Ravens are increasing, but the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker is no longer present.

The regular monitoring has shown changes over time, some due to the development of the reserve and some due to changes in the wider countryside around the reserve. Toads disappeared when their local breeding site was fouled; the large population of Hornet Robber Fly *Asilus crabroniformis* lost its breeding site when the riding stable next door closed; there are far fewer Stag Beetles *Lucanus cervus* (due to tidier gardens in the area?); Hedgehogs are scarce and Pipistrelle Bats are in decline. However Slow Worms, Grass Snakes and Common Lizards are increasing as are Noctule Bats. The reserve gets regular visits from the local school and this continues the history of education in Cholsey.

16<sup>th</sup> January

#### Climate Change – What will happen to your garden? by Dr. Michael Keith-Lucas

Michael began by setting out the background to global temperature increases. Although there had been a slight decline in 1940-60 the general upward trend is undoubted. The long term trend

is complicated by sunspot cycles and El Niño effects. The main emphasis for climate change is on CO<sub>2</sub> which has increased from 330ppm to 400ppm. Without any artificial CO<sub>2</sub> emissions this would likely be 250ppm based on glacial ice core evidence. However methane [CH<sub>4</sub>] is 23 times more potent a greenhouse gas, and by 2050 will have more effect than CO<sub>2</sub>. Most of the methane will come from the melting of permafrost in Siberia. Other important gases are nitrous oxide [N<sub>2</sub>O] from nitrate fertilizers, and CFCs that are even more potent greenhouse gasses.

The climate change effects are already measurable. Glaciers are retreating and if the Greenland glaciers melt the sea level will rise 7m, but if the Antarctic glaciers melt as well then there would be a 70m level increase – engulfing much of south-east England including Pangbourne. For a similar catastrophic change we need to look back in geological time to the Cretaceous-Palaeogene (K-T) boundary 66 million years ago. It was climate change that exterminated the dinosaurs, rather than the meteorite impact at Chicxulub, which was then the last straw for them.

Models show that in 2050 the tropics will remain largely unaffected but the Saharan desert will have extended north to cover southern Europe. However some other models predict that the Gulf Stream – which brings us warm air and rainfall – will fail, in which case our future climate in the UK would be much colder and drier. The UK will most likely be split in two zones. The south-east will have a Mediterranean climate while the north-west will be wet and cloudy and remain as forest. Our gardens will become more suitable for plants like Rosemary, *Echinops*, Lavender and *Cistus* that all tolerate higher temperatures and lower rainfall. From South Africa *Mesembryanthemum*, *Kniphofia* and *Proteus* plants should prosper. In agriculture it will become too dry for oil seed rape and sunflowers may replace them. Olives and oranges may become important crops.

However, as some plants respond to day length rather than temperature, flowering times will not all shift forward. Sharp, late spring frosts are likely to cause a lot of damage. Beech trees are particularly sensitive to late frosts which will decrease regeneration. Our winters should be milder with little snow but with more frequent storms and flooding. Now that there are fewer sharp frosts we are already seeing a wider range of plants flower into late winter. However further north-west and particularly in Scotland rainfall is likely to double, this will be combined with stronger winds. Further south, Spain is likely to be gripped by desert conditions with the collapse of its agriculture.

Michael then turned to the changes in distribution of wild plants that are already evident. Rare clubmosses in the New Forest are now extinct as it has become too hot and dry. The Stemless Thistle *Cirsium acaule* at its northern limit used to be restricted to the south facing slopes of Derbyshire Dales, but now its range has spread north into Yorkshire and it is prospering on north facing slopes too. Higher temperatures have allowed a suite of new butterfly, dragonfly and four orchid species to become resident in the UK.

Michael believes the only way to prevent the worst effects of climate change is to abandon fossil fuels in favour of renewable energy. However our gardens will have the benefit of a wide range of plants from warmer climes that could soon be grown.

## **6<sup>th</sup> February**

### **Why you should love wasps by Dr. Seirian Sumner**

Dr Seirian Sumner, Reader in Behavioural Ecology at University College London. She researches the reasons why animals live in societies with a focus on wasps.

Everyone loves bees and is fascinated by ants, but very few love wasps. The public image is poor and many ask what's the point of wasps? The negative image of wasps is because most people have been stung by a wasp, which is both a defence mechanism and also used to kill its prey. It is a modified ovipositor and different species offer a range of venom from the spider-hunting wasps that need very fast acting venoms to those collecting slow-moving prey. Our yellow jacket wasps are mid-range. The number of species of wasps greatly exceeds bees and ants added together:

there are around 2,200 species of bees, 8,000 ants and 150,000 species of wasps. Social wasps evolved division of labour such as foraging, rearing the brood, defence, reproduction and removal of dead wasps. Whereas bee colonies have one queen and the workers, in wasps all of the workers have the ability to lay eggs although only one does so at any one time. The assumption is that solitary wasps - that do all the jobs of queens and workers - gave rise to the current very advanced behaviour of social wasps. All wasps in one nest have the same genome and at UCL they are trying to determine how identical genomes produce phenotypic and behavioural diversity. They are marking and observing the wasps over a period of time before sacrificing them and extracting the RNA from the brain to try to determine whether there are differences between wasps with different functions in the colony. Wasps are not always faithful to one nest and electronic tagging revealed wasps moving between nests all the time so that there are extended family links between nests in the same area.

Wasps are essential. Despite a lack of research into wasps, compared to bees and ants, we know that wasps are essential pest control systems for aphids, spiders, caterpillars, cockroaches etc. They are a major controller of agricultural pests (a) as parasitic wasps that lay eggs in host species or (b) as predatory wasps that eat caterpillars and aphids. A common yellow jacket colony can remove 0.16-23kg of prey per season; half a kilo is 250,000 aphids.

The wasp brood is fed on meat, but adult wasps take pollen and nectar from plants and act as pollinators to some 650 species in 104 plant families. They are complementary to other pollinators. Finally, in some parts of the world they are a source of low fat protein to humans, and they are already a popular food source in Japan. For more information about wasps see [www.sumnerlab.co.uk](http://www.sumnerlab.co.uk).

**20<sup>th</sup> February**

### **On the trail of Polecats and Pine Martens, Britain's most elusive mammals?**

by **Lizzie Croose**

Lizzie Croose is the Mustelid Conservation Officer at the Vincent Trust; the trust was founded in 1975 by the late Hon Vincent Weir and since then has been at the forefront of wildlife conservation in Britain and Ireland. The Trust's speciality is mammals, concentrating in the early years on Otters and Horseshoe Bats. Lizzie specialises on the Weasel family (Mustelids) which in the UK comprises: the Badger; Otter; Pine Marten; Mink; Polecat; Stoat and Weasel. Her talk covered just two of these: the Polecat and Pine Marten.

The European Polecat *Mustela putorius* is the ancestor of the domesticated Ferret and reached Britain from southern Europe 2,000 years ago. It has a distinctive light mask with eyebrows, ears and moustache. The male is 1/3 larger than the female; the female has an average 5 kits per brood which disperse in September. Polecats are mainly nocturnal and Rabbits form 80-90% of their diet but they will also take Rats, Mice, Voles and amphibians. They can be found from Spain through to Russia but not Ireland, and in International conservation are of least concern. In 1800 they were widespread in the UK but they were then widely persecuted and by 1915 were restricted to western mid-Wales. After they were protected in 1981 they have recovered well, as surveys from road kill from 1990, 2004/6 and 2014/5 show a rapid re-colonisation of much of England. These surveys are complicated by the presence of hybrids between Polecats and feral Ferrets. In our area they were extinct by the 1880s but by the mid 1990s some had started colonising the Hungerford area. A recent record from Reading had a Polecat scavenging roast turkey intended for red kites. One of the worrying threats to polecats is the accumulation of rodent poison; latest studies showed that 80% of polecats' livers had some degree of rodenticide residue.

Lizzie then turned to describe Pine Marten *Martes martes* which is bigger than the polecat, roughly the size of a small cat; once again the male is 1/3 larger than female. The female has 2-3 kits each year that disperse in September. They are mainly nocturnal or crepuscular. They have a much more varied diet: Voles, fruit, birds and carrion. They have a wide population in Europe from the Mediterranean to Scandinavia and Ireland and require a large area of woodland

(coniferous or broad leaved) which restricts their distribution. By 1915 persecution had restricted them to Snowdonia, Cumbria and NW Scotland making them the second rarest mammal in the UK after the Wildcat. They have now re-colonised Scotland north of the Great Glen and also North Wales. They are unlikely to be able to spread to England or other areas without assistance. With this in mind the Vincent Trust has set up a release programme in north Ceredigion. A large suitably wooded area was carefully selected with tree corridors to other woods. The enthusiastic support of local people also influenced the choice. Under licence a total of 51 Pine Martens have been moved from Scotland - including some pregnant females. They were transported in one long overnight drive; all individuals were carefully checked and then were kept penned for five days before release. They were all radio-tagged for up to a year and there is evidence that at least nine of the females have bred successfully. A visitor centre is being built and volunteers trained so it is now possible to view these delightful creatures without travelling to Scotland. A possible English release site is in the early stage of planning.

In the questions that followed the talk Lizzie commented on the exciting possibilities that Pine Martens could actually advantage Red over Grey Squirrels. Some, but not all, studies have shown that the Red Squirrels are better at co-existing with the Martens, as the Greys are more easily predated by them.

## **6<sup>th</sup> March**

### **The History of a Beech Wood by Professor Richard Fortey FRS, FRSL**

Before he retired, Richard Fortey worked as a senior palaeontologist at the Natural History Museum, London. He also presented natural history programmes on BBC4 and he is the author of a number of popular books, including "The Wood for the Trees". The book was the subject of his talk tonight.

In 2011, using the proceeds from his television series, Richard was able to purchase four acres of ancient Beech and Bluebell woodland (Grim's Dyke Wood) north-west of Henley and close to Grey's Court (National Trust). For his book "The Wood for the Trees" he used his diary and notes on the natural history and other interesting aspects of this woodland written down during a 12 month period.

In the past this wood and the surrounding Lambridge Wood were probably part of the Grey's Court Estate. Famous families that owned this estate included the Knollys, which had close connections to the Elizabethan Court, and the Stapletons, who became rich because of the sugar trade. The trees were used for wood production until the mid-20th century and only in the last 70 years have they been allowed to grow on. Apart from Beeches, there are also Cherry, Oak, Yew and Wych Elm in the wood. The undergrowth comes into flower in April before the canopy closes. Bluebell, Wood Melick and Lesser Celandine are the main small herbs. In the summer there are far fewer flowers because the canopy filters out most of the light. A parasitic plant, Yellow Bird's-nest, *Monotropa hypopitys*, was found in two places, but eaten by Muntjac Deer. This plant does not produce chlorophyll and recent research has shown that is not only parasitic on beech roots, but also on the symbiotic mycorrhiza growing around the tree roots.

There appears to be a wealth of insects in the wood. Using his moth traps, Andrew Padmore collected more than 150 species of moth, including the beautiful Clouded Magpie, which feeds on Wych Elm. This tree species propagates with seeds, so that each generation becomes more resistant to Dutch Elm Disease, in contrast to English Elm trees which have clonal propagation, and are therefore genetically identical. Richard hired a hydraulic 'cherry picker', a machine that can lift you up to a height of 90 ft, so that entomologists from the Natural History Museum could carry out a 'bioblitz' and collect as many insects as possible. Many interesting species were captured, including a Jewel Beetle belonging to the Buprestidae family that is normally found in the canopies of tropical rain forests. In the autumn, many mushrooms and toadstools can be found in the wood and more than 300 species have been identified so far, including a Truffle, inedible for us but eaten by animals that distribute its spores.

The wood is named after Grim's Dyke, a bank of a few feet high which extends into the neighbouring Lambridge Wood and beyond. It appears to be an Iron Age feature, constructed at a time that there probably was no wood in this location. An archaeologist has recovered pollen from arable crops formerly grown in the soil. After the Romans left, agriculture stopped here for a while, sufficient for trees to grow up in the fields and become woods, which have stayed ever since. The trees were used for timber by the local population and for their other everyday needs. From the 18th century onwards they became a source of fuel wood which was exported to London. Coal then replaced wood as a fuel in the 19th century, but the timber was still useful for making furniture and until the 1950s brush backs were made from the local beech wood by the Star Brush Company. Few trees have been felled since then and most of them are now some 90 years old, with little regeneration. For the wood to survive, active management is needed.

A beautiful cabinet with four drawers was made from the timber of a cherry tree from Grim's Dyke for Richard to store all the mementos found in his wood or prepared from the soil during the 12 months that he studied it, both artefacts and biological and mineral specimens, such as pebbles, a thrush egg, nests, a tile made out of the local clay and green glass produced from local flint.

## **20<sup>th</sup> March**

### **Members' Talks**

#### **Michael Howes: St Kilda**

Michael described the trip to St. Kilda that he made three years ago. The islands are located forty miles west of the Outer Hebrides and are a World Heritage Site. Michael took a one day trip from Leverburgh on a rare sunny day. Hirta is the main island but does not have a deep harbour – access is only from small boats. The island was inhabited until 1930, and was then uninhabited until 1957 when the MoD established a missile tracking base. The islanders had developed a unique culture; they had no water or electricity and subsisted mainly on collecting seabirds and eggs for food. They ate 18 eggs a day each plus seabirds - they did not go out fishing as the seas were too rough and unpredictable – letting the birds do the hard work for them. By 1930 the population had drifted down to an unsustainable thirty people and after suffering a very harsh winter they all decided to abandon the island.

The islands are owned by the National Trust of Scotland. They are very important for seabirds and have one of the largest colonies of Gannets and also Fulmars. One sea stack has the highest sea cliff in the U.K. The last Great Auk in Britain was killed here in 1840. Soay Sheep are unique animals to the islands and are remnants of the earliest sheep that were kept as livestock in Europe. It also is home to the St. Kilda Field Mouse which is larger than its mainland relative.

#### **Brian Sargent: Underwater marvels**

Brian had spent a season diving the warm waters of the Sulu Sea, Indonesia. The area is full of wrecks and depths vary from 25-50m. Brian presented a sequence of stunning photographs that he took himself of the rich variety of sea life that can be seen there. One of the best camouflaged of fishes is the Frogfish (a type of anglerfish) - often only the eye gives it away. Cuttlefish are also well disguised, able to change their colour to match the surrounding coral. Brian braved the very venomous fin rays of the Lionfish to get amazing close-ups of its red-brown stripes and spots. He also saw Catfish, Sea Anemones, Red Corals, Glass Shrimps and Sea Slugs of which there are thousands of different types. He has seen the remarkable looking Cowfish and Blue Spotted Ray. He then showed some amazing video footage of Manta Rays. These graceful, gentle and inquisitive giants feed on plankton and are very tolerant of divers.

#### **Rob Stallard: Egg to Butterfly**

Rob has studied the lifecycle of the least endangered of butterflies: the Large White. He had noticed a female laying eggs on a Nasturtium in his garden and followed their development from orange egg to two inch caterpillar. The eggs are laid in batches of fifty or so and the caterpillars hatch after a week. They next spend the following four weeks munching their way through leaves, in his case nasturtiums rather than brassicas, through four moulting stages.

Wasps, blue tits and parasitic wasps are some of the many predators of the larvae and very few make it to full size. Any that survive climb a tree or a wall and then form a chrysalis. The butterfly has two, and sometimes three broods and any formed in September will overwinter as a chrysalis to hatch out the following April. Rob had not yet caught the magic moment when a butterfly emerges from the chrysalis but has been rewarded with observing many generations of caterpillars and butterflies each year.

**2<sup>nd</sup> October**

**PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS by David Cliffe**

**The Nature Diaries of T W Marshall** – please see page 41

**16<sup>th</sup> October**

**Biodiversity – the role and work of the Environment Agency by Graham Scholey**

Graham is the senior biodiversity specialist at the Environment Agency (EA) with responsibility for the huge Upper Thames area (from Cirencester to Staines and Banbury to Guildford). He started by illustrating the precious nature of river and lake water: it represents just 0.02% of all water on Earth (sea water is 98%).

The Environment Agency is legally responsible for the protection and enhancement of the environment. It also promotes conservation and enhancement of natural beauty including the associated flora and fauna. It has more specific responsibilities to support fisheries in the aquatic environment and is responsible for flood control measures, a major part of its budget.

To meet these responsibilities the EA works in a broad range of areas from flood risk to development planning as well as ecological planning. To meet increased demands from an increasing population Thames Water have identified that there is likely to be a huge new reservoir needed in the Thames Valley just south-west of Abingdon. The EU's Water Framework Directive (WFD) gives stringent controls over water management and ecological quality. To implement the WFD the Thames basin is split up into dozens of smaller areas based on tributary river basins (in this area: Ock; Pang; Kennet; Loddon and Thame). Each area has its individual management plan. The WFD aim is to achieve an overall 'good' ecological status by 2027.

Watercourses are important ecological systems and extend from the river beyond the margins into the floodplains. They provide vital wildlife corridors but they are subject to many pressures. There is a legacy of historic management schemes, pollution, abstraction and invasive alien species. The areas under Graham's management are mainly rural and here centuries of field drainage and channelisation has left water courses as thin ribbons between fields. This leads to problems with poaching caused by livestock and high runoff in heavy rain. Further downstream it is the mills and weirs that have made rivers look like stagnant ponds rather than dynamic water systems.

The EA works to hold back the spread of alien invasive species. The fight to maintain the native White-clawed Crayfish against the larger Signal Crayfish appears to have already been lost. The Chinese Mitten Crab is of potential major concern – as it damages river banks with its burrowing. Floating Pennywort *Hydrocotyle ranunculoides* can smother narrow courses and is now established along some water courses in Surrey.

An important part of the work is flood risk management where the EA strives to persuade developers and local authorities not to build on the floodplain. A few decades ago dredging was seen as a key technique to maintain the river's full drainage capacity. Nowadays dredging is only used in a few river courses through urban areas. A wider functioning floodplain is a better flood risk management solution than a narrow dredged channel. Dredging also removes the river's natural gravel bed which is so important for invertebrates and the fish that feed on them. Another change in management policy is over the removal of woody debris. Removal used to be routine

but this is now restricted to areas where it might lead to restricted flow under bridges and culverts. The debris can generate areas of greater biodiversity and deflect high energy flows. Approaches to reducing flood risk can be good for the wider ecology. Hedgerows and shelter belts can help reduce runoff upstream as well as woodland and gully planting. Developing new wetlands is a key option in flood management. There are major schemes in development including one on the Thames to the west of Oxford to introduce a ribbon of ponds and wetlands that will greatly improve the function of the local floodplain for future flood events.

Graham helped create the Fobney Wetland Nature Reserve in Reading. A natural wetland has been created around the River Kennet where gravel had to be placed in the channel to restore the ecosystem. Many marshland plants now thrive and Hobbies are often seen there. Another scheme at Avington near Kintbury opened up the River Kennet from a dead piece of water between weirs to a diverse wetland habitat. Graham and his team also work on schemes to bring back natural rivers to town centres where the river is constrained by concrete, culverts and weirs.

Graham completed his talk with a description of initiatives that are close to his heart: bringing back Water Voles and Otters. Water Voles have suffered a huge drop in numbers but there are now encouraging signs of increasing numbers in parts of the Thames catchment, for instance upstream of Oxford. In the case of Otters it is a similar story, virtually wiped out by the end of the 1970s, but now re-established in much of the upper and middle Thames and its tributaries from the source down to Windsor. The rise in numbers has not been popular among fishermen and Graham spends considerable time assuaging their fears.

It all makes an encouraging story with clear signs of a brighter future for our river systems and all their associated plants and creatures.

## **6<sup>th</sup> November**

### **The Shady Side of Town - Reading's trees by Adrian Lawson**

Adrian kindly came a month earlier than planned because the booked speaker was indisposed. As a youth Adrian lived in London and from the age of 12 he cycled out to Epping Forest because he loved trees. Adrian was the Open Spaces Development Manager for Reading Borough Council where he spent 18 years getting to know intimately the landscape of this town. Adrian wrote a weekly column for the local paper, entitled 'Rural Reading', about the town's natural environment from 1999 until 2014, and subsequently was asked to write a book about Reading's trees. As with most towns there are many interesting and old trees in Reading Borough. His friend, Geoff Sawers drew the illustrations for the book and it was published by a Reading publisher, Two Rivers Press in May 2017.

We were treated to a photographic tour around Reading showing his favourite trees. There are countless trees in the town, and nobody knows all of them, many are unrecorded. Many were planted in Victorian times and are now mature. Some are much older, the Black Poplar from the meadows of Coley Park; and Corsican Pine, Horse Chestnut and False Acacia (*Robinia*) in Southcote Park Farm, growing very close to housing. In Prospect Park the large numbers of planted trees only afford glimpses of Reading town. Modern planting has added a lot of value to the town, through screening of buildings.

In Christchurch Meadow stands a mature Elm, unaffected by Dutch Elm Disease and now surrounded by a children's playground. An engraving of Coley Manor from 1699 showed a long avenue of large London Planes, possibly one of the earliest plantings of these trees in the UK. These are still standing, though in 2014, one of these huge trees fell. However, the fallen tree, six feet in diameter, is still alive and making fresh growth.

Hybrid Limes are common and those by Caversham Court with large balls of Mistletoe are a welcome sight for Adrian as he ascends St Peter's Hill by bike, his favoured mode of transport. Wild Apple trees found near the railway embankment might well be the result of apple cores thrown from steam train windows. Fruits of the Wild Service Tree are very sweet and a favourite



Photographic Competition 2018  
Winning Photographs (for article, see page 39)



**Overall Winner**

**&**

**Any Fauna  
(UK or overseas)**

**Black-necked Grebes**

*Podiceps nigricollis*

Lake Geneva, Switzerland

© Ken White



4-Spotted Chaser *Libellula quadrimaculata* Thorne Moor, Yorkshire  
Winner: **Small is Beautiful** © - Ken White



Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* Brimpton Common, Berks  
Winner: **Colour Prejudice** © - Grahame Hawker



Linnets *Linaria cannabina* East Ilsley  
Winner: **Three of a Kind** © - Rob Stallard



Merveille du Jour *Dichonia aprilina* Axmansford, Hants  
Winner: **Pattern Perfect** © - Ken White



## Photographic Competition 2018: Winning photographs and Runners Up



Snowy Ink Cap *Coprionellus niveus* North Downs Way, Kent  
Winner: **Floral-Fungal UK & Overseas** © - Fiona Brown



White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Tianavaig, Skye  
Winner: **Nature in Action** © - Ken White



Mistle Thrush nestlings *Turdus viscivorus* Upper Teesdale  
Winner: **Something to make you smile** © Laurie Haseler



Knitted butterfly *Pieris wooliana* Brimpton Common  
Runner Up: **Something to make you smile** © - Grahame Hawker



Scarlet Tiger Moth larva *Callimorpha dominula* Tilehurst, Berks  
Runner Up: **Small is Beautiful** © - Laurie Haseler



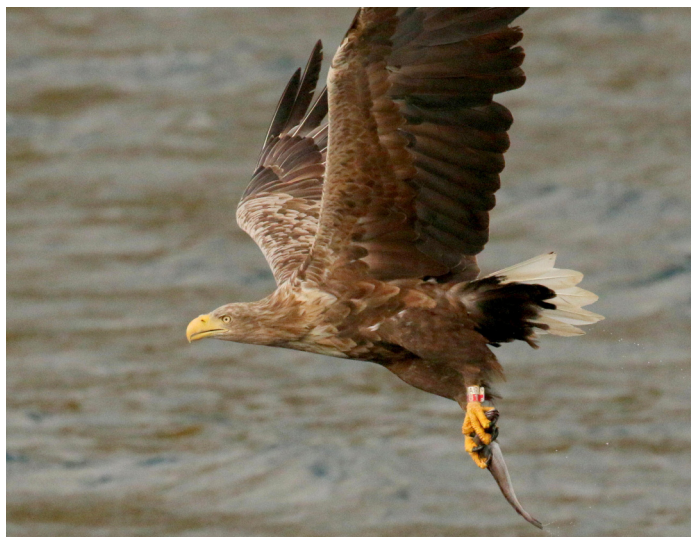
3 Field Voles *Microtus agrestis* Aston Rowant NNR  
Runner Up: **Three of a Kind** © Ian Esland



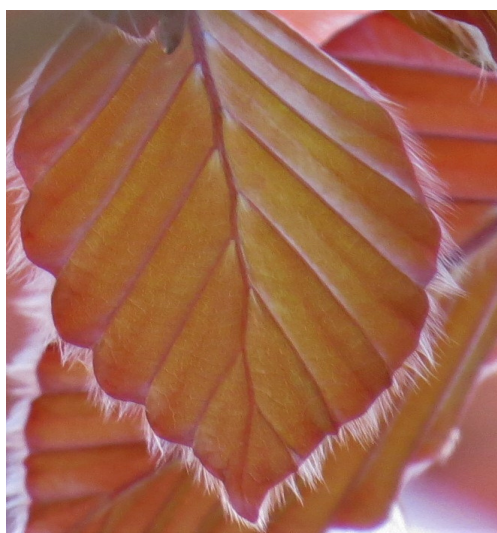
Photographraphic Competition 2018: Runners Up



Ammonites *Ludwigia murchinsonii* Staffin Museum, Skye  
joint Runner Up: **Pattern Perfect** © Ken White



White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* Isle of Skye  
Runner Up: **Nature in Action** © Ken White



Beech leaf *Fagus sylvatica* Cholsey, Oxfordshire  
Runner Up: **Colour Prejudice** © Fiona Brown



Hogweed *Heracleum sphondylium* R.Almond, Edinburgh  
joint Runner Up: **Pattern Perfect** © Fiona Brown



European Rollers *Coracias garrulus* Osuna, Spain  
Runner Up: **Fauna UK & Overseas** © Ken White



Scarlet Elf-cups *Sarcoscypha coccinea* Lambourn, Berks  
Runner Up: **Flora-Fungus UK & Overseas** © Laurie Haseler





Hummingbird Hawk-moth *Macroglossum stellatarum*  
17/08/18 Plastow Green Photo © Ken White



Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* WWT Caerlaverock,  
Dumfriesshire. 18/01/18 RDNHS trip Photo © Ken White



Northern Bald Ibis *Geronticus eremita*, Barbate Marismas,  
Cadiz Province, Spain. 10/09/18 Photo © Fiona Brown



Little Swift *Apus affinis*, Chipiona, Cadiz Province,  
Spain 09/09/18 Photo © Ken White



Mullein moth larva *Cucullia verbasci* on Dark Mullein  
19/06/18 Plastow Green Photo © Ken White



Toadflax Brocade larva *Calophasia lunula* on Purple Toadflax  
12/08/18 Plastow Green Photo © Ken White

with Fieldfares. Black Mulberry trees are common in Reading as they were very popular with the Victorians.

The fierce storms of 1987 and 1990 brought down many large trees. Those from 1987 were logged up and many were burnt, while in Tilehurst the trees blown down in 1990 were left where they fell, many of their branches touched the ground and grew forming new trees. Adrian is very keen on natural regeneration of woodland and the best local woodlands have all sprung up on their own on abandoned areas of land.

Despite being an urban area, Reading has thousands of trees and Adrian's mission is to get people to look more closely at these and not take them for granted.

## **20<sup>th</sup> November**

### **An introduction to British Bats by Rose-Ann Movsovic**

Rose-Ann is a retired Reading librarian who during the last nine years has worked as a volunteer with the Berkshire and South Buckinghamshire Bat Group ([berksbats.org.uk](http://berksbats.org.uk)). The first part of her talk was a survey of the 17 species of bats which breed in the UK, which consist of several distinct groups.

The first group (a) has a distinct 'nose leaf' and comprises the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bats. The Greater has been found occasionally in Berks; it needs woodland and rough ground and is expanding in range. The Lesser Horseshoe is rare and endangered, and is restricted to south and west England.

All the other species (b) are without a nose leaf, but of these one subgroup (1) has 'joined' ears, with the base of the ears joined over the head. They comprise the Brown long-eared and Grey long-eared Bats. The Brown is widespread and common; it roosts in buildings and trees. The Grey is very rare and restricted to south and west coasts. The last member of the group, the Barbastelle, is a rare woodland bat. The other subgroup (2) are big bats that do not have joined ears and are distinguished by the shape of the Tragus inside the ear. If it is round and stubby it is a Noctule Bat that is widespread and roosts in trees, or the smaller Leisler's bat which is common in London but rare in Berkshire. In contrast the Serotine has a long pointed tragus, it is uncommon but widespread, and roosts in trees and buildings. If the tragus is shorter and stubby then it is one of the three species of the small Pipistrelle bats: Common (widespread); Soprano (prefers wetland) and Nathusius' (rare). A final group (*Myotis*) have a pointed tragus and in this locality comprise: Bechstein's (fairly rare); Natterer's (uncommon but widespread); Daubenton's (fairly common, often seen over water); Whiskered (widespread but rare in Berkshire) and Alcaethoe (a recent discovery not yet recorded in Berkshire).

Rose-Ann then reported on survey results. Some bats are hard to distinguish on audio recordings. Roosts can be checked out and DNA of droppings can be used to identify the species. The National Bat Monitoring Survey shows that numbers have been broadly steady since 1981 after a previous huge decline (80%). The most common species in the Berkshire area are Common Pipistrelle; Soprano Pipistrelle; Brown long-eared; Daubenton's and Noctule. Wind turbines are causing heavy mortality in bats particularly those which migrate long distances. The cause is not contact with the blades but the pocket of extreme low pressure behind them. It is hoped that raising the threshold wind speed for operation will greatly reduce the death toll.

The rest of the talk looked at the work on the Nathusius' Project which began in 2014. The Nathusius' Pipistrelle (*Pipistrellus nathusii*) is hard to distinguish from the Common Pipistrelle. It started to appear as a breeding winter migrant in Antrim in 1990 and has since become widespread but is still rare. The Baltic area is their main summer location but some are now resident in the UK. To carry out their survey work the group use Harp traps (suspended vertical fishing wire) and acoustic lures (recording of the male). Four locations were used in the area: Thatcham Discovery Centre, Hosehill Lake, Bearwood Lake and Cliveden. The traps are monitored every fifteen minutes and when caught the bats are measured and identified. In the first year

2016 they had nine trapping nights and caught 154 bats; only three *Nathusius'* bats were found at two different sites. In 2017 over nine nights 289 bats were caught but many of these were at one bumper night at Hosehill: 10 *Nathusius'* *Pipistrelles* were found at two different sites and the first Brandt's Bat was caught. In 2018 the count was 199 bats again over nine nights. This time six *Nathusius'* *Pipistrelles* were found at three different sites. A new site at Caversham Lakes was used and this will replace Bearwood as that has seen very few bat captures recently.

There are 25 survey groups throughout the UK and some ringing and tagging is used to understand the movements of *Nathusius'*; there are also groups in the Netherlands and Lithuania. Most females migrate south west from the Baltic area in late autumn and winter while males and some females remain in the UK. So far no direct evidence of females returning to the Baltic has been discovered. More study is needed to work out the details of the behaviour of the species in the UK.

Rose-Ann and her colleague Elaine Charlson had brought three bats for us to see, a Brown long-eared Bat which Rose-Ann showed us in her hand, and a Common and a Soprano *Pipistrelle* in a mobile roosting box.

#### **4<sup>th</sup> December**

##### **Wild flowers in Eastern Andalucía by Dr. Sarah Ball**

Dr Sarah Ball held a variety of different scientific positions, including researcher and lecturer at the University of Reading in plant pathology and chief scientist of the Royal Horticultural Society. Now semi-retired, she is currently writing a follow-up to her book "Wildflowers of Eastern Andalucía". At present she chairs the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Flora Group.

Sarah took us on a virtual trip to the coasts and mountains of Eastern Andalucía, exploring the wild plants and their adaptations to extreme environments. In the last 20 years Sarah has travelled to these places many times, first with the Eden Project and field courses for botany students of Reading University, and of late with the Kew Diploma Students. The students fly to Malaga, and are then driven east to Almería and Las Negras, where they stay and study the wild plants in a variety of places. There are many different habitats in Eastern Andalucía because of the many different soil types (caused by the complex geological history, originally volcanic), different elevation levels (from lowlands to high mountains) and different microclimates. Because of the variety of different habitats, this location is a hotspot for wild flowering plants and 2,500 different species have been recorded, which is 50% of the total number in Spain; very significantly, 200 species in this area are endemic and therefore unique to Eastern Andalucía.

The area is in the rain-shadow of the Sierra Nevada and other mountain ranges and therefore semi-arid. There are even deserts here, so that the plants have had to adapt to droughts. Moreover, this is an area of climatic change, where temperatures have become higher in the last 25 years, periods of rain shorter and the rainstorms more extreme, so that now the water tends to run off the land rather than get absorbed by the soil. Consequently, the area is even drier than it used to be and river beds have dried up. The plants do not only have had to adapt to the climatic challenges, but they must also be able to compete with other plants for the little water that is available. Because of the lack of water they do not grow closely together and have to control their evaporation. The soils in Eastern Andalucía may give further problems, because some are highly alkaline and others may have a high salt or mineral content. A number of plants have become specialists in these habitats and tend to dominate here, and you will not find them in less harsh conditions where they are outcompeted.

Plants have found ways to adapt to droughts in various different ways. A few plants have even developed enormously long roots to be able to get water in the summer. Other plants avoid the hot summer by being annuals that germinate and grow in winter and spring (when it is less warm and often wetter), set seed rapidly and senesce before it gets too dry and hot. Therefore no less than 30% of the seed plants here are annuals. Other species spend the summer underground by having evolved bulbs, rhizomes or corms. These plants are called geophytes. Another type of

adaptation is the development of very small or leathery leaves, so that there is reduced evaporation. But those leaves may attract herbivores in summer, so the plants also had to evolve spines or chemical deterrents such as the production of essential oils (at the same time these reduce evaporation). Shrubs with this kind of adaptation are called sclerophylls and they can be found in the so-called Matorrals, dense thickets of higher or lower evergreen shrubs such as Olive, *Cistus*, Broom, Lavender, Rosemary and related plants. Sarah showed pictures of many plant species adapted to these dry environments such as Jujube *Ziziphus lotus* (Rhamnaceae) and Oroval *Withania frutescens* (Solanaceae), which grow into each other to protect each other in turn as they bear leaves at different times of the year.

The Coast is another habitat with special plants. Between Almeria and Las Negras is the Cabo de Gata Natural Park, where there is sea mist along the coast, which keeps the plants moist. Consequently, the vegetation is much greener. Although tourists can still go to the beaches close to the sea, the land behind is fenced off by the Spanish authorities for conservation. There are also Salt Marshes where species of the family Chenopodiaceae dominate. These have succulent leaves and are salt and drought tolerant. In the Las Salinas salt marsh there are still Flamingos. The soil in this protected Natural Park is volcanic and full of minerals and semi-precious stones. Here we find Palmetto *Chamaerops humilis*, the only European palm.

Further north in Eastern Andalucía are the Badlands, so called because they are not suitable for the cultivation of crops. They are officially a desert and have been used in the past as a background for Spaghetti Westerns. There are Salt Steppes and one of the special plants is *Cistanche phelypaea* (Orobanchaceae), which is parasitic on the salt-tolerant species of Chenopodiaceae that grow here.

Still further inland are mountain ranges such as the Sierra de Los Filabres. At 2,000 m we find the Hedgehog Zone, where it is cold with often freezing fog. Mountain flowers growing here include *Crocus nevadensis*, *Poa ligulata* and *Veronica praecox*. The Pine Processionary caterpillar can also be found at these high altitudes.

The students visit other interesting sites, including botanical gardens and the typical plastic greenhouses (plasticos) where the farmers grow tomatoes and vegetables. They now use more biological control than in the past and use bees for pollination. They are also starting to plant native species between the plastics to encourage beneficial insects. After visiting the Alhambra and Generalife gardens in Granada, the students go back to Malaga for their return flight to Britain, knowing a lot more about the rich flora of Eastern Andalucía.

## **18<sup>th</sup> December**

### **Christmas Party**

At the same time that everyone was munching away on the Christmas food members started tackling three quizzes. A bird quiz originally set some years ago by Meryl Beek was recycled. A joint team on David Cliffe's table won the prize. Lesley Hawker produced two quizzes; one was a picture quiz on birds while the other was a cryptic town name quiz. Ian Esland, with some help from others on his table won both quizzes. David Cliffe then recited some suitably light poems including a reprise of 'The Amateur Botanist'. While Laurie Haseler counted up the photographic competition votes, Rob Stallard gave a review of the year based on photographs from field excursions, with a few lame limericks to accompany the pictures. Michael and José Keith-Lucas produced another fine vintage of mulled wine to keep us all merry.

### **Christmas Party Photographic Competition by Laurie Haseler**

The Photographic Competition at the 2018 Christmas Party attracted over 80 entries, an increase on the previous couple of years. The same set of eight categories was used as in 2016 and 2017: six were restricted to photos taken in the UK, with two generalised to "UK or overseas". There was a good spread of entries with nine or more pictures in most of the categories. A few of the photographs generated questions about their validity relative to the category definitions: none

were excluded, but more detailed guidance in the rules might be useful in future.

The winners in each category are tabulated below, followed by a table showing the runners up, or in some cases the joint first. In each case there is an indication of where pictures were taken: it is pleasing to see that several of the pictures were taken on RDNHS outings, or on local Nature Reserves.

Category	No.	Winner	Subject
1. Small is Beautiful: (UK)	12	Ken White	4-spotted Chaser, Thorne Moors, Yorkshire
2. Three of a Kind: (UK)	9	Rob Stallard	Linnets at East Ilsley, Oxfordshire
3. Nature in Action: (UK)	13	Ken White	White-tailed Eagle, Tianavaig, Isle of Skye
4. Colour Prejudice: (UK)	14	G. Hawker	Red Admiral, Brimpton Common, Berkshire
5. Pattern Perfect: (UK)	14	Ken White	Merveille du Jour, Axmansford, Hampshire
6. Makes You Smile (UK)	5	Laurie Haseler	Mistle Thrush nestlings, Upper Teesdale
7. Any Flora or Fungus:	5	Fiona Brown	Snowy Ink Cap, North Downs Way, Kent
8 Any Fauna:	11	Ken White	Black-necked Grebes & chick, Lake Geneva Switzerland
<b>Best overall</b>		Ken White	<b>Black-necked Grebes &amp; chick</b>

Voting presented a difficult choice for members: an amazing 28 of the photos got three or more votes for “best in category”. In the “best overall picture” category 23 pictures got one or more votes. These numbers indicate the high overall standard of the pictures, though may possibly also have resulted in part from some idiosyncrasy of the criteria members used when judging. The option was again given of voting for two best pictures, to provide a clearer indication of the overall winner: Ken White’s picture of Black-necked Grebes in Switzerland won by a large margin.

Category	Posn.	Runner Up	Subject
1. Small is Beautiful: (UK)	2nd	Laurie Haseler	Scarlet Tiger caterpillar, Tilehurst, Berkshire
2. Three of a Kind: (UK)	= 1st	Ian Esland	Field Voles, Aston Rowant NNR, Oxfordshire
3. Nature in Action: (UK)	2nd	Ken White	White-tailed Eagle, Tianavaig, Isle of Skye
4. Colour Prejudice: (UK)	2nd	Fiona Brown	Beech leaf, Cholsey garden, Oxfordshire
5. Pattern Perfect: (UK)	= 2nd = 2nd	Fiona Brown Ken White	Hogweed Umbel, River Almond, Edinburgh, Ammonite Fossil, Staffin Museum, Skye
6. Make You Smile: (UK)	2nd	G.Hawker	Knitted Butterfly, Brimpton Common, Berks
7. Any Flora or Fungus	2nd	Laurie Haseler	Scarlet Elf-cup, Lynch Wood, Lambourn
8 Any Fauna:	2nd	Ken White	European Rollers, Osuna, Andalucia, Spain



When there was a tie in the number of votes David Cliffe, the Society's president, arbitrated. Five different photographers appeared in the overall list of category winners, six if runners-up are taken into account. Ken White's skill was again evident in the number of categories where he was first or second: it was the fourth year running in which he won the competition for overall best photo. Please see pages 33-35 for winning and runner up photos.

## **PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS**

### **The Nature Diaries of T W Marshall by David Cliffe**

Like my talk of a year ago, this one resulted from my undertaking to find out what had happened to the Society's publications, records and photographs. The T W Marshall diaries were in five exercise books, covering the years 1930 to 1936, in the Berkshire Record Office at the top of Castle Hill in Reading. They had been presented at some time to the Society's library. In 1971 they were presented to Reading Central Library, and at some later stage they were transferred to the Record Office, since they are unique items which need the special protection which the B.R.O. can provide. Anyone can go and look at them, free of charge, but you must first obtain a ticket, and the search room in which you read is constantly under supervision.

And so, in the hot summer of 2018, I spent many happy hours there in air-conditioned quietness with a notebook and pencil at my elbow. You can bring in laptop computers and plug them in, but I did it in the time-honoured way. The search room is open till 9 p.m. on Thursdays, and that's the day I usually chose, managing to read one notebook per day. Most of the entries in the diaries were repetitive and boring, with nuggets hidden here and there. My task was to seek out the nuggets, and copy them down. After that, in the comfort of my own home, came the fun of extracting bits of my notes in order to tell a story in some kind of logical order.

One of my jobs was to see what I could find out about Mr. Marshall himself. Not only was he the Society's President between 1932 and 1934, as I am at the time I'm writing this, but I discovered that during his presidency, he was living at 43 Alexandra Road, where I lived for a spell in the 1970s. But whereas he presumably owned the house, I could only afford to rent a bed-sitting room.

Thomas Wilfred Marshall was the son of a solicitor from High Wycombe, born in 1870, and he studied at Oxford and became a barrister. He appears in the Society's photograph albums from 1902 onwards, and is instantly recognisable on account of his high cheek-bones. In group photographs, he is usually standing at the back and to one side or the other, looking rather forbidding. He married a lady from Tilehurst in 1906. By the time he came to write the diaries, he had retired from work, and had the leisure to pursue his interest in natural history, and in butterflies and moths especially. He outlived two of his three wives, and died in his Tilehurst home in 1948.

Since childhood, I have been interested in what people said and what things were called in days gone by, so I couldn't help noting down a few of his names we don't use any more. Yellow Archangel was Yellow Deadnettle, Lady's Bedstraw was Yellow Bedstraw, and Red Campion was always Pink Campion. Among the Lepidoptera, the Marsh Fritillary was the Greasy Fritillary, and the Adonis Blue was the Clifden Blue, and among the birds, the Arctic Skua was Richardson's Skua. I was intrigued by his calling Great Crested Newts Tritons, but the man who showed them to him said they were Lejards – which is presumably a Berkshire dialect word.

Mr. Marshall's use of Latin scientific names is variable. For plants and birds, he almost always uses English names, and for plants, he tends to use very general terms. He talks about Helleborines, Milkwort, and Veronica Speedwell. But for butterflies and moths, it's usually Latin. Very often he gives only the specific names, and fails to mention the genera. If he was expecting anyone else to read the diaries, he was expecting them to know that by "aceris" he meant *Acronicta aceris*, the Sycamore Moth, or that "alni" was *Acronicta alni*, the Alder Moth, and so on. This tendency, coupled with the fact that some of the names have been changed since the 1930s, and Mr.



Marshall's handwriting is small and not always easy to read, meant that interpreting what he wrote was not always straightforward. I'm grateful to Jan Haseler for helping me out here, and pointing out which species were still common, and which would be worth commenting on in the talk.

Considering how much effort must have gone into walking for many miles and then writing the diaries, it is perhaps surprising that it is not more obvious whether or not they were written to be read by other members of the Society. The diaries start part of the way through the year, and finish part way through the year, with no indication of whether it was intended to continue them. Maybe there are, or were, other volumes in the series.



**T.W. Marshall**

Probably the first thing you notice when you open one of the books is that every entry starts with a report on the day's weather. Even if the author never sets foot outside his door, there is a weather report. He doesn't seem to have owned a thermometer, but sometimes goes down to the jeweller's shop of Botly & Lewis in the town centre to see what their open-air thermometer says. Any extraordinary weather phenomena are noted – cloud formations, fiery sunsets, rings round the moon, unusual heatwaves and cold spells. He notes the beginning and end of British Summer Time, eclipses, and an earth tremor. He notes the dates when trees come into leaf, or plants come into flower, the first Swallows are seen, or the Cuckoo is heard for the first time in that year. Maybe this obsessiveness is a result of his legal training, and the need for precision.

Another thing you soon notice is that Mr. Marshall was a follower of the hunt – the South Berkshire Hunt and the Garth Hunt. He may well have ridden out with them in the past, but now he just reports on the "scent," and how many foxes were killed. He is obviously familiar with the language of the hunt, and speaks of "drawing" covers and woods, of foxes being "afoot" and hounds being "in full cry." I was surprised to read that on at least two estates, foxes had been imported from France to improve the sport, when I had thought that part of the object of fox-hunting was to reduce the fox population, and their depredation of game birds and farm livestock. The French foxes were "small, but giving good sport."

From the diaries we also learn about the activities of gamekeepers. Opinions were divided as to whether Owls and Badgers did more good than harm. On some estates, where Rabbits were killed for sport or for the table, Badgers were killed because they dug into rabbit warrens and killed and ate the young ones. Other keepers left Badgers alone because they killed Stoats and destroyed wasps' nests. Mr. Marshall sometimes records the contents of what he calls "gamekeepers' museums." In March 1936, he describes the "vast collection of mummified vermin" at Padworth, which were hanging up in the woods – Stoats, Grey Squirrels, Jays, Magpies, Crows, Kestrels and Sparrowhawks. Victims in other places included Badgers, Weasels, Rats, Owls and Jackdaws.

In the 1930s there were still herds of deer in some of the gentlemen's parks near Reading. Holme Park at Sonning had Red and Fallow Deer, and Englefield Park had Fallow Deer – as it still does. It would be interesting to know what happened to the deer in Calcot Park. In 1931, Mr. M. heard that the deer which had been driven out of the park were by then killed off. Calcot Park is now a golf course. At Maiden Erlegh Park, Solly Joel allowed the South Berkshire Hounds to hunt over his land, and this state of affairs continued after his death in 1931. The Red Deer here were in an enclosure, and Golden and Silver Pheasants were kept in an enclosure, presumably for decorative purposes. Part of the park here has been built on, but the part with the lake is now a local nature reserve, looked after by Earley Town Council.

As one might imagine, changes in the distribution of species since the 1930s are apparent from the diaries. Canada Geese, believed to have escaped from the grounds of Aldermaston Court and Englefield House are now around, but not in large numbers. Red Squirrels have almost gone, and their last toe-hold seems to have been at Ufton Nervet. The loss of species of lepidoptera is particularly apparent. The species around in the 1930s and now locally extinct or very rare, are

the Duke of Burgundy Butterfly, the Wall Butterfly, the Large Heath Butterfly, the Small Heath Butterfly, the Wood White Butterfly, the Pearl-bordered Fritillary, the High Brown Fritillary, and the Marsh Fritillary. Moths in this category are the Marbled Green Moth, V Moth, Pale Eggar Moth, Dingy Mocha Moth, Striped Hawk Moth, and Broad-bordered Bee Hawk Moth.

Besides being a collector of pinned specimens, Mr. Marshall also bred some Lepidoptera in captivity. There appears to have been a network of such people round the country, who would send off eggs by post to fellow enthusiasts. The emergence of the perfect insects from their chrysalides is often remarked on in the diaries. Other members of our Society collected mounted birds and occasionally small mammals. One Reading taxidermist told Mr. M. about the species that had been brought in for his attention.

The role of Reading Museum in identifying plants and wildlife must have been considerable in the 1930s. The curator, Mr. W.A. Smallcombe, was a young man with a young family at the time and occasionally appeared on the Society's photographs. He and Mr. Marshall appear to have been friends, and he would tell Mr. M. about specimens which had been brought in. In 1931, it was Striped Hawk-moths, rare migrants which in that year appeared in the Reading area in considerable numbers. In the same year, a specimen of the Military Orchid was brought in – not freshly dug up from the ground, one hopes! This orchid, "newly found in the Reading area," was generally thought to be extinct in the British Isles at the time. It is still thought not to have been re-discovered until 1947, when J.E. Lousley found it at Homefield Wood, near Medmenham, where it can still be found.

Mr. M. sometimes mentions the live specimens which were on display in aquaria and vivaria in the museum lobby. There were still live specimens there when I arrived in Reading in 1969. In the 1930s, he saw Spotted Salamanders, Black Salamanders, an Axolotl, a Triton - Great Crested Newt - a Spiny-footed Frog, a Common Frog, and an Edible Snail.

His delight in watching animals in captivity surfaces again when he describes visits to the zoo – the Oxford Zoological Gardens at Kidlington, London Zoo, and the Bertram Mills Menagerie when the Bertram Mills Circus came to Reading. At the menagerie he saw Elephants, Zebras, Horses, Ponies, and performing Shorthorn Bulls (!).

Although in photographs Mr. Marshall looks rather austere, he seems always to have been talking to people, and noting down things they told him in the diaries, even when they are bizarre or barely believable. Members of the Natural History Society, policemen, clergymen, and especially labourers at the corporation sewage farm were often good for a story. And so we can read of Herons being found dead, choked by swallowing "water rats," with the tails of the unfortunate mammals hanging from their bills, and of the Pike which seized the head of a Mute Swan which was dabbling in the weed for food, causing the death of both. Slow-worms swallowed their young when danger threatened, Moorhens would not eat newts but Dabchicks did, and Herons attracted fish by wiggling their toes in the water.

Part of the pleasure in reading the diaries comes from the reports of what was found in the various localities, and making a mental comparison with what is known to be there now. When Mr. M. was living in Tilehurst, summer after summer he records hearing the Turtle Dove, the Nightingale and the Cuckoo in Halls Road. Though now mostly built up, at the time there was a large scrubby area, bordered by Hall's Copse, Churchend Copse and Curtis's Wood. A little later in the summer, in the same place, he heard Nightjars, night after night, and occasionally managed to see them.

Somewhere in Tilehurst, in 1934, he found the Deptford Pink, a great rarity. His identification is probably correct, for there is a dried specimen of this plant which was collected at Tilehurst for the Reading University Herbarium.

One of the best places to watch birds in the area was Manor Farm, the corporation sewage farm at Whitley. 57 different species are recorded in the diaries. It seems that in the 1930s, you could come and go as you pleased. Mr. M. would be there as late as 10 p.m. on summer evenings.

Some of the men who worked there were obviously keen bird watchers, and would tell him of recent arrivals. Some of the birds formed large flocks – for instance in 1932 there were flocks of Starlings in January, Lapwings in January and October, Snipe in March and August, Swallows in September and Teal in December. Migrant birds arrived in their due seasons, and odd birds which had been blown off course occasionally found their way there. In 1932, Mr. Marshall remarks on migrating Turnstones, Greenshank, Dunlins and Ruff. In 1934, they had a stray Arctic Skua. These multitudes of birds attracted birds of prey and mammalian predators – Sparrowhawks, Little Owls and Weasels. The sewage farm must still have been used to produce hay on the richly fertilised fields, where Corncrakes reared their chicks – perhaps the last Corncrakes to breed in the Reading area.

A notable feature of the Society's outings in the 1930s was the tea stop. Sometimes it was at a public house, such as the Round Oak at Padworth, sometimes it was the house of a country landowner or a vicarage or rectory, and sometimes it was at the house of a member. Apparently some of those on the walk resented being chivvied along in order to reach the destination for tea at the agreed time.

In June or July, they went to Mr. Bowman's house at Greenham, where they sometimes had a group photograph taken. They reached it by taking the train to Thatcham, and walking to Crookham and Greenham Commons. The plants and birds they spotted are always listed, but they never seemed to go later in the year, when presumably they could have seen large colonies of Autumn Lady's Tresses Orchids, as we can now.

Another regular port of call was the house of Dr. Somerville Hastings, a distinguished surgeon who was also at the time M.P. for Reading. He had had a house built on Kingwood Common, near Peppard, and in a nearby wood, the Fly Orchid, Bird's-nest Orchid and Ghost Orchid were noted.

One of the curiosities of the Berkshire countryside which is no longer accessible is the Kimber Head Springs, near Stanford Dingley. The Society went there fairly regularly, by dint of taking a bus to Bradfield. They examined the Blue Pool, the Bottomless Pool, and the watercress beds. When I went there in the 1970s, you were asked to put some coins in a collecting box near the gate, and could see the bluish water of the Blue Pool, with springs bubbling up, fish, and freshwater sponges. If you approach now, you are faced by warning notices and closed-circuit television cameras.

I cannot leave the subject of places visited by the Society without mentioning Pamber Forest, which may be said to be the place our Society began: the earliest group photographs of its founding fathers were taken there in 1881. They were all men. As an important area of ancient woodland, our members have returned year after year, as we still do. The 2018 fungus foray took place there in November. In the 1930s, the usual way of getting there was to take a train to Bramley, on the line to Basingstoke, and to walk the three miles to the Plough Inn at Little London on the edge of the forest. As one might imagine, long lists of species in the diaries result from these visits. Among the plants were Lousewort, Cow-wheat, Milkwort, Solomon's Seal and Early Purple Orchid. Butterflies included Wood White, White Admiral, Marsh Fritillary and the Duke of Burgundy. Grass Snakes and Adders were also common.

Here is not the place to mention all the localities visited by Mr. Marshall, sometimes with other members of the Society and sometimes alone, nor will I list all the species he noted. I well remember, after delivering the talk, that someone suggested the possibility of producing a database and perhaps maps also to record where species occurred in the past, using the diaries, and "The Reading Naturalist" for the later period. This would be possible, and in the case of the plants, one could go back further, and use some of the data in the 1900 publication, "A List of the Flowering Plants, Ferns, &c. of the Countryside round Reading . . . compiled by Members of the Reading Natural History Society." I seem to remember replying to the suggestion that the task would be an interesting one, but please don't ask me to take it on!

The diaries show how people "did" natural history in the 1930s, and shed some interesting side-lights on our own Natural History Society, and on society in Reading in general. They also say

something about how the countryside surrounding the town was managed. It is good to know that they have been preserved, that they are in safe hands, and accessible to anyone wishing to study them.

## **AUTUMN RAPTORS IN ANDALUCIA 4 – 11<sup>th</sup> September by Fiona Brown**

On Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> September seven birdwatchers - including three members from RDNHS, one from Wokingham RSPB, and three from East Berks RSPB - touched down at **Malaga Airport Andalusia, Spain** at the start of an 8- day trip organised by Sarah and Ken White. Our aim was to experience the autumn migration of raptors and storks when the area becomes a departure lounge for European birds flying across the Straits of Gibraltar to Morocco and beyond, and also enjoy the many different resident birds. During the trip we visited several types of habitat, from the sea cliffs and beaches to the lofty mountain tops of the nearby sierras.

Larger birds such as raptors & storks need thermals to help them gain height. So, the best places to see them are on mountain ridges and peaks. This was beautifully demonstrated at the official watchpoint of **El Algorrobo** just west of Algeciras, where the migrating birds are recorded daily. Local Griffon Vultures circle around all day, but it was here that we saw huge flocks (kettles) of Honey Buzzards & Black Kites as they gradually gained height before heading south over the narrowest part of the Mediterranean, The Straits of Gibraltar. In addition to these there were Egyptian Vultures, Short-toed Eagles, good numbers of Booted Eagles (both the dark and pale morphs) and a flocks of Bee-eaters all heading southwards.

At **Sierra de la Plata** which overlooks the ancient Roman settlement of Bolonia, we stopped for lunch near the top of a huge vertical rock face that showed the extent of the geological uplift in the area. Here we spotted a Blue Rock Thrush flitting about secretively. High up on the rock face there was a Griffon Vulture with its head still covered in blood from a recent meal and in front of us we watched a huge flock of White Storks flying in a massive arc towards the distant hills above Tarifa.

Later in the week we visited **Castellar de la Frontera**, where we had a spectacular view of the area from a terrace in the castle ramparts. Here the raptors came quite close to us including an Egyptian Vulture. Hirundines included Crag Martins and also Alpine Swift were whizzing about near the castle walls, and above the trees in front of the castle we saw a couple of Booted Eagles stooping as they hunted.

Towards the end of the trip we drove through the wooded hills above **Facinas** in the hope of seeing some of Spain's smaller birds. Unfortunately, most potential sightings proved to be Stonechats, but we did see a Redstart and some Bee-eaters presumably resting and feeding while on migration, and of course some raptors, especially Short-toed Eagles resting in the road-side trees.

Nearly every day we visited wetland areas. Everywhere we saw many birds familiar to us in the UK but, also some different species. The first location was **Desembocadura** on the the Rio Guadalhorce nature reserve which is very close to the airport. Walking beside the river we saw Monk Parakeets in trees, Red-rumped Swallows swooping low over the river and marginal vegetation. Hovering and flying just above the footpath were a new colonist from Africa, Northern Banded Groundling dragonflies *Brachythemis impartita*, recognised by the square marks on their wings. Midday was very hot but there was a cooling breeze in the lakeside hides where we saw Kentish Plover, Sandwich Tern and a Pacific Golden Plover, a very rare visitor indeed.

**La Janda** was originally a vast lake and area of swamps but sadly it was drained in the 1950s for agriculture where 40% of Spain's rice crop is now grown, as it is now an area of drainage canals, ditches and mud. However, while driving through we saw many White Stork, Cattle & Little Egret and Glossy Ibis near the drainage ditches. There was also a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron sitting on a ditch bank and quite a few raptors flying above the fields including a juvenile

Montagu's Harrier.

Moving on to the **Marismas de Barbate** we were treated to a distant Slender-billed Gull, together with a Black-headed Gull for comparison. The many waders included Kentish & Ringed Plover, Sanderling and a really good view of Stone Curlews. At a nearby cattle farm we found the rather odd-looking Bald Ibis [see p.36] with their beautiful plumage and bare heads, which are being re-introduced after several centuries of absence and is probably Europe's rarest breeding bird.

At **Laguna de Medina** there were huge numbers of water birds of mostly Coot, but it included Ferruginous Duck, White-headed Duck and Black-necked Grebe. A Reed Warbler out onto the reeds in front of the hide several times and some Greater Flamingos flew around the shallows displaying their spectacular colours.

We also visited **Las Marismas del Bajo Guadalquivir** on the southernmost edge of the Doñana National Park. On the salinas and fish ponds there were hundreds of waders including Black-tailed Godwit and Avocet; we were fascinated to watch Flamingos in shallow water stamping in circles presumably to disturb the sediment. This brought Flamenco dancing very much to mind. Above a canal a pair of Whiskered Terns were flying back and forth, but the icing on the cake was finding a *flock* of Marbled Duck!. Our last stop in the area was at **Mesas de Asta** where at last we caught up with a Black-winged Kite.

Visiting the beachside at **Playa de los Lances** near Tarifa we saw some smaller species preparing to migrate. These included a sprinkling of Short-toed Lark, a flock of Calandra Lark and several Tawny Pipit. There were also two Dung Beetles rolling some dung off the boardwalk and an unusual white daffodil, perhaps the Sea Daffodil *Pancratium maritimum* growing in the sand.

Joining a Cetacean cruise from Tarifa, we had hoped to watch birds flying across **The Straits**, though we didn't see many. However, we did see flying fish rushing away from the boat and two species of dolphin - Bottlenose Dolphins and Pilot Whales following the boat. There were also Cory's Shearwaters skimming the surface of the sea and a smaller black and white bird that may have been a Yelkouan Shearwater.

Our birdwatching was not confined to mornings and afternoons. On two occasions we went along the **Guadiaro Valley** before daylight to experience the dawn chorus with different species joining in succession. Bats were rushing about in the low light and as the sun rose a Squacco Heron landed in the mud beside the river. The small birds included a pair of Rock Sparrow and juvenile Crested Lark were busy searching for breakfast beside the road.

The highlight of our various lunch stops was at **Mirador del Estrecho** where we got fantastic views of a pair of Firecrests in Cypress trees next to the car park, and when we went into towns for our evening meals, we saw several interesting birds. At **Chipiona** we saw Little Swifts [see p.36] with their short wings and white rumps, the latest newcomer to the southern shores of Spain, and in **Tarifa** at dusk, we watched some Lesser Kestrels coming in to roost and a large murmuration of Spotless Starlings.

**Totals of selected raptor and stork species counted during the trip period 4th - 11th September 2018 in the Tarifa area of Andalucia**

SPECIES	SCIENTIFIC NAME	TOTAL (approx.)
<b>White Stork</b>	<i>Ciconia ciconia</i>	<b>1900</b>
<b>Honey Buzzard</b>	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>	<b>3,200</b>
<b>Montagu's Harrier</b>	<i>Circus pygargus</i>	<b>58</b>
<b>Booted Eagle</b>	<i>Aquila pennata</i>	<b>110</b>
<b>Short-toed Eagle</b>	<i>Circaetus gallicus</i>	<b>12</b>

A couple of times before retiring for the night we drove along the gravel track near our B&B at **Cortijo Papudo, San Martin de Tesorillo** looking for nocturnal birds and were rewarded by seeing a Red-necked Nightjar sitting in the middle of the road to take advantage of the sun's residual warmth. By the end of a most enjoyable trip we had witnessed the mass migration of migrant storks and raptors, Swallows and Bee-eaters, identified 154 species of birds including 18 raptor species, and all sorts of other wildlife.

## **A SUNFLOWER TALE** by Sarah White

This summer a late-germinating rogue sunflower seedling appeared in one of our patio pots. Admiring its initiative, I rescued it and re-potted it, but we have always been puzzled about its origin. Was it perhaps from the bag of compost we used? The puzzle was solved on a sunny day in October when we noticed a **Coal Tit** feeding very actively on black sunflower seeds from our bird feeders. Every so often, instead of eating a seed, it flew off to different spots around the patio tucking a seed into the edge of a plant tub. Clearly it was 'caching' seeds, while they are plentiful, in preparation for harder months to come.

Another unsolved puzzle remains, however. Our row of planted sunflower plants grew heavy heads of ripening seed and we were looking forward to watching the birds feeding on them over the winter months. Alas it was not to be – returning from a trip away in September we came home to a row of leafy stumps where the sunflower plants had been – every seedhead having been surgically severed and completely removed. Never mind, we thought, at least the rogue sunflower planted by the coal tit had survived. But no, after a second trip away that too had had its head surgically decapitated in the same way! Out of curiosity, we wish we could have caught the culprit in the act – a Grey Squirrel perhaps? But we still haven't found the seedheads...

## **BOTANY RECORDER'S REPORT 2018** by Renée Grayer

The plant records below have been selected from plants seen during the RDNHS field meetings and Wednesday walks, and from those observed by members during wildlife or plant recording trips. Records for several botanically interesting locations are included for 2018 that are either new to, or not often visited by the Society, such as Seven Barrows, Asham Meads, Woodsides Meadow and Bowdown Woods - all BBOWT Reserves - and The Warren at Tidgrove by kind invitation of Raleigh Place, who has a habitat creation scheme on the farm under Higher Level Stewardship. A problem for botanising this year was the very dry and hot summer, so that in July and August many wild plants were shrivelled up. Despite this, more plant data were received by the RDNHS botany recorder than can be listed in here, hence the selection of records given below. The *Flora of Berkshire* by M.J. Crawley (2005) was generally used for this selection, **using rarity or decrease in numbers** as criteria, although one common species, *Crassula helmsii*, is also included, because it is a very invasive alien.

The plants in this report have been arranged in an alphabetical sequence of their scientific names. The 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of C.A. Stace's *New Flora of the British Isles* (2010) has been followed for the scientific and English names. Family names are given in brackets after the English name. Nearly all species belong to the class of Flowering Plants (Angiospermae). However, a few species belong to the Gymnosperms (Gymnospermae) or to the Ferns and allies (Pteridophyta) and only in these two cases is the name of the class is given in addition to the family name. 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.

***Allium neapolitanum* - Neapolitan Garlic  
(Amaryllidaceae)**

03/05/18. Clayfield Copse, several patches. SU72497723 (RG, TM)

***Althaea officinalis* - Marsh Mallow (Malvaceae)**

24/07/18. Shiplake, along the Thames, also present last year. SU77397856 (RG, SR, TM)

***Anacamptis pyramidalis* - Pyramidal Orchid  
(Orchidaceae)**

20/06/18. Crog Hill (RDNHS walk). SU323833 (RS).

24/06/18. Englefield. SU631706 (JL).

25/06/18. Leverton, abundant. SU335700 (JL).

25/06/18. Membury. SU31627596 (JL)

***Anagallis tenella* - Bog Pimpernel (Primulaceae)**

10/03/18. Inkpen Common, leaves only (RDNHS trip). SU382640 (JH).

15/08/18. Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS walk). SU50946423 (JH).

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SU729534 (JC)

***Arabis hirsuta* - Hairy Rock-cress (Brassicaceae)**

20/05/18. Linky Down, Aston Rowant NNR, small patch (RDNHS trip). SU727964 (MK)

***Arenaria leptoclados* - Slender Sandwort  
(Caryophyllaceae)**

19/08/18. The Warren, Tidgrove (RDNHS trip). SU519542 (SW, KW)

***Asperula cynanchica* - Squinancywort (Rubiaceae)**

20/06/18. Seven Barrows BBOWT reserve (RDNHS walk). SU328829 (RS)

***Atropa belladonna* - Deadly Nightshade (Solanaceae)**

21/10/18. Watlington Hill (RDNHS trip). SU70169336 (MK)

***Berula erecta* - Lesser Water-parsnip (Apiaceae)**

24/07/18. Shiplake, bog near the College. SU7679978107 (SR, RG, TM).

31/07/18. Shiplake, in pond. SU76717798 (SR, RG, TM)

***Butomus umbellatus* - Flowering-Rush (Butomaceae)**

03/07/18. Fobney Island, large number of plants. SU70147114 & SU69987116 (RG, TM)

14/08/18. Thames between Sonning and Shiplake; one plant. SU7612576846 (TM, SR, RG)

***Campanula glomerata* - Clustered Bellflower  
(Campanulaceae)**

21/10/18. Watlington Hill (RDNHS trip). SU69919334 (MK)

***Campanula trachelium* - Nettle-leaved Bellflower  
(Campanulaceae)**

19/09/18. Newnham Hill (RDNHS walk). SU690845 (MB, MV)

***Carex vulpina* - True Fox-sedge (Cyperaceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP59261397 (SR, AP, CL)

***Cephalanthera damasonium* - White Helleborine  
(Orchidaceae)**

20/05/18. Bald Hill, Aston Rowant NNR (RDNHS trip). SU723962 (MK).

23/05/18. Sulham Woods. SU64427484, SU64607542, SU64857583, SU649377577 (RS).

02/06/18. Great Bottom Wood, 34 plants. SU704827 (JJW).

18/06/18. Near Hailey, 19 plants. SU650868 (JJW).

20/06/18. Crog Hill (RDNHS walk), one plant. SU323833 (RS)

***Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* - Opposite-leaved  
Golden-saxifrage (Saxifragaceae)**

14/04/18. Maiden Erlegh Reserve, many plants (RDNHS trip). SU751711 (RG).

18/04/18. Blundell's Copse, Tilehurst (RDNHS walk). SU673734 (RS).

18/04/18. Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst (RDNHS walk). SU6799873398 (RS)

***Cirsium dissectum* - Meadow Thistle (Asteraceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP59441388 (SR, AP, CL)

24/06/18. Woodsides Meadow BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP556177 (SR, AP, CL).

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SU728534 (JC)

***Clinopodium acinos* - Basil Thyme (Lamiaceae)**

07/07/18. Near Hailey. SU647859 (JC)

***Crassula helmsii* - New Zealand Pygmyweed  
(Crassulaceae)**

15/08/18. Crookham Common, dried up pond, abundant (RDNHS walk) SU520646 (JH)

***Cuscuta epithymum* - Dodder (Convolvulaceae)**

31/07/18. Shiplake, near the Thames. SU7673077972 (SR, RG, TM)

15/08/18. Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS walk). SU50746442 (JH)

***Danthonia decumbens* - Heath-grass (Poaceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP59441388 (SR, AP, CL)

***Daphne laureola* - Spurge-laurel (Thymelaeaceae)**

21/03/18. Bowsey Hill, Warren Row (RDNHS walk). SU808803 (FB)

03/05/18. Clayfield Copse. SU72527725 and SU72587735 (RG, TM)

***Dryopteris affinis* - Scalp Male-fern (Pteridophyta / Dryopteridaceae)**

10/03/18. Inkpen. SU376640 (JW)

19/09/18. Newnham Hill, one plant. SU690845 (JW)

***Dryopteris carthusiana* - Narrow Buckler-fern (Pteridophyta / Dryopteridaceae)**

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SU731535 (JC)

***Epipactis phyllanthes* - Green-flowered Helleborine (Orchidaceae)**

28/06/18. Great Bottom Wood, a few plants. SU704827 (JJW)

***Euphorbia exigua* - Dwarf Spurge (Euphorbiaceae)**

19/08/18. The Warren, Tidgrove (RDNHS trip). SU523544 (SW, KW)

***Filago vulgaris* - Common Cudweed (Asteraceae)**

27/07/18. Mapledurham Golf Course, a few plants. SU694771 (JJW)

***Filipendula vulgaris* - Dropwort (Rosaceae)**

18/06/18. Sheepdrove Farm. SU362820 (JL)

20/06/18. Seven Barrows BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS walk). SU325831 & SU328829 (RS)

***Galeopsis angustifolia* - Red Hemp-nettle (Lamiaceae)**

19/08/18. The Warren, Tidgrove (RDNHS trip), many

plants. SU519542 (SW, KW)

***Genista anglica* - Petty Whin (Fabaceae)**

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SU728534 (JC)

***Genista tinctoria* - Dyer's Greenweed (Fabaceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP59441388 (SR, AP, CL)

28/06/18. Coldmoor Wood, a few plants. SU698829 (JJW)

***Gentiana pneumonanthe* - Marsh Gentian (Gentianaceae)**

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SU728534 (JC)

***Geranium columbinum* - Long-stalked Crane's-bill (Geraniaceae)**

20/06/18. Seven Barrows BBOWT reserve (RDNHS walk). SU32848289 (RS)

***Gymnadenia conopsea* - Fragrant-Orchid (Orchidaceae)**

20/06/18. Seven Barrows BBOWT reserve (RDNHS walk). SU32878295 (RS)

***Gymnadenia densiflora* - Marsh Fragrant-orchid (Orchidaceae)**

24/06/18. Woodsides Meadow BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP556177 (SR, AP, CL)

***Helleborus foetidus* - Stinking Hellebore (Ranunculaceae)**

06/04/18. Lambourn Woodlands, a few plants. SU33097637 (JL)

***Helleborus viridis* - Green Hellebore (Ranunculaceae)**

21/02/18. Mongewell Woods, 40-50 plants. SU655868 (JJW)

21/02/18. Morrell's Bottom, Nuffield, at least 100 plants. SU 657872 (JJW)

***Hippocrepis comosa* - Horseshoe Vetch (Fabaceae)**

20/05/18. Bald Hill, Aston Rowant NNR (RDNHS trip). SU721962 (MK).

20/05/18. Linky Down, Aston Rowant NNR (RDNHS trip). SU727964 (MK).

20/06/18. Seven Barrows BBOWT reserve (RDNHS



walk). SU328829 (RS)

***Hottonia palustris* - Water-violet (Primulaceae)**

29/04/18. Cock Marsh (RDNHS trip). SU882868 (MK)

***Hypopitys monotropa* – Yellow Bird’s-nest (Ericaceae)**

28/06/18. Ovey’s Wood, 3 plants. SU70318312 (JJW).

02/07/18. Busgrove Lane, 14 plants. SU67958337 (JJW).

26/07/18. North of Wyfold Lane-cross-road, 2 small colonies. SU678816 (JJW)

***Iberis amara* - Wild Candytuft (Brassicaceae)**

04/08/18. Nuffield area (RDNHS trip). SU66518968 & SU66538960 (JJW).

21/10/18. Watlington Hill (RDNHS trip). SU69919344 (MK)

***Inula helenium* - Elecampane (Asteraceae)**

10/08/18. Tagg Lane, Dunsden, 1 plant. SU738774 (JJW)

***Juniperus communis* - Juniper (Gymnospermae/Cupressaceae)**

20/05/18. Bald Hill, Aston Rowant NNR (RDNHS trip). SU720961 (MK).

21/10/18. Watlington Hill (RDNHS trip). SU69949332 (MK)

***Kickxia elatine* - Sharp-leaved Fluellen (Veronicaceae)**

24/06/18. Woodsides Meadow BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP556177 (SR, AP, CL).

19/08/18. The Warren, Tidgrove (RDNHS trip). SU519542 (SW, KW)

***Kickxia spuria* - Round-leaved Fluellen (Veronicaceae)**

24/06/18. Woodsides Meadow BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP556177 (SR, AP, CL). 19/08/18. The Warren, Tidgrove (RDNHS trip). SU519542 (SW, KW)

***Legousia hybrida* - Venus’s-looking-glass (Campanulaceae)**

07/07/18. Near Hailey, 3 plants. SU64658709 (JJW)

***Leucojum aestivum* - Summer Snowflake (Amaryllidaceae)**

13/04/18. Hosehill LNR, 19 flowering spikes, 2 bitten off. SU650644 (JL)

***Linaria repens* - Pale Toadflax (Veronicaceae)**

21/10/18. Watlington Hill (RDNHS trip). SU70279355 (MK)

***Mespilus germanica* - Medlar (Rosaceae)**

21/08/18. Sheepdrove Farm, 1 specimen. SU35738180 (JL)

***Narcissus pseudonarcissus* - Wild Daffodil (Amaryllidaceae)**

10/03/18. Inkpen Common, a few clumps (RDNHS trip). SU380640 (JH)

***Neottia nidus-avis* - Bird’s-nest Orchid (Orchidaceae)**

02/06/18. Great Bottom Wood, 2 plants. SU704827 (JJW). 28/06/18. Ovey’s Wood, 9 plants. SU703831 (JJW).

02/07/18. Busgrove Lane, 1 plant. SU67958337 (JJW)

***Onoclea sensibilis* - Sensitive Fern (Pteridophyta/Onocleaceae)**

15/08/18. Greenham Common (RDNHS walk). SU50936423 (JH)

***Ononis spinosa* - Spiny Rest-harrow (Fabaceae)**

24/06/18. Woodsides Meadow BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS trip). SP556177 (SR, AP, CL)

***Ophrys insectifera* - Fly Orchid (Orchidaceae)**

02/06/18. Great Bottom Wood, 1 plant, not previously recorded from here. SU704827 (JJW)

***Orchis mascula* - Early-purple Orchid (Orchidaceae)**

11/04/18. Clayfield Copse, 20 plants in leaf, but only 5 flowering in May. SU725774 (JL).

03/05/18. Clayfield Copse, 1 plant. SU72507722 (RG, TM).

20/05/18. Bald Hill, Aston Rowant NNR (RDNHS trip). SU721962 (MK)

***Orobanche elatior* - Knapweed Broomrape (Orobanchaceae)**

20/06/18. Wether Down, Lambourn (RDNHS walk), 23 specimens. SU32208135 (RS)

***Pedicularis sylvatica* - Lousewort (Orobanchaceae)**

02/06/18. Fence Wood. SU511714 (JL)

***Petroselinum segetum* - Corn Parsley (Apiaceae)**

21/02/18. Hailey, thousands of plants here in summer. SU64918702 (SW, JJW)

***Polystichum aculeatum* - Hard Shield-fern  
(Pteridophyta / Dryopteridaceae)**

21/03/18. Bowsey Hill, Warren Row. SU803803 (JW)

***Polystichum setiferum* - Soft Shield-fern  
(Pteridophyta / Dryopteridaceae)**

10/03/18. Inkpen. SU376640 (JW).  
21/03/18. Ashley Hill, Warren Row. SU821810 (JW).  
18/04/18. Blundell's Copse, Tilehurst (RDNHS walk).  
SU674735 (RS)

***Pyrus pyraister* - Wild Pear (Rosaceae)**

03/05/18. Clayfield Copse. SU72797724 (RG, TM)

***Sambucus ebulus* - Dwarf Elder (Caprifoliaceae)**

22/05/18. Little Stoke, 1 specimen (RDNHS walk).  
SU603852 (IE)

***Sanguisorba officinalis* - Great Burnet (Rosaceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Res. (RDNHS trip).  
SP59431387 & SP59341406 (SR, AP, CL)

10/07/18. Near Jubilee River. SU92367940 &  
SU92477938 (FB, RG)

***Sanicula europaea* - Sanicle (Apiaceae)**

21/02/18. Nuffield, leaf rosettes (RDNHS walk).  
SU66598681 (JC, ID).  
29/04/18. Winter Hill, big patch (RDNHS trip).  
SU880866 (MK).  
03/05/18. Clayfield Copse. SU72437710 &  
SU72667729 (RG, TM).  
02/06/18. Fence Wood, patch. SU514722 (JL)

***Scirpus sylvaticus* - Wood Club-rush (Cyperaceae)**

15/08/18. Bowdown Woods BBOWT Reserve  
(RDNHS walk). SU50926518 (JH)

***Scutellaria minor* - Lesser Scullcap (Lamiaceae)**

01/09/18. Bartley Heath HIOWWT Reserve (RDNHS  
trip). SU729534 (JC)

***Serratula tinctoria* - Saw-wort (Asteraceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS  
trip). SP59451387 (SR, AP, CL)

***Setaria pumila* - Yellow Bristle-grass (Poaceae)**

27/09/18. South Stoke Road. SU627843 (JJW)

***Silaum silaus* - Pepper-saxifrage (Apiaceae)**

24/06/18. Asham Meads BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS  
trip). SP590743 (SR, AP, CL)

***Sorbus aria* - Common Whitebeam (Rosaceae)**

04/02/18. Caversham, Furze Plat, large clump.  
SU711765 (JL)

***Sorbus torminalis* - Wild Service-tree (Rosaceae)**

23/01/18. Ashampstead Common (RDNHS walk), a  
few small trees. SU585748 (JL).  
03/05/18. Clayfield Copse. SU72387708 (RG, TM).  
07/05/18. Bradfield, Rushall Farm, a few young  
trees. SU58117270 (JL).  
16/05/18. Clayfield Copse. SU72867705 (RG, TM)

***Spergula arvensis* - Corn Spurrey  
(Caryophyllaceae)**

19/09/18. Near Howberrywood Farm, many plants.  
SU68098596 & SU68988560 (JJW).  
24/09/18. Near Haw Farm, in field of *Cannabis*  
*sativa*. SU662794 (JJW)

***Spergularia rubra* - Sand Spurrey  
(Caryophyllaceae)**

27/07/18. Mapledurham Golf Course, a few plants.  
SU694771 (JJW)

***Stachys arvensis* - Field Woundwort (Lamiaceae)**

16/09/18 Nr Binfield Heath, 5plants. SU751793  
(JJW).  
24/09/18 Nr Collins End, scattered community.  
SU657787 (JJW)

***Trifolium incarnatum* ssp. *incarnatum* - Crimson  
Clover (Fabaceae)**

19/05/18. Agricultural field nr Nuffield, a few  
plants. SU68218793 (RG)

***Veronica catenata* - Pink Water-speedwell  
(Veronicaceae)**

03/07/18. Fobney Island, large number of plants.  
SU70017115 and SU7017111 (RG, TM)

***Veronica polita* - Grey Field-speedwell  
(Veronicaceae)**

24/07/18. Shiplake, near the College, many plants.  
SU76807810 (RG, SR, TM)

## BOTANY REPORT CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members and their friends for their submissions:

(AP) Alan Parfitt, (CL) Camilla Lambrick, (FB) Fiona Brown, (ID) Ian Duddle, (IE) Ian Esland, (JC) Julia Cooper, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (JW) Jerry Welsh, (JJW) Janet and Jerry Welsh, (KW) Ken White, (MB) Maggie Bridges, (MK) Michael Keith-Lucas, (MV) Marion Venners, (RG) Renée Grayer, (RS) Rob Stallard, (SR) Sally Rankin, (SW) Sarah White, (TM) Tricia Marcousé

## LEPIDOPTERA RECORDER'S REPORT 2018 by Norman Hall

2018 was a very interesting year. We had an unexpected blast of polar continental air in late February - '**the beast from the east**'. Cold frosty conditions are known to cut down predation and normally help overwintering stages of lepidoptera, to survive using less of their fat reserves, but in 2018 the event probably occurred too late to make a lot of difference. However, it did mean that the **spring moths** emerged at more-or-less their normal time, so the trend towards earlier and earlier emergence which has been going on for several years because of unusually warm winters, was less in evidence. The year will be remembered more for the fabulous long hot dry summer, but prolonged hot spells are not necessarily good for catching moths, because moths ready to emerge do so early and numbers then tail off as the vegetation dries out. However, although there were spells when the heat increased steadily for a week or more, summer 2018 was not *continuously* hot; it was interrupted by short periods of 'normal' summer weather during which numbers recovered. The remarkable thing was that hot weather kept coming back. There were some of those good nights when many moths seemed to be dispersing over much greater distances than usual, a mechanism that expands their range if possible, and perhaps this explains why several of us saw more moths new to our gardens than usual. They would be flying across places outside their normal habitat. I had about 10 species new to my garden when in 'normal' years I wouldn't expect to see *any* – but it did include some species such as the Clifden Nonpareil - The Blue Underwing - and the Box-tree Moth, which are extending their range and were almost certain to come to my garden traps eventually. Another very noticeable effect of the hot dry summer was that the bulk of the large **autumnal noctuid** species such as Large Yellow Underwings, emerged much later than usual and there were some very late records of a good number of species.

The systematic list that follows includes records from up to about 20 miles from Reading. Apart from records from Vice County 22 (Old Berkshire S or W of the Thames), VC23 (Oxfordshire N or E of the Thames), there were more from VC12 (North Hampshire) this year because of records from the Axmansford area submitted by Andy Bolton.

Selected records are listed for all butterflies recorded in 2018 and most moths not considered common in the standard field guides, so only a few single records of interest are given for common moths.

If moths seen by the contributors were trapped by others the records are normally attributed to both. [BMG] is the Berkshire Moth Group which runs a trap at the Maiden Erlegh Discovery Centre on the Second Thursday of each month.

### Footnote:

Vice Counties are much-used biological recording areas devised by H.C.Watson in 1852, based on the county boundaries as they were then, the smaller ones becoming vice counties in their own right, the larger ones being divided up into two or more parts so that all the Vice Counties are much similar in size to each other than the original counties were. Their boundaries have not been changed since Watson defined them. This Naturalist report is unusual in that the area covered cuts across the vice-county boundaries.

It is possible to display vice country boundaries in Google Earth Pro by downloading a folder vice counties.zip from the internet, extracting the .KLM files and opening the files for the vice counties of interest.

## HEPIALIDAE

**03.003 *Korscheltellus fusconebulosa*, Map-winged Swift, Local**  
09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB, Les Finch]

## TINEIDAE

**12.010 *Morophaga choragella*, Local**  
05/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

## GRACILLARIIDAE

**15.012 *Caloptilia semifascia*, Local**  
6 records 18/04/18-04/09/18, all 6 from Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

## YPONOMEUTIDAE

**16.005 *Yponomeuta rorrella*, Willow Ermine, Local**  
22/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
**16.007 *Yponomeuta plumbella*, Local**  
21/07/18, 2, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]

## YPSOLOPHIDAE

**17.009 *Ypsolopha sylvella*, Local**  
04/10/18, Bowdown Bomb Site SU50726532. Not dissected but specimen available. [NH]  
09/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

## OECOPHORIDAE

**28.008 *Metalampra italica*, Migrant**  
23 & 24/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
**28.024 *Tachystola acroxantha*, Local**  
Up to 8 individuals recorded on 20 dates from 04/05/18 to 30/12/18 Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH], and yet 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 was a new record for Jan's garden [JH]

## DEPRESSARIIDAE

**32.002 *Semioscopis steinkellneriana*, Local**  
19/04/18, Sole Common Pond SU41247072 [NH]  
**32.029 *Agonopterix umbellana*, Local**  
15/11/18, Broadmoor Bottom SU85656288 [JL]  
**32.035 *Agonopterix yeatiana*, Local**  
25/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

## ETHMIIDAE

**33.001 *Ethmia dodecea*, Local**  
22/06/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 New garden record. [JH]  
11/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

## GELECHIIDAE

**35.022 *Dichomeris marginella*, Juniper Webber, Local**  
06/07/18, 2, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
23/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
**35.157 *Recurvaria leucatella*, Local**  
01/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

## PTEROPHORIDAE

**45.034 *Merrifieldia baliodactylus*, Dingy White Plume, Notable B**  
30/06/18 & 09/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**45.037 *Oidaematophorus lithodactyla*, Dusky Plume, Local**  
16/10/18, Hosehill LNR, Butterfly Bank SU64876947 [JL]

## TORTRICIDAE

**49.001 *Olindia schumacherana*, Local**  
07/06/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
16/06/18, Greyfield Wood SU58136897 [NH]  
02/10/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
**49.014 *Archips crataegana*, Brown Oak Tortrix, Local**  
30/06/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW, NH]  
**49.056 *Cnephasia conspersana*, Notable B**  
19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]  
**49.085 *Acleris kochiella*, Local**  
01/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
June to August, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**49.087 *Acleris literana*, Local: 7 records from**  
24/03/18 to 23/04/18,  
earliest and latest both at Whitchurch Hill  
SU63697880 [IE]  
**49.167 *Celypha rivulana*, Local**  
13/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**49.200 *Enarmonia formosana*, Cherry-bark Moth, Local**  
03/06/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW, Graham Dennis, AB]  
**49.210 *Ancylis unculana*, Notable B**  
03/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**49.238 *Epinotia cruciana*, Willow Tortrix, Local**  
21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]  
**49.280 *Gypsonoma oppressana*, Notable B**  
15/06/18, Fobney Island SU701710 [JL]  
**49.283 *Gypsonoma aceriana*, Local**  
10/10/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
**49.376 *Pammene aurita*, Local**  
23/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

## SESIIDAE

### **52.014 *Bembecia ichneumoniformis*, Six-belted Clearwing, Notable B**

15/07/18, 3 together, Fobney Island SU702711 [JL]

## LIMACODIDAE

### **53.001 *Apoda limacodes*, Festoon, Notable B**

22/06/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742

Earliest record, previously 11/7/15 [JH]

30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

01 & 04/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

## HESPERIIDAE

### **57.001 *Erynnis tages*, Dingy Skipper, BAP**

Earliest: 13/05/18, 7, Paices Wood SU5863 [JL]

Latest: 01/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **57.002 *Pyrgus malvae*, Grizzled Skipper, BAP**

Earliest: 06/05/18, Lardon Chase SU588809 [JH]

Latest: 30/05/18, 2, Paices Wood SU5863 [JL]

### **57.005 *Thymelicus lineola*, Essex Skipper**

Earliest: 21/06/18, Moor Copse SU638738 [JL]

Latest: 26/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **57.006 *Thymelicus sylvestris*, Small Skipper**

Earliest: 14/06/18, Shepperlands SU7864 [JL]

High Count: 11/07/18, 21, Stubbington Down, Kingsclere SU520569 [AB]

Latest: 16/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **57.009 *Ochlodes sylvanus*, Large Skipper**

Earliest: 03/06/18, Hillside Farm west SU579593 [AB]

High Count: 07/07/18, 32, Basing Wood, Chineham SU645557 [AB]

Latest: 27/07/18, Moor Copse, Park Wood SU636739 [JL]

## PIERIDAE

### **58.003 *Anthocharis cardamines*, Orange-tip**

Earliest: 01/04/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 03/06/18, Hillside Farm west SU579593 [AB]

### **58.006 *Pieris brassicae*, Large White**

Earliest: 01/05/18, Three Mile Cross (track next to A33) SU709674 [JH]

Latest: 13/10/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **58.007 *Pieris rapae*, Small White**

Earliest: 28/03/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

High Count: 22/07/18, 41, Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI SU546838 [JH]

02/08/18, Bramshill Plantation (south) SU757614 [AB]

24/09/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 29/09/18, 2, Riseley, The Marshes SU735633 [JH]

### **58.008 *Pieris napi*, Green-veined White**

From 02/04/18 to 11/09/18, earliest and latest both at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **58.010 *Colias croceus*, Clouded Yellow**

3 records only: 22/07/18, 3, The Holies, Streatley SU594798 [AB]

15/09/18, Moor Copse, Corner Field, SU639735 [JH]

03/11/18, Lowbury Hill SU5382 [JL]

### **58.013 *Gonepteryx rhamni*, Brimstone**

Earliest: 07/03/18, Brimpton Common SU568631 [JL]

High Count: 13/05/18, 27, Tidgrove Warren, Overton. SU526543 [AB]

Latest: 05/12/18, Moor Copse, Cottage Field SU63867370 [JL]

## NYMPHALIDAE

### **59.003 *Pararge aegeria*, Speckled Wood**

Earliest: 07/04/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 12/10/18, Moor Copse, Park Wood SU63817397 [JL]

### **59.005 *Coenonympha pamphilus*, Small Heath, BAP**

Earliest: 17/05/18, Great Windsor Park SU9472 [JL]

High Count: 02/06/18, 19, Tidgrove Warren, Overton. SU526543. Best ever! Really establishing all over the site now [AB]

High Count: 20/08/18, 51, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 [JH]

Latest: 27/09/18, Seven Barrows SU328829 [JL]

### **59.009 *Aphantopus hyperantus*, Ringlet**

Earliest: 04/06/18, 16, Fobney SU7071 [JL]

High Count: 27/06/18, 60, Tidgrove Warren, Overton. SU526543 [AB]

Latest: 25/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

04/06/18, 16, Fobney SU7071 [JL]

### **59.010 *Maniola jurtina*, Meadow Brown**

Earliest: 01/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

High Count: 21/06/18, 101, Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI SU546838 Highest count [JH]

Latest: 16/09/18, 2, Oven Bottom SU537835 [JH]

### **59.011 *Pyronia tithonus*, Gatekeeper**

Earliest: 01/07/18, 2, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

High Count: 25/07/18, 50, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 28/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

### **59.012 *Melanargia galathea*, Marbled White**

Earliest: 13/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

High Count: 27/06/18, 108, Tidgrove Warren, Overton. SU526543 [AB]

Latest: 24/07/18, Sheepdrove Farm

SU358817 [JL]

**59.013 *Hipparchia semele*, Grayling, BAP:** 5 records:

Earliest & High Count: 14/08/18, 32, Mortimer, Hundred Acre Piece, Grayling bank SU633651 [JH]  
22/08/18, Pickling Yard Plantation, Mortimer SU641648 [AB]

22/08/18, Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer SU637650 [AB]

13/09/18, 7, Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer SU632650 [AB]

Latest: 18/09/18, 2, Hundred Acre Piece, Mortimer SU632650 [AB]

**59.017 *Argynnis paphia*, Silver-washed Fritillary**

Earliest: 21/06/18, Moor Copse SU640737 [JL]

High Count: 07/07/18, 23, Basing Wood, Chineham SU645557 [AB]

Latest: 07/08/18, Plastow Green SU536625 feeding on Buddleja [KW]

Also seen at Basildon Park [JH] [JL]; Frith Farm, Wheathold [AB]; Sulhamstead Bannister, Boarmoor Wood [JH], Mortimer, Starvale Woods [JH], Beech Hill [JH], The Holies, Streatley [AB], Aston Upthorpe, northern bank [a new for the site for JH]; Bramshill Plantation [AB]; Moor Copse [JL]; Bradfield, Mirams Copse [JL]; Ufton Wood [JL]; Sulham, Nunhide [JL]; Bradfield [JL] & Sheepdrove Farm [JL]

**59.019 *Argynnis aglaja*, Dark Green Fritillary:** 2 records only:

27/06/18, Tidgrove Warren, Overton. SU526543 [AB]

11/07/18, Stubbington Down, Kingsclere SU520569 [AB]

**59.021 *Limenitis camilla*, White Admiral, BAP**

Earliest: 14/06/18, Smithley's Copse, Axmansford SU564608 [AB]

High Count: 24/06/18, 10, Sleeper's Copse, Axmansford SU564613 [AB]

Latest: 11/07/18, Bradfield, Mirams Copse SU579728 [JL];

Also seen at Basildon Park [JH]; Sulhamstead Bannister; Boarmoor Wood [JH]; Mortimer, Starvale Woods [JH]; Padworth [JL], Lambridge Wood [JL] & Paices Wood, coppice [JL]

**59.023 *Vanessa atalanta*, Red Admiral**

17 records from 20/02/18 to 24/12/18 (Christmas Eve!), earliest and latest both at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**59.024 *Vanessa cardui*, Painted Lady:** 13 records: Earliest: :03/06/18, Hillside Farm west SU579593 [AB]

Latest: 25/09/18, Westwood Road (Tilehurst) SU666742 [JH]

**59.026 *Aglais io*, Peacock**

Earliest: 09/03/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 19/10/18, Burghfield Common SU6467

[JL]

**59.027 *Aglais urticae*, Small Tortoiseshell**

Earliest: 09/03/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 20/10/18, Burghfield Common SU649670 [JL]

**59.031 *Polygonia c-album*, Comma**

Earliest: 09/03/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 20/10/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW]

## RIODINIDAE

**60.001 *Hamearis lucina*, Duke of Burgundy, BAP** 27/05/18, 2, Wellbottom Down SU3283 [JL]

## LYCAENIDAE

**61.001 *Lycaena phlaeas*, Small Copper**

Earliest: 30/04/18, Sheepdrove Farm SU358817 [JL]

High count: 27/09/18, 27, Ashford Hill Meadows NNR SU562621 [AB]

Latest: 29/10/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

30/04/18, Sheepdrove Farm SU358817 [JL]

**61.004 *Favonius quercus*, Purple Hairstreak**

Eggs: 23/03/18, 10 eggs were found on and around oak buds at Westfield Copse, Little Ham Farm,

Earliest imago: 14/06/18, 2, Smithley's Copse, Axmansford SU564608 [AB]

Exceptional Count: 08/07/18, 73, Smithley's Copse, Axmansford SU564608 [AB]

Latest: 22/08/18, 2, Mortimer West End, Simms Copse SU645636 [JH]

Remarkable numbers this year [AB]

**61.005 *Callophrys rubi*, Green Hairstreak:** 8 records:

Earliest: 22/04/18, Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI SU546837 [JH]

Latest: 03/06/18, Snelmore, footpath south of Mary Hare Sc SU469707 [JH]

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

25/06/18, Clayfield Copse SU724769 [JL]

07/07/18, Hillgreen, Mud Lane crossroads SU452767 [JH, PB]

**61.010 *Cupido minimus*, Small Blue, BAP:** 6 records only:

21/05/18, Sheepdrove Farm SU358817 [JL]

03/06/18, 3, Curridge, field east of A34 SU473709 [JH]

20/06/18, 4, Crog Hill/Wellbottom Down SU323833 [JH, JL]

Correction: Reports in The Naturalist of Small Blue at Red Cow Cottage in 2017 were erroneous [NH].

**61.012 *Celastrina argiolus*, Holly Blue**

Earliest: 02/04/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

Latest: 20/10/18, Burghfield Common SU649670 [JL]  
**61.014 *Plebejus argus*, Silver-studded Blue, BAP**  
 From 18/06/18 to 17/07/18. 5 records, all from Broadmoor Bottom, SU85666296 [JL]  
**61.015 *Aricia agestis*, Brown Argus**  
 Earliest: 19/05/18, The Holies, Top section SU588802 [JH]  
 Latest: 20/09/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**61.018 *Polyommatus icarus*, Common Blue**  
 Earliest: 19/05/18, 4, The Holies SU594798 [JH]  
 Latest: 03/10/18, field margin, Wheathold Road. SU562605 [AB]  
 Several reports of counts of 40 to 50 [NH]  
**61.019 *Polyommatus bellargus*, Adonis Blue**  
 19/05/18, 1, The Holies SU594798 [JH]  
 23/05/18, 3, Lardon Chase SU588809 [JH]  
 20/08/18, 21, Lardon Chase SU588809 Highest count [JH]  
**61.020 *Polyommatus coridon*, Chalk Hill Blue**  
 22/07/18, 45, The Holies, Streatley SU594798 [AB]  
 22/07/18, 95, Lardon Chase SU588809 Highest count [JH]  
 22/07/18, 6, Aston Upthorpe Downs SSSI SU546838 [JH]  
 20/08/18, Lardon Chase SU588809 [JH]

## PYRALIDAE

**62.012 *Pyla fusca*, Local**  
 04/10/18, Bowdown Bomb Site SU50726532 [Roger Stace, NH]  
**62.021 *Oncocera semirubella*, Notable B**  
 17 records from 30/06/18 to 10/10/18, earliest and latest both at Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
 Becoming commoner and even occurring new to my garden on 19/09/18 in Harcourt Drive (Earley) in south Reading, which is not on The Chalk: [NH]; also new to Jan's garden: 22/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
**62.023 *Pempelia palumbella*, Local**  
 21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU56996566 [NH]  
**62.024 *Rhodophaea formosa*, Local**  
 27/05/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
 , Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**62.038 *Acrobasis consociella*, Local**  
 20/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 check [NH]  
 09/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
**62.075, *Hypsopygia costalis*, Gold Triangle, Common**  
 Very Late: 10/10/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

## CRAMBIDAE

**63.009 *Pyrausta nigrata*, Local**  
 21/07/18, 2, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]  
**63.014 *Sitochroa palealis*, Local**

May to September at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**63.015 *Sitochroa verticalis*, Local**  
 May to September at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**63.016 *Anania fuscalis*, Local**  
 27/05/18, 4, Watts Bank reserve SU331771 [JL]  
 02/06/18, Fence Wood, ride SU512713 [JL]  
 03/06/18, Lambourn, Crog Hill, The Hollow Way SU322833 [JL]  
 20/06/18, Seven Barrows SU329828 [JL]  
 25/06/18, Watts Bank reserve SU330772 [JL]  
**63.022 *Anania crocealis*, Local**  
 19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]  
**63.028 *Ostrinia nubilalis*, European Corn-borer, Local**  
 15 records from 18/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 18/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]. There have been more this year; numbers may have been augmented by migration [NH]  
**63.031 *Udea ferrugalis*, Rusty-dot Pearl, Migrant**  
 Only record: 03/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
**63.039 *Mecyna flavalis*, prDB3**  
 09/07/18, 2, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
 21/07/18, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]  
 Also seen at Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 in July & August [AR]  
**63.054 *Cydalima perspectalis*, Box-tree Moth, Adventive**  
 30/06/18, Datchet SU98917706 Verified by Martin Albertini (1/7/18) [IE]  
 05/09/18, 02/10/18, 03/10/18 & 10/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
 10/10/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 New for garden, dark form [JH]  
 This adventive moth is spreading rapidly across the UK and many members may have noticed the damage the larvae do to ornamental Box hedges. I feared that it would also begin to affect the wild Box on Box Hill in Surrey, but there was no sign of damage when I walked there in June 2018. None had come to my garden moth traps before September 2018, but by the end of October I had seen four. Though the moth is a pest it is to my eyes extremely beautiful. [NH]  
**63.063 *Scoparia basistrigalis*, Local**  
 Only record: 24/06/18, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
**63.075 *Eudonia pallida*, Local**  
 15/06/18, 2, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
 20/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
 21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU56996566 not 100% [NH]  
 01/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
**63.092 *Agriphila selasella*, Local**  
 11 records from 21/07/18, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH] to 28/08/18, Hermitage, Furze Hill meadow SU540738 [JL]  
**63.110 *Pediasia aridella*, Notable B**

27/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**63.118 *Nymphula nitidulata*, Beautiful China-mark, Local**

30/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**DREPANIDAE**

**65.002, *Watsonalla binaria*, Oak Hook-tip, Common**

Very Late: 27/09/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**65.003 *Watsonalla cultraria*, Barred Hook-tip, Local**

7 records from 07/05/18, 2, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 05/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**65.010, *Tethea ocularis*, Figure of Eighty, Common**

Very Late: 08/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**65.011 *Tethea or*, Poplar Lutestring, Local**

Very Early: 07/05/18, Snelsmore SU46287086 [PB]  
16/06/18, Greyfield Wood (SE) SU58136897 [NH]  
05/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**65.015 *Polyplocia ridens*, Frosted Green, Local**

22 records from 07/04/18, Snelsmore SU46177108 [PB] to 15/09/18, Kintbury SU37476593 [NH]  
22/04/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742.  
New to garden [JH]

**SPHINGIDAE**

**69.007 *Sphinx pinastri*, Pine Hawk-moth, Local**

09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]  
14/06/18, Erleigh Lake (Lower Meadow) SU74757096 [NH]  
21/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
12/08/18, Snelsmore SU46237100 [PB]

**69.010 *Macroglossum stellatarum*, Hummingbird Hawk-moth, Immigrant**

11 records, *all* listed below:  
17/07/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
31/07/18, Pierce's Hill, Tilehurst SU66507423 [JL]  
05/08/18, 2, 06/08/18, 11/08/18 & 17/08/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW]  
16/09/18, Pierce's Hill, Tilehurst SU66507423 [JL]  
27/09/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
27/09/18, Sheepdrove Farm SU358817 [JL]  
30/10/18, Caversham Park SU7276 [JL]  
06/11/18, Emmer Green SU731764 [JL]

**69.016, *Deilephila elpenor*, Elephant Hawk-moth, Common**

Early: 25/05/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

**69.017 *Deilephila porcellus*, Small Elephant Hawk-moth, Local**

6 records from 06/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]

**GEOMETRIDAE**

**70.004 *Idaea rusticata*, Least Carpet, Local**

23 records from 18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 10/10/18, 2, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 1st record of 2nd generation [JH]

**70.006 *Idaea fuscovenosa*, Dwarf Cream Wave, Local**

8 records from 18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 16/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**70.008, *Idaea seriata*, Small Dusty Wave, Common**

Very Late: 04/10/18, Bombsite, Bowdown Woods SU50726532 [PB, NH]

**70.012 *Idaea trigeminata*, Treble Brown Spot, Local**

22 records from 28/05/18, Snelsmore SU46137612 [PB] to 09/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**70.015 *Idaea emarginata*, Small Scallop, Local**

10/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
12/07/18, 2, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
13/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
19/07/18, Seven Barrows, Lambourn SU327829 [PB, NH]

**70.018 *Idaea straminata*, Plain Wave, Local**

30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]  
Very Late: 17/09/18, Snelsmore SU46207612 [PB]

**70.023 *Scopula marginepunctata*, Mullein Wave, Local**

Only record: 03/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**70.025 *Scopula immutata*, Lesser Cream Wave, Local**

Only record: 01/07/18, Bagnor Marsh (Headlights) SU452697 [PB]

**70.027 *Scopula floslactata*, Cream Wave, Local**

Only record: 17/05/18, 2, Chawridge Bank SU89267388 [NH]

**70.031 *Cyclophora annularia*, Mocha, Notable B**

17/05/18, Chawridge Bank SU89267388 [NH]  
21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795 [PB, NH]

**70.032 *Cyclophora albipunctata*, Birch Mocha, Local**

07/05/18, Snelsmore SU46287086 [PB]  
02/09/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 dusk [PB]  
06/09/18, Decoy Heath SU61116353 [PO], NH]



**70.037 *Cyclophora linearia*, Clay Triple-lines, Local**  
13 records from 26/05/18, Snelsmore SU46237100 [PB] to 08/09/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**70.038 *Rhodometra sacraria*, Vestal, Immigrant**  
08/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
10/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

17/10/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 ivy [PB]  
**70.039 *Phibalapteryx virgata*, Oblique Striped, Notable B**

16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB, Roy Dobson]

**70.043 *Scotopteryx bipunctaria*, Chalk Carpet, Notable B**

21/07/18, 13, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH, PB]

**70.050 *Xanthorhoe biriviata*, Balsam Carpet, Uncommon**

12/05/18, Beale Park SU619778 [PB]

**70.055 *Xanthorhoe quadrifasiata*, Large Twin-spot Carpet, Local**

19/06/18, Waltham Place SU85657710 [IE]

01/07/18, Bagnor Marsh (Headlights) SU452697 [PB]

19/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

21/07/18, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH, PB]

**70.059, *Camptogramma bilineata*, Yellow Shell, Common**

Very Late: 18/09/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB (BBOWT)]

**70.062 *Epirrhoe rivata*, Wood Carpet, Local**  
09/05/18 & 11/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**70.064 *Euphyia biangulata*, Cloaked Carpet, Notable B**

14/07/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**70.065 *Euphyia unangulata*, Sharp-angled Carpet, Local**

07/06/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]

22/06/18, Horris Hill SU460629 [PB]

07/08/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB (RD)]

**70.083 *Thera cupressata*, Cypress Carpet, Uncommon**

14/06/18, 2, Erleigh Lake (Lower Meadow) SU74757096 [NH]

18/06/18, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**70.084 *Plemyria rubiginata*, Blue-bordered Carpet, Local**

8 records from 13/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to

30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**70.104 *Lampropteryx otregiata*, Devon Carpet, Notable B**

03/06/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 headlights [PB]

09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB, Mark Calway]

**70.112 *Euchoeca nebulata*, Dingy Shell, Local**

09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

16/06/18, Greyfield Wood (W) SU57836888 [NH]

21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]

Very Late: 19/08/18, Herbert Plantation, Burghclere SU616795 [PB]

**70.117 *Minoa murinata*, Drab Looper, Notable B**

From 15/05/18, 15, Moor Copse, Park Wood SU636740 [JL] to 27/07/18, 2nd gen, also Moor Copse, Park Wood SU636739 [JL]

Other sites were Bradfield (Mirams Copse SU577730, Owlpit Copse & Long Copse SU580727) [JL], Greyfield Wood SU57836888 [PB], Yattendon ride SU563748 [JL] & Fence Wood (4 sites) [JL]

**70.118 *Philereme vetulata*, Brown Scallop, Local**

Only record: 24/06/18, Aston Upthorpe (day) SU546838 [PB]

**70.119 *Philereme transversata*, Dark Umber, Local**

19/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

19/07/18, 2, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]

21/07/18, 4, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]

**70.121 *Hydria undulata*, Scallop Shell, Local**

09/06/ & 14/7/18, & Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**70.123 *Triphosa dubitata*, Tissue, Local**

12/05/18, Beale Park SU619778 [PB, RI, Ian Sims]

**70.134 *Perizoma bifaciata*, Barred Rivulet, Local**

19/07/18, Seven Barrows, Lambourn SU327829 [PB]

22/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742

New record for garden [JH]

**70.137 *Perizoma albulata*, Grass Rivulet, Local**

6 records from 27/05/18, 3, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**70.146 *Eupithecia haworthiata*, Haworth's Pug, Local**

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]

21/07/18, 3, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]

04/08/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**70.148 *Eupithecia inturbata*, Maple Pug, Local**

19/07/18, 7, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH, PB]

21/07/18, 7, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH, PB]

27/07/18, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

04/08/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**70.159 *Eupithecia phoeniceata*, Cypress Pug, Uncommon**

8 records. From 29/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR] to 19/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

11 examples in 2018 seen at Harcourt Drive. More than in any previous year [NH]

**70.160 *Eupithecia tripunctaria*, White-spotted Pug, Local**

6 records from 18/04/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 05/08/18, Snelsmore

SU46387045 [PB]

**70.186 *Eupithecia millefoliata*, Yarrow Pug, Notable B**

Only record: 21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795 [PB]

**70.189 *Eupithecia subumbrata*, Shaded Pug, Local**

Only record: 21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU56996566 [NH]

**70.198 *Lobophora halterata*, Seraphim, Local**  
07/05/18, Snelsmore SU46287086 [PB]  
10/05/18, Maiden Erlegh SU750710 [PB (BMG)]

**70.199 *Pterapherapteryx sexalata*, Small Seraphim, Local**

7 records from 07/06/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB] to 16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB, Keith Lugg]

**70.200 *Acasis viretata*, Yellow-barred Brindle, Local**

10 records from 05/05/18, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 04/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**70.208 *Ligdia adustata*, Scorched Carpet, Local**  
7 records from 10/05/18, Maiden Erlegh SU750710 [PB, BMG] to 18/08/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**70.211 *Macaria notata*, Peacock Moth, Local**  
23/05/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB, BBOWT]  
16/06/18, Greyfield Wood (W) SU57836888 [NH]  
23/08/18, Snelsmore SU46207612 [PB]

**70.212 *Macaria alternata*, Sharp-angled Peacock, Local**

6 records from 07/06/18, 3, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB] to 28/08/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**70.224 *Plagodis dolabraria*, Scorched Wing, Local**  
Very Late: 15 records including one very late.  
From 17/05/18, Chawridge Bank SU89267388 Stace [Roger Stace, NH] to 12/08/18, Snelsmore SU46237100 [PB]

**70.226 *Opisthograptis luteolata*, Brimstone Moth, Common**

Extra brood? 30/12/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**70.231 *Apeira syringaria*, Lilac Beauty, Local**  
16/06/18, Greyfield Wood SU58136897 [NH, PB]  
19/06/18, Waltham Place SU85657710 [IE]  
20/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**70.233 *Ennomos quercinaria*, August Thorn, Local**  
26/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
31/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**70.235 *Ennomos fuscantaria*, Dusky Thorn, Common**

38 records including one very early: From 05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB] to 10/10/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
An exceptionally good year for this species [NH]

**70.246 *Apocheima hispidaria*, Small Brindled Beauty, Local**

10 & 18/02/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
18/02/ & 10/3/18, Snelsmore SU46177108 [PB]  
15/03/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**70.251, *Biston strataria*, Oak Beauty, Common**  
Very early: 22/01/18, Snelsmore SU46177108 [PB]

**70.258, *Peribatodes rhomboidaria*, Willow Beauty, Common**

Very late: 17/10/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Previously 3/10 [JH]

**70.267 *Hypomecis roboraria*, Great Oak Beauty, Notable B**

07/06/18, 3, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
27/07/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW]

**70.273 *Parectropis similaria*, Brindled White-spot, Local**

26/05/18, Snelsmore SU46237100 [PB]  
14/06/18, Erlegh Lake (Lower Meadow) SU74757096 [NH]  
16/06/18, Greyfield Wood (W) SU57836888 [NH]  
24/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096  
New to garden [NH]

**70.294 *Aspitates ochrearia*, Yellow Belle, Local**  
Only record: 07/08/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB, Martin Finch]

**70.295 *Perconia strigillaria*, Grass Wave, Local**  
Only record: 10/06/18, Decoy Heath SU611633 [JL]

**70.300 *Comibaena bajularia*, Blotched Emerald, Local**  
07/06/18, 2, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]  
09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]  
12/06/18, Snelsmore SU46287086 [PB]  
19/06/18, Waltham Place SU85657710 [IE]

**70.302 *Hemistola chrysoprasaria*, Small Emerald, Local**

14/06/18, Erlegh Lake (Lower Meadow) SU74757096 sic [NH]  
22/06/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]  
28/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
07/07/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**NOTODONTIDAE**

**71.016 *Peridea anceps*, Great Prominent, Local**  
19/04/18, Sole Common Pond [PB, NH]  
07/05/18, Snelsmore SU46287086 [PB]

09/05/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
14/05/18, 2, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
22/05/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**71.022 *Ptilodon cucullina*, Maple Prominent, Local**

18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
12/07/18, Maiden Erlegh SU750710 [PB (BMG)]  
26 & 27/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
05/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**71.027 *Clostera curtula*, Chocolate-tip, Local**  
12/05/18, Beale Park SU619778 [PB]  
20/05/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

#### EREBIDAE

**72.004 *Hypena rostralis*, Buttoned Snout, Notable B**  
Only record: 14/05/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**72.007 *Hypena crassalis*, Beautiful Snout, Local**  
Only record: 03/06/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 headlights [PB]

**72.009 *Leucoma salicis*, White Satin Moth, Local**  
Very Early: 09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [Grahame Hawker, PB]  
21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]

**72.010 *Lymantria monacha*, Black Arches, Local**  
14 records from 30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB] to 20/08/18, Snelsmore SU46197094 [PB]

**72.011 *Lymantria dispar*, Gypsy Moth, Immigrant**  
Only record: 05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB (BC)]

**72.012 *Euproctis chrysorrhoea*, Brown-tail, Local**  
24/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 soc [NH]

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

**72.013, *Euproctis similis*, Yellow-tail, Common**  
Very Late: 18/09/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB (BBOWT)]

**72.017, *Orgyia antiqua*, Vapourer, Common**  
Very Early: 06/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Previously 6/7 [JH]

**72.029 *Callimorpha dominula*, Scarlet Tiger, Local**  
Larvae found 07/04/18, Hosehill LNR & 18/04/18, Tilehurst [JL]  
17 records from 10/06/18, Hermitage SU502728 [JL] to 14/07/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**72.030 *Euplagia quadripunctaria*, Jersey Tiger, Notable B**  
29/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 Second time I've caught one in the garden moth trap [NH]  
05/08/18, Frogmill, Hurley SU812835 [FF]

**72.035 *Miltochrista miniata*, Rosy Footman, Local**  
8 records from 28/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 05/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**72.036 *Nudaria mundana*, Muslin Footman, Local**  
Only record: 19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]

This was the first time I had seen *mundana* on Chalk downland [NH]

**72.037 *Thumatha senex*, Round-winged Muslin, Local**  
22/06/18, Horris Hill SU460629 [PB]  
27/07/18, Bagnor Marsh (Headlights) SU452697 [PB]

**72.038 *Cybosia mesomella*, Four-dotted Footman, Local**  
09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]  
21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57036570 [NH]  
22/06/18, Horris Hill SU460629 [PB]

**72.041 *Lithosia quadra*, Four-spotted Footman,**

#### Notable A

Only record: 14/07/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**72.042 *Atolmis rubricollis*, Red-necked Footman, Local**

03/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

28/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

**72.043 *Eilema depressa*, Buff Footman, Local**

10 records from 28/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 22/07/18, Fobney Island SU701710 [JL]

Very High Count: 21/07/18, 68, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH]

01/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 New to garden [JH]

**72.046 *Eilema complana*, Scarce Footman, Local**

19 records from 30/06/18, 2, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE] to 13/08/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 [PB]

**72.049 *Eilema sororcula*, Orange Footman, Local**  
19 records from 06/05/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR] to 30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**72.060 *Hypenodes humidalis*, Marsh Oblique-barred, Notable B**

Only record: 21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795  
Unexpected, though there are suitable marshy areas for it along the banks of the Thames [NH, PB]

**72.061 *Schrankia costaeistrigalis*, Pinion-streaked Snout, Local**

16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB]

04/10/18, Bombsite, Bowdown Woods SU510654 [PB]

**72.063 *Lygephila pastinum*, Blackneck, Local**  
21/06/18, 10, Wasing Quarry NR SU56996566 [NH]  
19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]

**72.066 *Parascotia fuliginaria*, Waved Black, Notable B**

23/06/18 & 10/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

14/07/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

16/07/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 Trapped with 5W LED lamp over Skinner [IE]

**72.067 *Phytometra viridaria*, Small Purple-barred, Local**

Only record: 21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795 [PB, NH]

**72.069 *Laspeyria flexula*, Beautiful Hook-tip, Local**  
21 records from 01/06/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 Earliest ever garden record, previously 19/6/17 [JH] to 19/07/18, Seven Barrows, Lambourn SU327829 [PB, NH]

**72.076 *Catocala fraxini*, Clifden Nonpareil, Immigrant**  
13/08/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 [PB]

16 & 18 & 19/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 Having seen none in my garden before 3 three came along at once – or at least 3 different individuals in the course of 4 days [NH]  
04/10/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey

SU592868 [AR]  
 08/10/18, Snelsmore SU46017099 [PB]  
**72.078, *Catocala nupta*, Red Underwing, Common**  
 Very Early: 11/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst  
 SU666742 [JH]

## NOCTUIDAE

**73.002, *Abrostola triplasia*, Dark Spectacle, Common**  
 13/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
 04/09/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

New to both Jan's garden and my garden, but I was surprised to find that I had not seen it there before because I always see a few each year elsewhere.

**73.008 *Chrysodeixis chalcites*, Golden Twin-spot, Immigrant**  
 Only record: 23/10/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 New record for garden. ?2nd record for VC22? [JH]

**73.010 *Macdunnoughia confusa*, Dewick's Plusia, Immigrant**  
 Only record: 25/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] This is the second record for my garden; it may be establishing itself in the UK.

**73.022 *Plusia festucae*, Gold Spot, Common**  
 7 records from 19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [P B, NH] to 17/10/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]  
 I think it had a good year [NH]

**73.036 *Acronicta alni*, Alder Moth, Local**  
 18/05/18, Braywick Park, Maidenhead SU8879 [PB]  
 22/05/18, 2, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
 09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB, Grahame Hawker]

**73.039 *Acronicta aceris*, Sycamore, Local**  
 8 records from 23/05/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 07/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**73.047 *Craniophora ligustri*, Coronet, Local**  
 35 records from 21/05/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 05/10/18, Snelsmore SU46307105, very late [PB]

**73.048 *Panemeria tenebrata*, Small Yellow Underwing, Local**  
 04/05/18, 2, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

14/05/18, Furze Hill, Meadow SU51157419 [JL]  
 28/05/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead (day) SU452767 [PB]

**73.059 *Calophasia lunula*, Toadflax Brocade, RDB**  
 25/05/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 2nd garden record [JH]  
 08/09/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868

[AR]  
 Caterpillars munching a vigorous Purple Toadflax: 07 & 09/08/18, Plastow Green SU536625 [KW, AB, Graham Dennis, Grahame Hawker]  
 Another moth that has been increasing in our area, but hasn't visited my garden yet [NH]  
**73.070 *Pyrrhia umbra*, Bordered Sallow, Local**  
 Only record: 07/07/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**73.082 *Cryphia algae*, Tree-lichen Beauty, Immigrant**  
 10 records from 12/07/18, Maiden Erlegh SU750710 [PB, BMG] to 28/08/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

This **was** an immigrant moth but is now well established in the UK. However, it avoided my garden until late July 2018 when 7 came along on 5 nights between 23 & 27/07/18; I also caught one on the RDNHS visit to Hartslock nature reserve on 21/07/18 [NH]

22/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Second garden record [JH]

**73.091 *Elaphria venustula*, Rosy Marbled, Notable B**  
 Only record: 18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**73.099, *Hoplodrina ambigua*, Vine's Rustic, Common**  
 Extra generation? 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

**73.100 *Chilodes maritima*, Silky Wainscot, Local**  
 Only record: 19/07/18, Seven Barrows SU32958276 [NH]

**73.105 *Dypterygia scabriuscula*, Bird's Wing, Local**  
 Only record: 13/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**73.107 *Mormo maura*, Old Lady, Local**  
 8 records from 08/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR] to 19/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**73.119 *Helotropha leucostigma*, Crescent, Local**  
 Only record: 16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB]

**73.124 *Hydraecia petasitis*, Butterbur, Local**  
 Only record: 16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB, Mark Botham]

**73.139 *Lenisa geminipuncta*, Twin-spotted Wainscot, Local**  
 07/08/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB, Roy Dobson]  
 18/08/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**73.142 *Coenobia rufa*, Small Rufous, Local**  
 26/07/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]  
 05/08/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**73.157 *Apamea anceps*, Large Nutmeg, Local**  
 8 records from 25/05/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH] to 07/07/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**73.164 *Apamea sublustris*, Reddish Light Arches, Local**

13/06/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
21/06/18, 2, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]

21 & 30/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**73.180, *Tiliacea aurago*, Barred Sallow, Common**

Late: 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

**73.181, *Xanthia togata*, Pink-barred Sallow, Common**

Very Early: 16/08/18, Thatcham Reedbeds [PB, Keith Lugg]

**73.191 *Agrochola haematidea*, Southern Chestnut, RDB**

Only record: 16/10/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 [PB]

A moth I have never seen in the UK. It occurs very locally and in small numbers in Sussex and the New Forest, and I have previously looked for it in our area with Brian Baker who thought there was a realistic chance of it being found in Berkshire [NH]

**73.197 *Conistra rubiginea*, Dotted Chestnut, Notable B**

Only record: 21/04/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

Overwinters as an adult. Can sometimes be found feeding on Sallow (Pussy Willow) in the Spring.

**73.200 *Lithophane semibrunnea*, Tawny Pinion, Local**

21/09/ & 02/10/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 feeding on ivy blossom [PB]

Overwinters as an adult [NH]

**73.201 *Lithophane socia*, Pale Pinion, Local**

21/03/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

07/04/18, Thatchers, Axmansford SU565607 [AB]

18/04/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

29/09/18, 08/10/18 & 25/10/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 All feeding on ivy [PB]

Overwinters as an adult [NH]

**73.209 *Xylena vetusta*, Red Sword-grass, Local**

27/09/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

11/10/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 ivy [PB]

A moth I've never seen in the UK. Overwinters as an adult moth and though it does come into moth traps, it seems that you are more likely to find it feeding on ivy nectar in the Autumn [NH]

**73.211 *Enargia paleacea*, Angle-striped Sallow, Notable B**

Only record: 14/07/18, Kintbury Chase

SU374658 [PB]

A moth I've never seen in our area [NH]

**73.212 *Ipimorpha retusa*, Double Kidney, Local**

Only record: 24/07/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB]

**73.213 *Ipimorpha subtusa*, Olive, Local**

Only record: 21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795 [PB, NH]

**73.216, *Cosmia trapezina*, Dun-bar, Common**

Early: 15/06/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Previous earliest ever 22/6 [JH]

Very Late: 17/09/18, Snelsmore SU46207612 [PB]

**73.217 *Cosmia pyralina*, Lunar-spotted Pinion, Local**

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB, Martin Finch]

11/07/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

21/07/18, Hartslock SU616795 [PB, NH]

**73.221 *Parastichtis suspecta*, The Suspected, Local**

21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]  
30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**73.222 *Apterogenum ypsilon*, Dingy Shears, Local**

21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57036570 [NH]

21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU56996566 [NH]

05/07/18, Ockwell's Park SU87867863 [PB]

**73.223 *Dryobota labecula*, Oak Rustic, Rare immigrant**

Only record: 07/10/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 First time I've seen it in the UK.

[NH]

This species is now established on the south coast and is spreading north. There are still very few records from our area [NH]

**73.224, *Griposia aprilina*, Merveille du Jour, Common**

Very Late: 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Previous latest ever 30/10 [JH]

**73.233, *Aporophyla nigra*, Black Rustic, Common**

Very Late: 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Previous latest ever 31/10 [JH]

**73.237 *Polymixis flavicincta*, Large Ranunculus, Local**

27/09/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

02/10/18, Snelsmore Lane SU461714 ivy [PB]

08/10/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]

**73.263 *Lacanobia w-latinum*, Light Brocade, Local**

10 records from 18/05/18, 4, to 15/06/18, 3, earliest and latest both at Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH]

**73.264 *Lacanobia thalassina*, Pale-shouldered Brocade, Common**

Only record: 20/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

Though classified as common, I come across it very infrequently [NH]

**73.270, *Melanchra persicariae*, Dot Moth, Common**

Very Early: 09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**73.280 *Hecatera dysodea*, Small Ranunculus, pRDBK**

Only record: 23/08/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH].

This should perhaps be reclassified as a recent colonist. I was surprised that no-one else recorded it in VC22. Apart from the one in my Reading garden, I saw others in a Salisbury garden on 5 different dates [NH]

**73.289 *Mythimna pudorina*, Striped Wainscot, Local**

Only record: 30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]

**73.297 *Mythimna albipuncta*, White-point, Immigrant, recent colonist**

28 records from 19/05/18 to 15/11/18! It is clearly now well established and should really be reclassified as 'common' – though I *still* find it exciting to see [NH]. Highest ever year count: 30 individuals. Previously 9 in 2017 [JH]

**73.302 *Leucania obsoleta*, Obscure Wainscot, Local**

14/06/18, Erleigh Lake (Lower Meadow) SU74757096 [NH]

21/06/18, Wasing Quarry NR SU57076573 [NH]

**73.317, *Agrotis exclamatoris*, Heart & Dart, Common**

Late: 10/10/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Latest ever garden record. Previously 25/9/14 [JH]

**73.319, *Agrotis segetum*, Turnip Moth, Common**

Very Late: 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Latest ever garden record. Previously 4/11 [JH]

**73.327 *Agrotis ipsilon*, Dark Sword-grass, Immigrant**

6 records from 21/07/18, Hartslock SU61627954 [NH] to 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742 [JH].

**73.337 *Cerastis leucographa*, White-marked, Local**

07/04/18, Snelsmore SU46177108 [PB]  
13/04/18, Whitchurch Hill SU63697880 [IE]  
19/04/18, Sole Common Pond SU41247072 [NH]

**73.338, *Lycophotia porphyrea*, True Lovers Knot, Common**

Very Early: 26/05/18, Snelsmore SU46237100 [PB]

**73.342, *Noctua pronuba*, Large Yellow Underwing, Common**

Late: 15/11/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Latest ever garden record, previously 26/10 [JH]

**73.345, *Noctua comes*, Lesser Yellow Underwing, Common**

Early: 01/07/18, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742. Earliest ever garden record, previously 10/7 [JH]

**73.355 *Xestia castanea*, Neglected Rustic, Local**

4 records only, but if you run moth traps on heathland in Berkshire you may expect to see it. [NH]

25/08/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 dusk [PB]  
06/09/18, 10, Decoy Heath SU61116353 [NH]  
06/09/18, 3, Decoy Heath SU61116353 [NH]  
18/09/18, Estovers SU499652 [PB (BBOWT)]

**73.356 *Xestia agathina*, Heath Rustic, Local**

Only record(s): 06/09/18, Decoy Heath SU61116353 [Paul Olive] & [NH] each caught one.

I know of no other recent records of Heath Rustic in VC22 (old Berkshire) [NH]

**NOLIDAE R**

**74.002 *Meganola albula*, Kent Black Arches, Notable B**

30/06/18, Snelsmore SU46387045 [PB]  
07/07/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**74.003 *Nola cucullatella*, Short-cloaked Moth, Common**

11 records from 18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 18/09/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH]

**74.004 *Nola confusalis*, Least Black Arches, Local**

12 records from 17/04/18, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 09/06/18, Kintbury Chase SU374658 [PB]

**74.007 *Bena bicolorana*, Scarce Silver-lines, Local**

5 records from 18/06/18, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 [NH] to 07/07/18, Hill Green, Leckhampstead SU452767 [PB]

**74.009 *Nycteola revayana*, Oak Nycteoline, Local**

11 records from 07/04/18, Snelsmore SU46177108 [PB] to 16/10/18, Snelsmore SU45977082 [PB]

**74.011 *Earias clorana*, Cream-bordered Green Pea, Notable B**

Only record: 02/06/18, Red Cow Cottage, Cholsey SU592868 [AR]

**CONTRIBUTORS**

I am grateful for contributions of records from Paul Black [PB], Andy Bolton [AB], Ian Esland [IE], Jan Haseler [JH], John Lerpiniere [JL], Paul Olive [PO], Tony Rayner [AR] & Ken White [KW].

## VERTEBRATES REPORT 2018 by Tony Rayner

My grateful thanks to those who have contributed to this report. Once again special thanks are due to John Lerpeniere, Gordon Crutchfield, Rod d'Ayala, Ken White and Jan Haseler, for their invaluable input. Where Cholsey grid references are not stated, the records relate to SU592868 (Red Cow Cottage).

Easily the most commonly reported mammal in 2018 is the Muntjac Deer. I have decided simply to list the records that are nearest to the centre of Reading, and leave the reader to assume that this non-native species has been found almost everywhere in our area.

Full details of bird sightings for Reading and Berkshire can be accessed online at the Berkshire Ornithological Club website <http://berksoc.org.uk/recording/annual-reports/>. Annual reports for years up to 2012 can be downloaded as a PDF, and 2013-16 can be purchased as books. 2017-18 reports are in the pipeline

### BIRDS

#### Exceptional local records

##### ***Gavia immer* Great Northern Diver**

23 & 26/01/18 One on Woolhampton Gravel Pit (KW)

##### ***Coccothraustes coccothraustes* Hawfinch**

26/01/18 Five at Padworth Church SU613662 (KW)

##### ***Burhinus oedipnemos* Stone Curlew**

19/08/18 Nine in Kingsclere area SU52 (KW/SW)

#### Seen/heard on local RDNHS field trips or in members' gardens

##### ***Emberiza calandra* Corn Bunting**

22/05/18 Two at South Stoke SU608837 (ES)

##### ***Falco subbuteo* Hobby**

22/05/18 One at South Stoke SU595843 (ES)

##### ***Cettia cetti* Cetti's Warbler**

11/7/18 One at Jubilee River SU927795 (FB)

##### ***Fringilla montifringilla* Brambling**

02/01/18 One in Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

16/01/18 to 04/2/18 One in Plastow Green garden SU537624 (KW)

##### ***Falco peregrinus* Peregrine**

13/2/18 One seen from Plastow Green garden SU537624 (KW)

##### ***Spinus spinus* Siskin**

10/03/18 Six in Cholsey garden (TR)

##### ***Alcedo atthis* Kingfisher**

06/08/18 One seen from Plastow Green garden SU537624 (KW)

##### ***Perdix perdix* Grey Partridge**

09/08/18 Fifteen in Cholsey meadow (TR)

##### **FISH - No records received**

### AMPHIBIANS

##### ***Bufo bufo* Common Toad**

07/04/18 Hosehill LNR SU649699 (JL)

28/04/18 Hosehill LNR SU650694 (JL)

17/05/18 Great Windsor Park SU945723 (JL)

22/05/18 Long Copse Bradfield SU580727 (JL)

27/09/18 Hosehill LNR SU649694 (JL)

08/06/18 Juvenile in Cholsey garden (TR) 18/08/18 One in Cholsey garden (TR)

##### ***Triturus vulgaris* Smooth Newt**

30/05/18 Brookfield School, Tilehurst SU663754 (JL)

12/07/18 Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst SU6873 (JL) To

02/10/18 100+ records Newlands Avenue, Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)

##### ***Triturus helveticus* Palmate Newt**

23/3/18 to 19/9/18 Nine sightings Newlands Ave. Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)

12/07/18 Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst SU682733 (JL)

##### ***Triturus cristatus cristatus* Great Crested Newt**

13/02/18 to 12/10/18 26 records Newlands Ave Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)

##### ***Rana temporaria* Common Frog**

14/01/18 Tilehurst garden SU665742 (JL) 30/01/18 Two in Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

12/03/18 First spawn in Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

25/04/18 Long Copse Bradfield SU580727 (JL)

25/04/18 Rushall Copse Bradfield SU581724 (JL)

17/05/18 Great Windsor Park SU945723 (JL)

30/05/18 Brookfield School Tilehurst SU663754 (JL)

21/07/18 Hosehill LNR SU646696 (JL)

01/08/18 Sheepdrove Farm SU357818 (JL)

09/08/18 Sole Common SU412707 (JL)

06/09/18 Tilehurst allotment SU670748 (JL)  
21/11/18 Lea Farm Twyford SU782734 (JL)  
28/09/18 & 20/10/18 One in Cholsey garden, the  
sole site records for the year. (TR)

***Rana ridibunda* Marsh Frog** No records received

## **REPTILES**

### ***Lacerta vivipara* Common Lizard**

21/04/18 to 03/05/18 A total of 17 sightings at  
Cholsey (TR)  
05/05/18 Decoy Heath SU611633 (JL)  
14/07/18 & 01/09/18 5 at Peppard Common  
SU704815 (Rd/A)  
26/07/18 Broadmoor Bottom SU856628 (JL)  
02/08/18 Wokefield Common SU656661 (JL)  
04/09/18 Decoy Heath SU612633 (JL)  
07/10/18 One at Cholsey (TR)

### ***Anguis fragilis* Slow-worm**

04/01/18 Tilehurst garden SU665742 (JL)  
10/03/18 to 02/05/18 A total of 563 sightings with  
a maximum count of 83 on 22/04/18 Cholsey.  
(TR) 01/04/18 to 30/09/18 41 records at  
Chalkhills, Whitchurch SU640779 (Rd/A & MW)  
06/04/18 to 11/10/18 109 records at Newlands  
Ave Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)  
14/04/18 Paices Wood 2 locations SU583637 (JL)  
19/04/18 Tilehurst allotment SU670748 (JL)  
15/05/18 Decoy Heath SU610633 (JL)  
16/06/18 Wokefield Common SU650662 (JL)  
03/07/18 Two at Badgemoor Ave Henley  
SU756829 (Rd/A)  
07/07/18 One at Decoy Heath SU612634 (MT)  
25/08/18 Hermitage, Furze Hill SU541739 (JL)  
01/09/18 Hosehill LNR SU648694 (JL)  
28/09/18 to 21/10/18 A total of 54 sightings  
Cholsey (TR)

### ***Natrix natrix* Grass Snake**

5/03/18 to 02/05/18 A total of 97 sightings with a  
record maximum of 19 on 21/04/18 at Cholsey  
(TR)  
13/04/18 Hosehill LNR SU650694 (JL)  
13/05/18 Paices Wood 2 locations SU583638 (JL)  
09/06/18 Hosehill LNR 2 locations SU648694 (JL)  
10/06/18 Decoy Heath SU609634 (JL)  
30/06/18 Skin at Peppard Common SU704815  
(Rd/A)  
25/08/18 Hermitage SU502729 (JL)  
17/09/18 Paices Wood SU583638 (JL)  
10/09/18 One at Pingewood SU691703 (GC)

25/09/18 Hosehill LNR SU648694 (JL)  
26/09/18 to 16/10/19 A total of 12 sightings at  
Cholsey (TR)  
In year No records at Chalkhills, Whitchurch  
SU640779 (Rd/A)

### ***Vipera berus* Adder**

18/04/18 Decoy Heath SU611633 (JL)

## **MAMMALS**

### **BATS**

Using an Echo Meter Pro bat detector that records  
bats automatically. the number of passes made in  
a Cholsey garden were:-

### ***Pipistrellus pipistrellus* Common Pipistrelle**

18/06/18 13 passes (FR)  
21/06/18 4 passes (FR)  
07/08/18 20 passes (FR)

### ***Pipistrellus pygmaeus* Soprano Pipistrelle**

18/06/18 2 passes (FR)  
21/06/18 16 passes (FR)  
07/08/18 11 passes (FR)

### ***Nyctalus noctula* Noctule**

18/06/18 7 passes (FR)  
07/08/18 17 passes (FR)

### ***Nyctalus leisleri* Leisler's**

18/06/18 1 pass (FR)

### ***Myotis nattereri* Natterer's**

07/08/18 1 pass (FR)

## **INSECTIVORES**

### ***Erinaceus europaeus* Hedgehog**

10/04/18 to 25/10/18 One recorded on 45 dates  
Earley garden SU737711 (DO)  
May to Oct Newlands Ave Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)  
22/06/18 One at Caversham SU713789 (GC)  
08/08/18 One at Pingewood SU678703 (GC)  
09/08/18 One at Welford Park SU401715 (JL)  
02/10/18 Adult in Cholsey garden (TR)  
27/10/18 One occupying nest Newlands Ave  
Didcot SU522896 (Rd/A)

### ***Sorex araneus* Common Shrew**

08/01/18 to 3/05/18 Nine sightings at Cholsey site  
(TR)  
03/02/18 One at Hosehill LNR SU648694 (JL)  
13/04/18 One at Hosehill under felt SU648694 (JL)  
28/04/18 One at Hosehill under felt SU652697 (JL)



13/05/18 One at Hosehill Ash Hill SU650694 (JL)  
12/07/18 & 16/07/18 One at Pingewood SU691708 (GC)  
26/09/18 to 21/10/18 One sighting at Cholsey site (TR)

***Sorex minutus* Pygmy Shrew**

03/02/18 & 28/01/18 Hosehill East Meadow SU652607 (JL)  
14/04/18 One at Paices Wood SU587640 (JL)

***Neomys fodiens* Water Shrew**

16/06/18 One at Fobney SU700710 (JL)  
20/07/18 One at Greenmere Ponds Woodcote SU646813 (Rd/A)

***Talpa europaea* Mole**

12/03/18 Padworth Lane Gravel Pits SU608668 (JL)  
24/03/18 Two sites at Fobney Island SU7071 (JL)

**CARNIVORES**

***Meles meles* Badger**

Precise locations deliberately not provided for this species..

06/02/18 SU5186 (JL)  
19/02/18 SU5979 (JL)  
28/04/18 SU6374 (JL)  
06/05/18 SU4873 (JL)  
18/06/18 SU5175 (JL)  
09/08/18 SU4071 (JL)  
18/09/18 SU7175 (GC)  
09/10/18 SU4982 (JL)  
13/10/18 SU6079 (JL)  
16/10/18 SU6365 (JL)  
04/11/18 SU3474 (JL)

***Mustela nivalis* Weasel** No records received

***Mustela erminea* Stoat**

20/03/18 One in Cholsey garden SU587868 (PC)  
28/04/18 Road kill by Sheephouse Farm SU565845 (Rd/A)  
08/11/18 & 21/11/18 One in Cholsey garden SU587868 (PC)

***Mustela putorius* sp Polecat/Ferret**

21/08/18 One at Boxford SU434730 (JL)

***Mustela vison* American Mink**

25/03/18 One at Winterbourne Wood SU446718 (JL)

***Vulpes vulpes* Fox**

27/01/18 One at Lambourn SU323805 (LD)  
14/02/18 One at Tilehurst SU659733 (JL)  
09/04/18 to 11/04/18 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)  
14/04/18 to 22/11/18 One in Earley garden SU737711 (DO)

18/05/18 One at Southcote SU683718 (GC)  
16/06/18 One at Greyfield Wood, Beenham SU580689 (JL)  
19/06/18 One at Lousehill Copse, Tilehurst SU682733 (JL)  
22/06/18 One in Pingewood SU682709 (GC)  
28/06/18 One at Tilehurst SU665742 (JL)  
06/07/18 One at Southcote SU683714 (GC)  
19/07/18 One at Emmer Green SU717761 (GC)  
06/08/18 One at Moor Copse SU637735 (JL)  
10/08/18 One at Reading SU693729 (GC)  
17/09/18 One at Reading SU726729 (GC)  
07/10/18 One at Marlston SU527720 (JL)  
22/11/18 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)

***Lutra lutra* Otter**

10/4/18 One at Cholsey Marsh SU6085 (PC).

***Rattus norvegicus* Brown Rat**

07/01/18 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)  
03/05/18 One at Chieveley SU481728 (JL)  
13/06/18 & 05/9/18 One at Prospect Park, Reading SU691728 (JL)  
25/07/18 One at Pingewood SU691708 (GC)  
08/12/18 to 10/12/18 One in Cholsey garden (TR/RR)  
24/10/18 One at Hosehill LNR SU650698 (JL)

**DEER**

***Muntiacus reevesi* Muntjac**

15/01/18 At Sulham SU644743 (JL)  
29/01/18 At Purley SU644760 (JL)  
30/04/18 One at Mortimer SU647634 (JH)  
02/06/18 One at Emmer Green SU718762 (GC)  
05/06/18 At Moor Copse SU640734 (JL)  
05/06/18 At Englefield SU631722 (JL)

23/07/18 Two at Emmer Green SU716760 (GC)  
06/08/18 Two at Emmer Green SU714765 (GC)  
13/09/18 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)

***Capreolus capreolus* Roe Deer**

12/01/18 Four in Cholsey field SU600873 (TR)  
19/01/18 Ashampstead Common SU578750 (JL)  
19/01/18 Sulham/Purley SU653756 (JL)  
22/01/18 One in Cholsey meadow (TR)  
23/01/18 Two at Ashampstead Common SU578748 (JL)  
25/03/18 Three in Cholsey meadow (TR)  
29/01/18 Silchester Common SU622622 (JL)  
31/01/18 Twyford, Lea Farm pit SU788738 (JL)  
17/03/18 Theale SU648715 (JL)  
12/04/18 One in Cholsey meadow (TR)  
13/04/18 Theale SU648701 (JL)  
18/04/18 Two at Barefoot Copse SU655743 (JH)  
19/04/18 Two in Cholsey meadow (TR)  
29/04/18 Three in Cholsey meadow (TR)  
13/05/18 Paices Wood SU589636 (JL)

02/06/18 Fence Wood SU512712 (JL)  
 09/06/18 One at Pingewood SU675700 (GC)  
 26/06/18 Wokingham SU787714 (JL)  
 17/08/18 One at Pingewood SU676700 (GC)  
 03/10/18 & 31/10/18 Twyford Lea Farm pit  
 SU7873 (JL)  
 28/10/18 Two at Nettlebed SU701857 (GC)  
 21/11/18 Bradfield, Long Copse SU581727 (JL)  
 09/12/18 Three in Cholsey field SU600873 (TR)  
 23/1/17 Five at Lollingdon, Cholsey, SU571852  
 (PC)

***Dama dama* Fallow Deer**

01/04/18 15 at Hazeley Heath SU752584 (JH)  
 20/06/18 Post Down Lambourn SU470772 (RS)  
 01/09/18 One at Binfield Heath SU730779 (GC)

***Cervus elaphus* Red Deer** - No records received

**RABBITS & HARES**

***Lepus europaeus* Brown Hare**

22/04/18 One at Lids Down, Aston Upthorpe  
 SU547849 (JL)  
 19/08/18 Two at The Warren, Tidgrove SU524546  
 (KW/SW)

***Oryctolagus cuniculus* Rabbit**

03/03/18 Theale Tapperne Lake SU639705 (JL)  
 15/03/18 to 26/12/18 Up to 3 regularly in Cholsey  
 garden (TR)  
 06/04/18 Fobney SU705709 (JL)  
 10/04/18 Emmer Green SU724772 (JL)  
 22/04/18 Two at Aston Upthorpe Downs  
 SU543833 (JH)  
 03/05/18 Chieveley SU481728 (JL)  
 13/10/18 Wigmore Lane, Theale SU634702 (JL)

**RODENTS**

***Sciurus carolinensis* Grey Squirrel**

1 or 2 ever present in Cholsey garden (TR)  
 02/01/18 Ashampstead Common SU579751 (JL)  
 11/03/18 Beenham, Greyfield Wood SU577688  
 (JL)  
 10/04/18 Emmer Green SU723770 (JL)  
 13/06/18 Prospect Park, Reading SU691727 (JL)  
 09/10/18 Fobney SU700710 (JL)

**CONTRIBUTORS**

Many thanks go to the contributors of records who make the report possible:

**GC** Gordon Crutchfield; **PC** Paul Chandler; **LD** Lesley Dunlop; **Rd/A** Rod d'Ayala; **JH** Jan Haseler; **DO** David Owens; **JL** John Lerpeniere; **RR** Ro Rayner; **TR** Tony Rayner; **RS** Rob Stallard; **MT** Mike Turton; **KW** Ken White; **MW** Mike Waring; **SW** Sarah White.

***Apodemus sylvaticus* Wood Mouse**

19/02/18 One in Tilehurst garden SU665742 (JL)  
 11/04/18 to 15/4/18 Three sightings beneath  
 refuges at Cholsey (TR)  
 13/04/18 One under Hosehill felt SU652696 (JL)  
 29/06/18 One at Broadmoor Bottom SU860623  
 (JL)  
 27/06/17 One at Pingewood SU691708 (GC)  
 29/08/18 Breeding at Newlands Ave Didcot  
 SU522896 (Rd/A)

***Apodemus flavicollis* Yellow-necked Mouse**

No records received

***Muscardinus avellanarius* Hazel Dormouse**

No records received

***Micromys minutus* Harvest Mouse**

No records received

***Microtus agrestis* Field Vole**

08/01/18 to 16/10/18 Three sightings in Cholsey  
 meadow TR)  
 31/01/18 One at Twyford, Lea Farm Pit SU782734  
 (JL)

***Clethrionomys glareolus* Bank Vole**

12/01/18 to 5/4/18 Seventeen sightings in Cholsey  
 meadow (TR)  
 29/01/18 to 15/4/18 5 sightings under bird feeders  
 at Cholsey (TR/RR)  
 07/10/18 Bradfield, Long Copse SU580727 (JL)  
 16/11/18 One under bird feeders at Cholsey (TR)

***Arvicola terrestris* Water Vole**

No records received

## THE WEATHER IN READING DURING 2018 by Roger Brugge

### Department of Meteorology, University of Reading

*Averages and anomalies mentioned in this report refer to the climatological period 1981-2010.*

**2018** was a mild year with a mean temperature 11.5 °C, only + 0.9 °C above normal, something that might not have been expected after some rather cold and snowy weather in February-March, and following some cold days in early April that led to a delay in the onset of spring. Indeed, in the past 110 years only 2014 (11.6 °C) and 2006 (11.8 °C) have been milder. Only March, April and December were wetter than normal, and as a result 2018 was the driest year since 2015. In addition, with May to November seeing a run of consecutive sunny months, **2018 was the second sunniest year in the 60-year site record**, beaten only by 1959 when five consecutive months each recorded in excess of 200 sunshine hours. 44 days reached 25 °C during the year, the most since 46 days in 1976. Despite the dry summer, the year overall was only the driest for three years.

#### January

January was an unsettled month, occasionally stormy – especially on the 2nd-4th and the 18th. Overall there was a general lack of cold weather with the month being milder than the coming February and March and with just four nights having an air frost.

#### February

On the 24th a sudden stratospheric warming led to a cold flow across Reading from the east. The surface air was very dry, and a lack of cloud led to one of the sunniest February days on record – 9.3 hrs of bright sunshine occurred. On the 25th the effects of a sudden stratospheric warming continued, as a cold, dry flow across Reading from the east led to a second consecutive very sunny day; **9.6 hrs of bright sunshine occurred, making this the sunniest February day on record**. On the 28th, after several days of very cold air from the east, the temperature rose to just -0.5 °C, as about 1 cm of snow lay on the ground.

Overall the month recorded 123.4 hrs of sunshine, the second sunniest February after 126.7 hrs in 2008. The month was 1.8 °C colder than normal, the coldest of any month since December 2010.

#### March

On the 1st snow fell and drifted throughout the day, although fortunately Reading didn't see as much snow as in other parts of the country. With a maximum temperature of just -0.9 °C, **the 1st was the coldest March day on record** and the coldest day of 2018, and only the third March day to remain below freezing. Earlier in the day the minimum temperature had been -5.4 °C. On the 17th the maximum temperature could only rise to 0.8 °C as an easterly airflow brought cold air across the area; snow fell at times from about 0900 GMT onwards. This was the coldest spring day, by maximum temperature, after mid-March during the period 1908-2018. The next day the maximum temperature could only rise to 0.9 °C while overnight snowfall led to a depth of 4 cm on the ground at 0900 GMT. On the 19th snow lay to a depth of 6 cm.

Overall March was 1.4 °C colder than normal and it was the coldest March for five years. 83 mm of precipitation (which included snowfall on five days) made it the wettest March for 17 years

#### April

April 2018, after a cold wet start, included a very warm spell after mid-month, **with a new highest April temperature (26.7 °C) on record being recorded on the 19th**. However, on the 29th the air temperature failed to rise above 7.7 °C. Nevertheless, the month was 1.8 °C warmer than normal due to a lack of air frost at night and there have been only seven milder Aprils in the entire Reading record. However, April was also a wetter and less sunny month than normal.

#### May

May 2018 was an unusually sunny month. By the end of the 27th the accumulated sunshine amounted to 259 hrs – but then the final four days were duller with just 6.3 hrs being recorded. However, the overall total for 265.3 hrs

still **ranked the month as the second sunniest in the station record** – with ten days each recording in excess of 13 hrs of sunshine. May was very mild by day (the mean maximum temperature was 2.7 °C above average) and was the warmest May for ten years. As early as the 7th the temperature reached 26.8 °C.

## June

Especially during the final week, June 2018 was warm, dry and sunny (with 252.7 hrs of bright sunshine). The rainfall total of 6.5 mm made it the third driest June on record. It was also the equal fifth warmest June on record although overall the month was marginally cooler than June 2017. However, the mean maximum temperature was the highest for June since 2006.

## July

July 2018 was a remarkably warm and sunny month. It was also one of the driest July months on record with the only precipitation falling by 0900 GMT on the 27th being a fall of 0.5 mm on the 20th and a trace of rain on the 26th. But some wet days in the final week gave a monthly total of 14.0 mm making it the driest July since 1994. **The month was the sunniest July on record** – the only sunless day was on the 29th – and the total sunshine for the month of 299.7 hrs made it the second sunniest month of any month since June 1975 when 305.6 hrs of sunshine were recorded. During July 2018 daytime temperatures reached 30 °C on five days although night-time minimum temperatures never exceeded 17.2 °C. As a result, although the month was very warm overall by day (by almost 5 °C), the month was 0.4 C cooler than July 2006 – the warmest July on record.

## August

August was 0.8 °C warmer than average, meaning that **2018 brought the warmest summer (June-August) on record** (equal to 2006) with a mean temperature of 18.6 °C. 2018 was the fourth driest summer on record with 62.0 mm of rainfall. There was only 0.5 mm of rainfall in the 39 days from 18 June and no measurable rain in the 32 days from the same date. The sunshine total of 754.9 hrs during the summer of 2018 made this the fourth sunniest summer on record (since 1956) – August was the fourth consecutive month to surpass 200 hrs of sunshine – such a statistic has occurred only six times in the past 60 years.

## September

The air temperature fell to a low 0.8 °C on 25 September 2018 during a spell of high pressure. MSL pressure at 0900 GMT that morning was the **equal highest on record for September at 1039.5 mb**, as a large anticyclone migrated eastwards from south Wales during the day. 191.3 h of bright sunshine made this the third sunniest September in the past 60 years. The month was drier than normal but marginally cooler than normal (by 0.1 degC).

## October

The 12th-13th was an unusually warm October night, the temperature not falling below 16.1 °C; only 1916, 2005 and 2013 had seen a warmer night in October since 1908. Overall the mean temperature was close to normal and the month was drier than average, despite over 25 mm of rain falling on the 13th. October was the sixth in a run of sunny months.

## November

November was a mild month with just three morning air frosts. The rainfall total was close to normal and the month was again a sunny one. In fact, 2018 had the fifth sunniest autumn (September-November) on record, being the sunniest autumn for 15 years.

## December

December was wet, rather dull but mild. The final week was mainly dry, and the year ended without any autumn/early winter snowfall. It was the mildest December since the remarkably warm December of 2015 and overnight cloud, especially towards the end of the month, helped to reduce the number of air frosts.

This report was compiled using the daily weather observations made at the University of Reading climatological station – many of these being made by our observer Selena Zito. The University also operates an automatic weather station that gathers weather information continuously.

Details can be seen at <http://www.met.reading.ac.uk/weatherdata/> - 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 2018

	Mean Max temp	Mean Max anom aly	Mean Min temp	Mean min anom aly	Mean temp	Mean temp anom aly	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	
<b>J</b>	9.2	1.5	3.0	1.1	6.1	1.3	12.8	23	4.5	8	9.9	24	-2.0	30	-8.1	30
<b>F</b>	6.3	-1.7	-0.1	-1.8	3.1	-1.8	11.3	19	-0.5	28	7.1	20	-7.6	28	-14.0	28
<b>M</b>	9.1	-1.7	2.5	-1.0	5.8	-1.4	14.8	10	-0.9	1	7.4	15	-5.4	1	-9.0	21
<b>A</b>	14.5	1.0	7.3	2.6	10.9	1.8	26.7	19	7.7	29	12.5	18	2.9	3	-1.5	23
<b>M</b>	19.7	2.7	8.5	0.8	14.1	1.8	26.8	7	14.4	1	14.7	27	1.1	1	-6.1	1
<b>J</b>	22.5	2.5	11.6	1.0	17.1	1.8	28.3	30	17.3	17	15.9	19	6.8	13	-1.0	13
<b>J</b>	27.1	4.7	14.3	1.6	20.7	3.2	32.9	26	20.1	29	17.2	23	11.3	19	3.4	15
<b>A</b>	23.5	1.4	12.7	0.2	18.1	0.8	30.8	6	18.0	26	17.5	4	6.8	25	-3.3	11
<b>S</b>	19.8	0.8	9.3	-1.0	14.6	-0.1	24.5	17	12.0	22	17.0	17	0.8	25	-5.7	25
<b>O</b>	15.6	0.7	7.2	-0.4	11.4	0.2	23.5	10	6.5	27	16.1	13	-2.9	31	-5.0	31
<b>N</b>	11.7	1.0	5.1	0.7	8.4	0.9	15.4	6	5.3	20	11.5	29	-3.2	22	-10.0	22
<b>D</b>	10.3	2.4	4.5	2.3	7.4	2.4	14.7	2	5.8	13	11.1	7	-3.9	14	-10.5	14
<b>2018</b>	<b>15.8</b>	<b>1.3</b>	<b>7.2</b>	<b>0.5</b>	<b>11.5</b>	<b>0.9</b>	<b>32.9</b>	<b>26Jul</b>	<b>-0.9</b>	<b>1Mar</b>	<b>17.5</b>	<b>4Aug</b>	<b>-7.6</b>	<b>28Feb</b>	<b>-14.0</b>	<b>28Feb</b>

## PRECIPITATION 2018

	Total precip itation	% of mean precip itation	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	No. days with thunder	No. days with ice pellets/ small hail	No. days with hail over 5mm diam	No. days with fog
	mm	%	days	days	mm		days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days
<b>J</b>	57.3	95	19	11	14.1	21	4	14	1	1	0	0	0	0
<b>F</b>	26.5	65	12	8	6.7	14	15	24	5	1	0	1	1	0
<b>M</b>	83.0	187	22	19	12.3	30	8	17	5	5	1	0	1	1
<b>A</b>	62.8	131	14	10	15.4	9	0	4	0	0	2	0	0	0
<b>M</b>	42.6	92	11	7	14.2	29	0	11	0	0	4	0	0	0
<b>J</b>	6.5	15	5	2	4.6	3	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>J</b>	14.0	31	5	3	5.5	28	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0
<b>A</b>	41.5	79	10	8	12.7	26	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>S</b>	39.0	78	8	7	19.6	22	0	7	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>O</b>	63.8	88	11	6	25.6	13	2	11	0	0	0	0	0	0
<b>N</b>	63.9	96	13	11	10.1	9	3	9	0	0	0	0	0	1
<b>D</b>	75.3	120	17	14	16.4	18	3	17	0	0	0	0	0	2
<b>2018</b>	<b>576.2</b>	<b>91</b>	<b>147</b>	<b>106</b>	<b>25.6</b>	<b>13Oct</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>117</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>4</b>

## SUNSHINE & SOIL TEMPERATURE 2018

	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
<b>J</b>	57.1	101	6.2	17	10	4.4	6.1	7.6
<b>F</b>	123.4	163	9.6	25	5	2.2	5.0	6.7
<b>M</b>	77.7	71	9.5	21	9	4.8	6.1	6.7
<b>A</b>	122.9	77	13.1	20	10	10.2	10.5	9.5
<b>M</b>	265.3	141	14.4	14	1	15.2	13.7	12.2
<b>J</b>	252.7	133	14.6	25,29	0	19.2	17.0	15.1
<b>J</b>	299.7	152	14.7	2	1	22.8	20.6	17.7
<b>A</b>	202.5	106	13.9	5	2	18.9	19.0	18.1
<b>S</b>	191.3	138	11.7	1	1	14.4	16.1	16.5
<b>O</b>	127.7	120	9.1	10	4	10.3	12.9	14.3
<b>N</b>	68.0	107	6.1	2	8	7.1	9.3	11.3
<b>D</b>	30.1	65	4.2	13	12	6.1	7.7	9.4
<b>2018</b>	<b>1818.4</b>	<b>119</b>	<b>14.7</b>	<b>2 Jul</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>11.3</b>	<b>12.0</b>	<b>12.1</b>

## WIND DETAILS 2018

	No. days with <b>Gales</b>	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 <b>calm</b> winds at 0900 GMT
	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days	days
<b>J</b>	0	0	4	4	1	3	8	9	2	0
<b>F</b>	0	2	6	5	1	3	2	5	3	1
<b>M</b>	0	3	4	6	5	1	6	6	0	0
<b>A</b>	0	6	4	4	3	4	4	5	0	0
<b>M</b>	0	8	6	7	0	2	1	5	2	0
<b>J</b>	0	4	10	3	0	0	4	8	1	0
<b>J</b>	0	2	5	4	1	5	4	8	2	0
<b>A</b>	0	3	1	2	0	4	6	11	4	0
<b>S</b>	0	4	3	1	2	0	11	8	1	0
<b>O</b>	0	6	4	1	0	5	3	5	6	1
<b>N</b>	0	1	5	7	3	9	4	1	0	0
<b>D</b>	0	0	0	4	3	4	7	11	1	1
<b>2018</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>48</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>60</b>	<b>82</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>3</b>

## SLUGS IN THE KITCHEN by Rob Stallard

Some years ago I saw slime trails criss-crossing my kitchen doormat. Had I accidentally brought some slugs or snails inside on boots or plants? I thought little more about it for a while until they continued to re-appear. I then carefully searched the kitchen particularly the vegetable rack but I could not find the culprit. But at midnight one evening I happened to visit the kitchen and there it was – a slug on the side of a kitchen cabinet. I am not that keen on handling slugs so I let it be, reasoning that it wasn't going to survive long without food or water. Anyway it was brownish with mottled markings so I assumed it was a leopard slug. This species is not a threat to my garden plants as they eat dead plant material and other slugs. But the slimy trails continued to appear every so often despite there being no obvious openings to the outside garden. It was some months later that the mystery was solved when I again ventured into the kitchen around midnight. A slug was making its way down the kitchen door. It was fairly obvious that it had squeezed itself through the keyhole in the door – a standard keyhole size so this is quite a feat. This was confirmed sometime later when I saw four slugs making their laborious way from the keyhole (two larger and two smaller ones). The same pattern has continued for several years now. I still occasionally see the culprits, they sometimes make their way to a window ledge that has some parsley plants but it is always a late night activity even in winter.

So what is going on? Are they seeking refuge in the kitchen or finding food or water there? This required a bit more research. There are few books on slugs so I looked online and found [www.slugwatch.co.uk](http://www.slugwatch.co.uk) to be a good Web site. It turns out they are not leopard slugs (*Limax maximus*) as those have distinct dark stripes down their backs. They are either Green Cellar Slugs (*Limax maculatus*) or Yellow Cellar Slugs (*Limax flavus*), but note that the old genus name *Limachus* is also still widely used. They are quite tricky to tell apart, the green variety has a vague pale stripe down its back which the yellow species does not and there are also differences in the mottling of the mantle. The name gives the clue that they are often associated with houses, and they live on algae, decaying matter and fungi on rotting wood. *L. maculatus*, which is also known confusingly as the 'Irish Yellow Slug', is edging out *L. flavus* in some areas. To complicate matters further there are hybrids between the two. I think mine are of the Yellow variety (*L. flavus*). Slugs can live up to six years so it could be that it is mainly the same individual that I see returning for its night time exploration but then I have also seen four slugs at the same time. It is still a mystery as to why they find my kitchen so alluring. There is no apparent food for them so the long journey up the door, through the keyhole, down to the doormat and up the cabinet side would seem an unnecessary expenditure of energy for meagre returns. Perhaps they like the warmth or are just repeating the journey of a forbear – slavishly following an old scent trail.

The National Biodiversity Network has only one record for *L. maculatus* in the whole SU area and just sixteen for *L. flavus* – the most recent from 2005 in Wallingford but slug experts are thin on the ground and they are no doubt severely under reported. I have taken no action to encourage or discourage them but I must admit that I am concerned when I haven't seen any slime trails for a long period. When I entertain dinner guests I think it best not to mention my 'pet' slugs as that might create a few qualms over my food preparation !

## RDNHS WINTERING GOOSE & SWAN REVIEW by Ken White

Over the last three winters Ken & Sarah White had led several RDNHS winter trips around the UK to sample some of the very substantial numbers of wintering ducks, geese and swans that come here to share our [generally] very mild winters.

Several major factors contribute to our favourable climate; firstly our westerly maritime position with regard to Europe & the Western Palaearctic, secondly the predominantly westerly airflow we receive off the Atlantic enhanced by the Gulf Stream, and thirdly by what must have been a complex retreat of the ice sheets after the last glacial maxima. This last factor is important to help explain the astonishing and remarkable patterns of migratory routes that many of these winter visitors endure every autumn and every spring. Observation alone could not reveal the origins of these birds. Initially, ringing programmes - numbered leg rings, colour-coded leg and neck rings - and even colour-dyeing were used to help determine the routes the birds were using and where they were coming from.

Colour-coded rings continue to be very important tools, but more recently satellite tracking has provided the vital information on their routes, staging areas, flight altitudes, flight and rest duration, and final destinations that we need to fully understand the demands of their active lifestyles. So, where did we go and what did we see ?

Our first trip was to **WWT Slimbridge**, Gloucestershire January 2016 where the goal was to find the small but significant numbers of Bewick's Swans *Cygnus columbiana bewickii* which originate from central Arctic Russia; overall about 7,000 of these birds winter in the UK. The afternoon swan feeding time gave a delightful showing on these wonderful birds. Also present on the Dumbles were a small flock of White-fronted Geese *Anser albifrons albifrons* also from central Arctic Russia. When I visited Slimbridge as a young teenager, there were flocks of 4,500, and the scientific data for both of these species reveals a decline in the UK due to birds holding back in the Baltic and Low Countries due to a milder climate there, plus an overall decline in the total populations. Interestingly, Pochard, Teal and Pintail have ringing recoveries from much the same easterly longitudes.

Our second trip was to the north **Norfolk** coast January 2017 and amongst the many birds there we did find amazing numbers of Pink-footed Geese *Anser brachyrhynchus*, both at RSPB Snettisham and the Holkham Estate. Many of them originate from Iceland, and eastern Greenland as these birds are considered part of the same population. However, the Russian Dark-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla bernicla*, a much more confident goose, accompanied us in their hundreds on our visits to RSPB Titchwell and the NWT Cley - Salthouse areas.

Our third trip was to **Dumfries and Galloway** in January 2018. On the way we staged at WWT Martin Mere Lancashire, to catch up once again with Pink-footed Geese. On a glorious sunny day we also found some Whooper Swans *Cygnus cygnus* from Iceland, the entire population of which winters in the UK. Many more of these swans were at WWT Caerlaverock, also our venue for large flocks of Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*, with ringing recoveries confirming their origin as the Svalbard archipelago. Also present here were even more skeins of Pink-footed Geese. However, there were two more species to catch up with; the first was the Greenland White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons flavirostris*, with their longer orangey bills and heavier black belly markings which we found on the RSPB Ken-Dee Marshes; one bird we saw had a coded neck collar that turned out to have been very recently fitted in Dumfriesshire. Satellite tracking has revealed a remarkable migration over the Greenland icecap *via* Iceland in each direction to and from their breeding grounds in western Greenland. However, the star of the show for me was AND is the Pale-bellied Brent Goose *Branta bernicla hrota*, the Scottish and Irish population of which ALSO migrate *via* Iceland and the Greenland icecap, and then fly on to Ellesmere Is. and the Queen Elisabeth & Charlotte Islands. In 2006 & 2007 the WWT had the SUPERGOOSE satellite tracking scheme which tracked one goose nearly all the way back to the Alaskan border; SUPERGOOSE INDEED.



#### **Pale-bellied Brent Geese**

*Branta bernicla hrota* wintering in Loch Ryan, Dumfriesshire but migrating back to breed in Ellesmere Island at 75 deg West

© J. Villalvilla

RDNHS trip January 2018



#### **Dark-bellied Brent Geese**

*Branta bernicla bernicla* wintering in Norfolk, but migrating back to breed on the Taimyr Peninsula at 89 deg East

© Ken White

RDNHS trip January 2017









