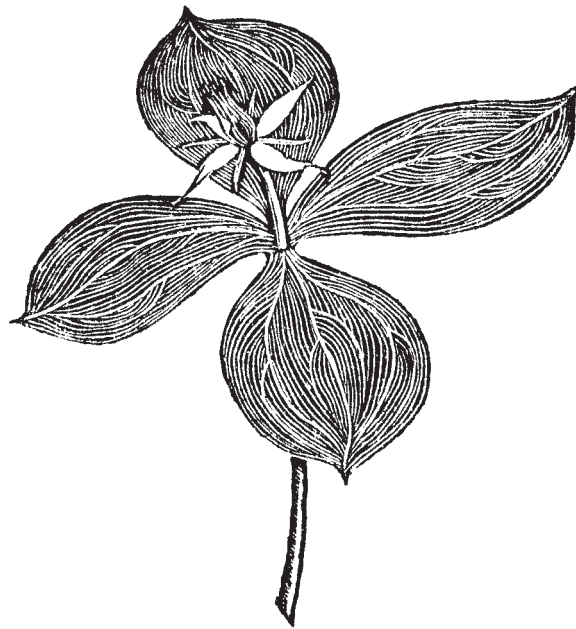


The Reading Naturalist

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THE READING NATURALIST

No 59 for the year 2006

The Journal of the
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EDITORIAL

2006 was the 125th anniversary of the founding of our Society. According to Wikipedia (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anniversary>) this was our Quasquicentennial anniversary. Anyway, whatever you choose to call it, it has been a very eventful year, with commemorative meetings to celebrate the anniversary in addition to our normal range of talks and walks.

For the first time, this year we're introducing a 4-page colour section. As well as selected photographs relating to the articles, this gives the opportunity to publish the winning entries from the Society's photographic competition.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

We're sorry to report the deaths of Alan Burt, our winter programme secretary from 1996 to 2003, and of his wife, Mary, who both passed away in early 2006.

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLINGS

Finding plants you haven't seen before - a personal account

Chris Bucke

I have been aware of the biodiversity of plants and animals for as long as I can remember. My parents never owned a car but were very keen walkers on the country lanes, cliff, mountain and field paths of the Isle of Man. They were not involved with local natural history societies so did not aim for known choice sites for plants but simply noted plants as they were found. In the 1940's and 50's fewer illustrated field guides were available than can be found now so some species went unnamed until a new book was available. One of my favourite species is the Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*) which we first named when my father acquired a King Penguin volume "Flowers of Marsh and Stream" that contains a very fine painting of that species. The arrival, as a birthday present, of "McClintock & Fitter" was most important from the point of view of giving names to familiar plants, and the stars awarded to indicate the rarity of species gave an added impetus to searching for new species. The same volume had line drawings of ferns which inspired a school friend and me to seek out as many species as we could, the Isle of Man being particularly rich in ferns. The recollection of looking for, and finding for the first time, Sea Spleenwort (*Asplenium marinum*) remains vivid as did, later on, finding the Isle of Man Cabbage (*Coincya monensis* ssp *monensis*). One of the "arts" in seeking out new plants is to know of their existence: McClintock & Fitter let me down in the case of the IOM cabbage which it describes as "Dune Cabbage" without mentioning its connection with the island (where it was first identified).

A formative event in my teens was to find a rather fine blue-flowered composite which my father and I took to the Manx Museum for identification. They could not offer a name so sent it to the Natural History Museum who named it as the Blue Sow-thistle (*Cicerbita macrophylla*). They also suggested that we record our observations for the coming Atlas of the British Flora, which led to much filling in of cards and sending in of specimens to experts. My familiarity with Manx roadside walls led to the recording of the lovely Rustyback fern (*Ceterach officinarum*) in many more locations than the experts expected. I have never seen this species other than in a wall. Apparently, some excitement was caused by my record of the Field Gentian (*Gentianella campestris*) from a site at the opposite end of the island from its known Manx habitat. I am sure that others had seen it, I was just the first to report it.

Student days at Liverpool (reading biochemistry) provided the opportunity to rub shoulders with experts, in particular mycologists. Field expeditions with friends concentrated on the marvellous sand dune areas north of the city. A meal of fungi, principally Chanterelles (*Cantharellus cibarius*) and Saffron Milkcap (*Lactarius deliciosus*) collected there remains in the memory after 44 years. The dunes were not as treasured then as they are now. We made the first record in the UK of a cup fungus (*Peziza* species) that occurred in vast quantities on a very large heap of tobacco waste. The dune slacks are much visited for many species (and hybrids) of orchid, and natterjack toads are relatively frequent. One day I had a wander in the countryside inland from the dunes and recorded what I saw, then was surprised to hear that I had recorded species that had not been noted for 40 years. Apparently it is well known that areas adjacent to species-rich areas go under-recorded and may turn up unexpected observations.

Career moves took me to York, then to Kent and allowed visits to areas of chalk grassland, in the Yorkshire Wolds and the South Downs. I would not like a year to go by now without spending some time during the summer in chalk country to see the characteristic vegetation and, in particular, the butterflies.

In my youth the prospect of foreign travel was not attractive (the ferries to and from the Isle of Man were not good training grounds for travellers!) but later it was necessary to travel to mainland Europe, then further afield, to attend academic conferences. One of the first was based in what had been the Olympic village when Grenoble held the winter games and I saw for the first time a very large area of crocuses freed by melting snow. I was bitten by the Alpine bug so took a deep breath and booked on a “flowers and photography” holiday with Ramblers Holidays, based in La Grave, not far from Grenoble. The format was to have some quite substantial walks but at a pace that allowed plenty of stops for botanising and photography. This was so successful that just about all of my subsequent holidays have been walking holidays with Ramblers and similar organisations. Rather to my amazement, and even more to the amazement of friends who had experienced what a shocking traveller I was, I found myself leading holidays at La Grave because I could or, perhaps more accurately, was prepared to name more plants than other party members. One of the parties consisted of individuals whose interest in plants was rather slight so some improvisation was necessary to fill the days. This allowed exploration of areas that had not been visited by previous parties, great fun because many new species were added to the already extensive list made by past leaders. The greatest thrill is finding something that is totally new – on a memorable occasion *Bulbocodium vernum* appeared in snow melt and led to extensive discussion – first what ever was it, then was it a crocus or was it a tulip? La Grave is one of the favourite haunts of the Alpine Garden Society (AGS) who produced a, now aging, volume “Mountain Flower Holidays in Europe” by Lionel Bacon. This describes hunting for flowers while travelling independently by car. Walking groups, using public or hired transport, reach far more spectacular and often richer sites than those who have to remain in reach of a car.

The AGS runs holidays for enthusiasts, sometimes in well-known areas, such as La Grave, less often in wilder parts, Nepal, for instance, Patagonia and Ethiopia. Some of these are not for those who must have their G&T after the evening bath but they do find spectacular species, even some new to science, in spectacular locations. Patagonia provided spectacular species, spectacular locations and G&T (until we had consumed all the G!)

Psychology and sociology are everywhere, a truism that applies to parties looking at natural history. Some wish to have a “guided tour” that take them to where choice species are known to occur and are content to photograph the same specimen, perhaps located from past observations using satellite navigation, that the other 15 party members have snapped. For others this is soft and unsatisfactory: the unexpected is unlikely to occur. In the high mountains of Nepal, Turkey, Iran and Patagonia the areas are so vast that it is impossible that all good sites have been explored. The most wonderful sites on the recent AGS trip to Patagonia were totally off the beaten track, without paths or established names. The remarkably attractive *Viola coronifera* may well have been seen by fewer than 100 individuals, the majority of them members of the AGS. At the end of the Patagonia trip some of us were itching to go again and explore other mountain tops and hillsides that had probably never been explored by serious botanists.

The members of most walking parties have some interest in natural history and are happy to be shown plants and animals. The leader of such holidays has to keep the party moving, though, which means that the interesting things are seen by those at the back. For some party members the imperative is to keep up with the leader. It is not infrequent for them to ask “why did you not show me that orchid, gentian or whatever?” to receive the answer “we would have shown you if you’d been there”. Occasionally, fortunately very rarely, strange individuals are encountered who really do not want to know about the natural history. In some countries, USA, Canada and South Africa, in my experience, walks not particularly aimed at naturalists are on trails in national parks or nature reserves. Park wardens make sure that you do not stray far from the path (but they cannot be everywhere!) Consequently there are superb displays of flowers in locations that are easy to find on well-maintained tracks.

There are now many companies that offer holidays for those interested in natural history. Some of them offer trips to remote areas such as Kazakhstan, Iran and Kamchatka with very special natural history. They also provide means of reaching areas that are not known by the rambling community, such as remote lowland areas of eastern Europe. The specialist companies are not cheap: on one walking holiday in Norway we found ourselves in the same hotel, eating the same food, as a party on a wildlife holiday. Discussion revealed that they were paying nearly double our rate and having shorter walks!

Mention of this example is probably misleading: holidays in which the party has dedicated transport with a driver and possibly also a local guide who knows the best sites to see plants and animals are well worth the cost. Various members of this Society have experienced botanising or birding trips to Bulgaria which had dedicated transport, a party leader, a local guide who dealt with language problems, a local expert botanist and a driver and were remarkably good value for money. A slight snag in having a really expert local botanist in the party was enthusiasm in her part for showing us all the local endemic plants, some of which were less than spectacular! That is a petty quibble because some of the sites visited on that trip were the most exciting I have explored.

What conclusions can be drawn from these ramblings? Most importantly, finding plants is fun! The fun can be enhanced by having good books to aid identification but for enjoyment it is by no means imperative to give an exact specific name to each new find. There are individuals who take the fun out of amateur botanising by treating with scorn an identification of a plant that is "wrong". Consolation for those suffering this attitude may be gained from recent results of investigations using molecular biological techniques that support "lumpers" rather than "splitters" suggesting that there are fewer species and more hybrids than past studies indicated so it is much less easy to be wrong (or right).

To become familiar with plants, join expeditions or simply walks, with enthusiasts visiting sites that are known to be good but do not ever say "that site is not worth visiting" because it is not known to have rarities. Do not avoid roadsides (unless they are dangerous!): for example, the green strips of land between the new A33 and the Foudry Brook are full of botanical interest. To go further afield, holidays organised by firms specialising in natural history expeditions, with expert leaders, are good value but, if you are fit and keen to have substantial walks, may not give complete satisfaction. Some of these holidays go to very remote areas where there is no alternative to walking and camping. Holidays offered by specialist firms aiming at walkers usually visit areas with rich natural history so are suitable for those who are content to see beautiful scenery with flowers and birds without the likelihood of stopping frequently to count the hairs on the stem of a small white flower or to decide precisely which pipit has just been seen. Such holidays usually have a single leader who is not necessarily expert in natural history (but often is quite knowledgeable) and are very good value for money. Such holidays are graded for the difficulty of the walks, some really tough with much climbing of steep slopes, some with long but not hard days, some with shorter days. Holidays with the lowest grade of walking are sometimes very full of other activities simply because the days have to be filled and the walk may have occupied only half the day. Specialist societies, such as the AGS, offer really serious expeditions that are quite hard but wonderfully exciting.

If in doubt, think positively and take every opportunity to find plants that you have not seen before!

MEMBERSHIP

Norman Hall

The following members were welcomed to the Society in calendar year 2006:

Anne Amos from Pangbourne.
Graham Arnot from Reading.
David & Hilary Cook from Purley-on-Thames.
Michael & Jaqueline Cross from Caversham.
Paul Donohue from Upper Basildon.
Kate Forrester & Andrew Giffen from Lower Earley.
Sue Guy from Caversham.

Ali Latham from Reading.
Sheila & Graham Mulrooney from Tilehurst.
David Owens from Reading.
Catherine Side from Pangbourne.
Michel & Julie Simoni from Tilehurst.
Alice Vinden from Caversham.
Dr James Wearn & Illana Shah from Reading.

THE FISHLOCK PRIZE

The Fishlock prize was not awarded this year.

MEMBERS' OBSERVATIONS

by Susan Twitchett & Colin Dibb

Before each evening talk, members & visitors are invited to announce their recent observations. Here is a selection, particularly of the birds since others tend to be incorporated into the recorders' reports shown elsewhere in this publication. Where not provided, no precise date or grid reference is quoted.

- 3rd Jan 06 Chris Bucke had seen a male Blackcap
Ken Grinstead reported two Tree-creepers
Roger Frankum had recorded 20 Crossbills in Upper Bucklebury
Jan Haseler had seen a Water Vole at Calcot
Tony Rayner reported seeing a Woodcock and 150 Skylarks
Dora Lucy had seen a Muntjac and Nuthatch
Ted Nelson saw 300 Golden Plovers at Theale on New Year's Eve.
- 17th Jan 06 Chris Bucke had seen-150 Lapwings at Ewelme, also a queen wasp
Martin Sell reported Bittern at Dinton Pastures plus 300/400 Lapwings & Golden Plovers at Theale, and a female Skew and Red-crested Pochard.
Veronica Vincent had had two male Blackcaps feeding in her garden.
Alan Strachan had seen a flock of Golden Plover
June Housden had seen the first Cowslips coming through the ground.
Colin Dibb mentioned *Japonica* attracting bumble bees.
- 7th Feb 06 Exhibits included various leaflets for viewing and a plant brought back from Lanzarote in 2003; a succulent of extremely dry conditions: *Caralluma burchardii* – not fed or watered for a year but still surviving.
Jan Haseler had heard a woodpecker drumming and 9 Water Voles at Shinfield Park.
Chris Shayler had spotted a newt on the pavement outside a shop in Cholsey
Colin Dibb had seen 9 Red Kites over Frieth, one with moss which it dropped.
Tony Rayner reported two or three Redpolls feeding on nettles.
He'd seen three Redpoll & female Peregrines at Bury Down on 24th Jan and a Siskin at Dinton Pastures, on the 26th. On 31st Jan, he'd seen two Redpoll & Stonechat nr. Brightwell Salome and on 2nd Feb he'd seen a Barn Owl near Cholsey. On 7th Feb, he'd seen flocks of Chaffinch, Linnet, Greenfinch, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer all between Culham, Brightwell Baldwin & Brightwell Salome.
Martin Sell reported two Smew, Siskins, Redpoll at Bottom Lane. Pochard and 17 White-fronted Geese.
- 20th Feb 06 Barn Owl at Fulscot.
Heather Baker saw an Otter or maybe Mink between Aldermaston & Woolhampton
Chris Bucke reported a flock of Linnets at Shinfield Grange.
- 21st Feb 06 Tony Rayner had seen approximately 100 Golden Plover and Stonechat on Bury Down and 3 Roe Deer and a Hare between Bury Down & West Ilsley.
- 7th Mar 06 Jan Haseler's Frogs have come back to her pond.
Tony Raynor had seen 2 Bramblings in Cholsey.
Chris Bucke had seen Nuthatches.
Alan Schurer reported 7 pairs of boxing Hares and a Red Kite in Boxford.

- 3rd Oct 06 A specimen of an unusual tree has been brought in — what is it?
Michael Keith-Lucas identified it as *Corylus colurna* (Turkish Hazel) from the Black Sea coast of Turkey. It is a good source of nuts which are used in Cadbury's chocolate.
Ted Nelson had seen several thousand House Martins over Cholsey.
Tony Rayner reported a Red-eared Terrapin walking past his front door
- 17th Oct 06 Jan Haseler had seen Red Admiral butterflies flying South.
Both Red and White Admiral butterflies have produced a second brood at Pamber Forest. This is a record.
Chris Bucke had seen a Humming-bird Hawk-moth.
Martin Sell had been to the Scillies where he had seen 3 Long-tailed Blue butterflies, several Monarchs, Queen of Spain Fritillary and a large number of Hummingbird and Convolvulus Hawkmoths.
Large Ranunculus, Green Brindled Crescent and a *Merveille du Jour* brought in by Norman Hall in pill boxes for us to see.
Tony Rayner reported good numbers of Grass Snakes and Common Lizards at Red Cow.
June Housden had seen a yellow Brimstone going into hibernation.
- 7th Nov 06 11.45am on Bath Road in Reading, Chris Bucke saw a Fox cross the road. It was nearly run over by traffic but escaped and ran into his garden.
An Azure-wing Magpie was seen at the north side of the M4 motorway in the service area near Theale, by Martin Sell. Possibly this was the same one seen earlier this year in the Pangbourne Village Hall car park which had escaped from Child Beale Park.
Martin also saw Roe Deer, a Fox, Clouded Yellow butterflies and dozy Hornets feasting on black grapes in his garden.
Heather Baker saw a Painted Lady last week.
Ken Grinstead commented on the large amount of Beech mast and Sloes he had seen this year. It has been a bumper year for wild fruit.
Red Cow, Cholsey sightings: On 4th Nov. Tony Rayner saw a Speckled Wood, 3 weeks later than any other sighting over a 20yr period of record keeping. On 5th Nov. two each of Buzzards, Carrion Crows and Magpies were seen disputing a Wood Pigeon carcass which had probably been killed by a Sparrowhawk seen earlier. On 6th Nov. 4 species of butterfly were seen: Red Admiral, Peacock, Comma and Brimstone. This is his latest ever record of a Comma. On 7th Nov. A Red Kite perched in a birch tree in his garden, early in the morning – good to see them extending their range. The first record of a Red Kite landing in their property.
- 21st Nov 06 Brimstone butterfly at Rushall Farm, Bradfield earlier that day.
Whooper Swan at Woolhampton on November 11th 2006
Marsh Tit feeding on hop seed recently
Stonechat at Streatley and Dartford Warbler at Silchester Common recently.

EXCURSIONS: January – December 06

Meryl Beek

As the Society celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2006, this has made it an exciting year. The committee decided the programme should include some of the old familiar sites of yesteryear to see how they are faring nowadays. The Society visited Pamber Forest three times, as it is reputed everything started here in 1881! To get the balance, some new venues were included. This gave the Society some surprises – and hope and inspiration for the next 125 years!

The year began on 28th January, when Martin Sell led a field trip to Thorney Island in West Sussex. With temperatures close to freezing and a stiff north-easterly wind, warm clothes were essential. Good numbers of Brent Geese were seen, together with Red-breasted Mergansers, Pintail, Grey Plovers, Godwit and a flock of Corn Buntings.

25th February saw 5 members on a trip to Inkpen Crocus Field. The sunshine was bright, but the wind was strong. The north-facing slopes of the Hampshire Downs were white with snow. The Crocus Field was searched carefully, and 11 closed Crocus flowers were found. The party then walked the footpaths and lanes around the village. Drifts of Snowdrops were seen, and birds included Mistle Thrushes, Fieldfares, a Buzzard, a Lapwing and Pied Wagtails. Various ferns were found, including Soft Shield Fern (*Polystichum setiferum*), Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), and Hart's-tongue (*Phyllitis [Asplenium] scolopendrium*). On returning to the Crocus Field, nearly 30 flowers were found, and some were fully open. Jan Haseler is thanked for leading this excursion.

On 18th March, as Christine Storey was unwell, Malcolm led 8 people exploring some of the less popular paths around Bucklebury Common, taking in heathland, woodland, streams and even a small gravel pit. As a result it was quite long and some people were heard to compare it to a Wednesday walk!

8th April was the Society's birthday excursion, this being the nearest Saturday to 6th April, the day the Society was formed in 1881. It was celebrated with a double bill. In the morning, Sean O'Leary led a successful hunt for mosses and liverworts in Pamber Forest. 15 people attended. After lunch at the Calleva Arms, Silchester, Alice Ayers led a walk round the Roman walls. In the shaded wooded south-west side, Navelwort (*Umbilicus rupestris*), Small Teasel (*Dipsacus pilosus*) and Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*) were found. On south-facing walls were the small flowers of Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*). The eastern wall had ferns, including Wall-rue (*Asplenium ruta-muraria*). 19 members attended in the afternoon, and in all, 25 people had joined in at some point during the day. A very nice birthday!

28 members and friends attended Sally Rankin's walk on 22nd April to look for Loddon Lilies (*Leucojum aestivum*) along the banks of the Thames below Wargrave. Good numbers were seen in the wet woodlands beside the footpath, and on the islands of the Thames. Butterflies were flying in the warm spring sunshine, including Brimstones, Peacocks, and freshly-fledged Green-veined Whites. Spring migrant birds included Swallows, Blackcaps, and a Whitethroat.

A new venture on 6th May was a visit by members to Withymead Nature Reserve, South Stoke. It was arranged by Tony Rayner. 100 years ago, the area was a thriving boat-yard, employing 30 people, and the remains of the yard are still visible today. In 2003, just before the death of Mrs. Anne Carmael, who had lived at Withymead for nearly 60 years, a Trust was formed to preserve the house and its riverside land of 23 acres. Brian Shaw is the Reserve's Manager, who lives on the site, and he records the local birds on a daily basis. The Society plans to become actively involved in the recording on this reserve.

An evening meeting at Dinton Pastures was held on 9th May, which was led by Martin Sell. 12 people turned up, and heard Nightingales singing by Lavell's Lake. Also, Barn Owls were seen, just 5 minutes from the car park!

Later in the month, on 27th May, Martin Sell led another excursion. This time it was to Homefield Wood near Marlow to view the ever-popular Military Orchids (*Orchis militaris*). 7 people were present.

The first stop on the annual coach outing on 10th June was to Portsdown Hill, where the group were met by the warden. This is a steep grassland reserve overlooking Portsmouth and the Isle of Wight, and has been greatly improved over recent years. Star finds included Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*), Hairy Rock-cress (*Arabis hirsuta*), and Bastard Toadflax (*Thesium humifusum*). Also, the Small Blue butterfly was seen. Renee Gayer is thanked for recording 44 plant species on the site. In the afternoon, the party went on to the Weald and Downland Open Air Museum near Chichester. Although not strictly a natural history site, the old buildings rescued from destruction were a reminder of rural times gone by. Unfortunately, six people were unable to come at the last minute, due to illness, but the remaining 27 greatly enjoyed the whole day.

On 19th June, Chris Bucke led 10 people on an evening walk from Woolhampton to Midgham Church, then back along the Kennet and Avon Canal. Moths in Midgham Park included the Blood Vein and the Green Oak Tortrix. One of the lock-gates had an interesting collection of plants and liverworts. Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) was in flower on the towpath.

6 people joined Michael Keith-Lucas on a field trip in the Old Burghclere area on 25th June. The walk started up the track of the former Newbury-Southampton railway line. Where this ran through the chalk, the bank-side flora was superb, and included Greater Broomrape (*Orobanche rapum-genistae*). Next, the Hants Wildlife Trust's Old Burghclere Lime Quarry was explored. The floor of the quarry was covered with Common Twayblade (*Listera ovata*), Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*) and a number of Fly Orchids (*Ophrys insectifera*). In all, 62 species were recorded during the afternoon.

2nd July was a very hot afternoon, but, in spite of this, 11 people assembled on the Phillimore Estate, Dunsden Green, to enjoy a really high-class botanising afternoon. Jerry and Janet Welsh led the party through fields and nearby hedgerows into a chalk pit off the Caversham to Henley Road. The best plants of the afternoon included Corn Parsley (*Petroselinum segetum*), Venus's Looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*), Catmint (*Nepeta cataria*), Lesser Centaury (*Centaureum pulchellum*), Broad-leaved Cudweed (*Filago pyramidata*), and Wild Candytuft (*Iberis amara*) which was growing abundantly in the chalk pit. The afternoon was rounded off with an invitation to tea in the Welsh's garden, which was much appreciated by the 8 or 9 who took up the invitation.

The big day arrived at last! On 15th July, 31 members assembled in Graham and Jan Saunders' garden in Pamber Heath for the official 125th Anniversary Celebration. The Society was pleased to welcome back Len Williams and his wife, visiting from Kent. Len had been a very young member of the Society in the 1940s and 1950s, and he was the editor of the first three or four issues of *The Reading Naturalist*. There were excellent refreshments provided by the Saunders and many others, and after a chance to look round the garden before the "formal" proceedings, Chris Bucke, as President, made an appropriate speech. Then there were poems to read (composed by members of the Society), a cake to cut and distribute, and a toast to the Society in various liquids! The party are thankful to the Saunders for their hospitality, and a Victorian house fern was presented to them. Ivy Brickstock had made the cake, and arranged to have it iced with the Society's Herb Paris logo (see centre pages). She was thanked most sincerely for this effort. Photos and other memorabilia from the past were looked at, and before members knew it, it was time to go down to Pamber Forest with butterfly nets – as the 1881 members did! 5 more people joined the group at this point, and Malcolm Storey and Chris Raper led the party to discover 18 different species of butterfly, including 2 Purple Emperors (one in the car park!) and many White Admirals, Silver-washed Fritillaries and Purple Hairstreaks. It was interesting to see a Wild Service Tree (*Sorbus torminalis*) growing well. The weather stayed warm – it was certainly a day to remember for a long time!

Peter and Susan Twitchett's home in Upper Basildon was the venue on 22nd July, when 23 members attended the annual mothing night. 4 mercury vapour lamps attracted 103 species of moth, and the event proved so interesting, some members stayed to study moths until 3 a.m. Highlights of the night included Striped Lychnis, a nationally scarce species, and Small Mottled Willow, a migrant moth. A full list is available from the Entomology Recorders.

On 5th August, 14 members met in the lay-by at Gangsdown Hill to explore the area between there and Ewelme Park. This varied walk took the party down the Ridgeway Path through woodland, which provided nourishment in the form of raspberries, cherries, and redcurrants! Finally, the party arrived on the chalk grassland of Harcourthill Shaw. There, many butterflies were seen, especially Common

Blues, Meadow Browns, Commas, Painted Ladies, and the occasional Small Copper. The arable weeds alongside the path proved most interesting, with several plants of Venus's Looking-glass (*Legousia hybrida*) and Small Toadflax (*Chaenorhinum minus*). The party opted to return up Swan's Way, and then up to Ewelme Park. One plant of Corn Marigold (*Chrysanthemum segetum*) was seen in the middle of Swan's Way, and there was considerable excitement when some plants of Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*) were found outside the stables of Ewelme Park. This had not been noted previously in South Oxfordshire. Thank you, Chris Bucke, for your leadership.

On Saturday, 19th August, 10 members attended a field trip to The Holies, led by Jan Haseler. This is a National Trust chalk grassland site near Streatley. In the hours preceding the start of the walk, there had been frequent heavy showers. After one further shower at the beginning of the walk, the clouds cleared and then the sun shone strongly. Common Blue butterflies were seen in good numbers on all the chalk grassland, but the Adonis and Chalkhill Blues were restricted to the steep hillside at the south-eastern corner of the site. The views across the Thames to Hartslock and then to Goring were enjoyed. The group then returned by the path at the top of the steep woods overlooking the river.

On the 2nd September, 9 members met Chris Bucke at Kintbury Station, equipped with waterproofs to deal with the rain that was forecast but did not arrive. The walk took the party along the canal, over a bridge, and into Kintbury churchyard. Eventually, a large area of untended grassland was approached. This had been rich with butterflies 9 days previously, but the weather had grounded all but a few intrepid Meadow Browns. The vegetation of the grassland proved interesting, with a "non-standard" ragwort being quite common. This was probably Hoary Ragwort (*Senecio erucifolius*). There were conspicuous areas of yellow Meadow Vetchling (*Lathyrus pratensis*). Many Ash seedlings in the grassland suggested the area will become scrubland if not mown or grazed. The party continued through the more orderly grassland of Inglewood Farm, where there were a good number of Field Mushrooms. The party passed fields of borage, which had been harvested but were having a second bloom. The verge of Hungerford Road near the common had a large population of Common Orache (*Atriplex patula*) and one plant of Gallant Soldier (*Galinsoga parviflora*). Returning along the canal towpath, there was a good display of waterside plants, including Orange Balsam (*Impatiens capensis*), and a single group of Skull-cap (*Scutellaria galericulata*). An interesting afternoon: thank you, Chris.

30th September on Peppard Common was the right time and place to look for autumn fruits of many kinds – 21 in all were found, including Red Oak (*Quercus rubra*), Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) and Field Maple (*Acer campestre*). Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*) was found in bloom in the acid area at the top of the Common. Extras for the afternoon included the pure white and poisonous Destroying Angel fungus, and a migrant Vestal Moth. Brian Kemp, who has been a member of the Society since boyhood in the 1950's, led the party, which totalled 16 members and friends.

A third visit to Pamber Forest took place on 7th October, when Gordon Crutchfield led 22 members on a magnificent fungus foray. This season seems to be the best for years, and 62 different fungi were found. This list will be in the fungus records and with the Fungi Recorder.

2nd November saw another combined coach trip with Reading Gardeners, this time to Wakehurst Place, West Sussex. 52 people (half from each society, approximately) enjoyed a fine day weather-wise, and with plenty to occupy both organisations. Gardeners were entranced by the abundance of rare species, and natural historians by the variety of habitats throughout the park. For many, the high spot was the Millennium Seed Bank, remarkable for its architecture and for the great importance of the scientific work going on there. A day to be repeated with another venue in 2007!

2nd December dawned dry and clear and provided a fitting end to a wonderful anniversary year. The walk was led by Colin Dibb in the Mapledurham area, and assisted by Ken Thomas and Chris Howlett, who added historical and architectural details respectively. Some fungi (mostly fairly common) were found, including Sulphur Tuft, Clouded Agaric, and Wood Blewit. Buzzards and Red Kites flew overhead at the viewpoint near Whittles Farm – magic moments for the 13 who joined the party, who could see right over to the range of hills near Watership Down and Inkpen. The morning was rounded off with a lunch together at the King Charles' Head, Nuney Green – and so 2006 ended!

It finally remains to thank everybody (too numerous to mention individually) who has contributed to this wonderful season. Now, on into the future – 2007 here we come!

WEDNESDAY WALKS

Meryl Beek

There have been 7 walks this year, which includes 2 Ken Thomas describes as “unofficial and unplanned”. These took place in January and November. It was a pity that the walk planned for July 19th to Cock Marsh and Winter Hill had to be cancelled, but it was the hottest day of the year, registering the top end of the 90’s Fahrenheit. Just too much for Ken and the party alike! It is hoped to include this venue in the 2007 Summer Programme.

On January 18th 20 people met on Peppard Common. After a look inside Peppard Church, everybody enjoyed a very good morning walk, in spite of mud and grey skies. Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*) was flowering and birds seen included many Red Kites, a Greater Spotted Woodpecker and a House Sparrow. A Song Thrush was singing at the start of the walk.

April 4th saw 22 people (a record number for Wednesday’s) assemble at Stanford Dingley for a fine Spring walk in the favourite Pang Valley. Interesting botanical finds in the woods were Moschatel (Town Hall Clock) (*Adoxa moschatellina*) and Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*). Grasses seen included Creeping Bent (*Agrostis stolonifera*) and Floating Sweet Grass (*Glyceria fluitans*). 29 species of birds were sighted during the walk, and the spring on the River Pang near the Blue Pool was inspected. Finally the 7 planted Sweet Chestnuts (the size of 4-5 hugs!) were admired.

19 people met near the Brick Kiln, Nettlebed on May 17th for a circular walk round Bix Bottom and the Warburg Reserve. It was good to see Sanicle (*Sanicula europaea*) and Green Hellebore (*Helleborus viridis*) flowering. Also the Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*) appeared to be doing well on the BBOWT reserve. A pleasant morning!

The venue on June 21st was Wildmoor and Broadmoor, and 8 people enjoyed a walk through Berkshire heathland, which made a refreshing change of habitat. Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) was recorded.

August 16th saw a party of 20 in Snelsmore Country Park, which once again is a heathland habitat, but the water meadows of the River Lambourne were also included. The BBOWT reserve, Rack Marsh, was visited. On the heathland all 3 heathers were seen – Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), Bell Heather (*Erica cinerea*) and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*). In the marshy area Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*), Gypsywort (*Lycopus europaeus*) and Monkey Flower (*Mimulus guttatus*) were seen – among other goodies! A Humming-bird Hawkmoth was noted *en route*, and trout were swimming in the River Lambourne. A super walk!

18 members and friends enjoyed a walk round Nuffield on September 20th. A good variety of chalk grassland and wasteland plants were seen including Amaranth (*Amaranthus retroflexus*), and then great excitement to see the Small Nettle (*Urtica urens*), which had not been recorded before in S.E. Oxon. Gordon Crutchfield provided a list of 27 fungi seen during the walk for the Fungus records.

The 2006 Wednesday walks ended on November 21st, when 17 people enjoyed the beechwoods around Highmoor. Again it was good for fungi, and among the finds were *Helvella crispa*, *Amanita citrina* and *Russula atropurpurea*. The absence of Gordon Crutchfield meant that probably many more fungi were lurking in the undergrowth unidentified, but Alice Ayers and David Cliffe (among others) did a fine identification job!

Thank you Ken, once again, for a varied and interesting programme. The Society eagerly awaits the 2007 venues!

INDOOR MEETINGS 2006

Cath Butcher, Susan Twitchett & Colin Dibb

Members seeking further information about any of the talks outlined here should ask to see the minutes book kept by the Secretary. Several of the speakers provide a detailed account of their talk which can only be precised below. (Attendances are shown in brackets.)

3rd January – Jan Haseler – Butterflies of the Harris Garden (49)

The Harris Garden is the Botanical Garden of the University of Reading. It occupies a 5 hectare site in the south-west corner of Whiteknights Park, the main University of Reading campus. Whiteknights Park was landscaped by the marquis of Blandford at the beginning of the 19th Century. The botanic garden was first established in 1972 and extended in 1988. It is named after the late Professor Ted Harris, who was a distinguished paleobotanist and keen gardener.

The talk started with the first warm, spring day at the end of March. Four of the five butterfly species seen, the Comma, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone and Peacock, have over-wintered as adults, while the fifth species, the Small White, had over-wintered as a chrysalis. The Brimstone and Peacock are very long-lived butterflies which have a single generation in the year, with the adult butterflies living for up to 11 months. The Small Tortoiseshell and Comma have 2 generations in the year, with adults on the wing in early spring, midsummer and again in autumn. Three species of butterfly were seen in the Primula Dell. This is a sheltered glade and it is one of the best places to see butterflies, right through the flight season from early spring to autumn. Other good places for butterflies in the early spring are the Heather Garden and the south-facing wall of the Walled Garden.

Butterflies seen in April included a Speckled Wood on Wild Cherry Blossom in the New Wood and a Small Copper on Rosemary in the Walled Garden.

In May, an Orange-tip was seen flying over the Dell Meadow. Only the male Orange-tip has the striking orange wing tips. The female is white with black wing tips. A Green-veined White was seen nectaring on Cow Parsley in the Woodland Garden. A Small Copper with a row of blue dots on its hind wing, the form called *coeruleopunctata*, was seen.

In June, a Common Blue butterfly was seen on Bird's-foot Trefoil in the Wilderness Road wildflower meadow. The Holly and Common Blue butterflies were compared. Also seen in the wildflower meadows were Large and Small Skippers, Marbled White, Meadow Brown and Ringlet. Large and Small Whites visited Sage flowers in the Walled Garden.

In July, a Purple Hairstreak was seen in the Walled Garden. It is a butterfly which is closely associated with oak trees. New generation Comma and Small Tortoiseshell butterflies flew in the Primula Dell.

At the beginning of August, the Wilderness Road wildflower meadow was cut short and no more butterflies were seen there. A Gatekeeper was seen on a favoured pink *Hebe* in the Primula Dell. In the Walled Garden a Painted Lady nectared on Marjoram, another excellent butterfly plant. The Painted Lady is an immigrant butterfly which comes from desert fringes on North Africa and then raises further generations in Britain. During invasion years, it arrives in very high numbers.

In September, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral butterflies were seen on *Sedum* in the long herbaceous border, and a caterpillar of a Knot Grass moth was found on *Bergenia* leaves. A Hummingbird Hawk moth fed on *Verbena bonariensis* in the Walled Garden.

The last butterflies of the year, at the beginning of October, were a Red Admiral in the long border and a Small Copper on the annual wild flowers. With at least 21 species, the Harris Garden is a good place for butterflies. There is nothing extremely rare, but there is a very good coverage of a wide range of the commoner species.

January 17th – Barry Oxley – South Africa: Land of Contrasts (57)

Mr. Oxley started his talk by telling us that he and his wife had worked in the garden centre business for many years and on his retirement they decided to go to South Africa for their anniversary. They were keen bird watchers and were hoping to see the many exotic species from that country.

The first stage of his journey was to the Kruger National Park which was full of surprises. They enjoyed seeing the many Flycatchers and Hornbills, including the rare grey Hornbill. The Crested Barbet was fairly common, also known as the Scruffy Barbet, a name it truly lived up to, with its bedraggled plumage. Weaver birds were also common, building immense structures in the trees and other birds noted were the Babbler family and the Blue Crane which is the national bird of South Africa. Impala lilies grew in abundance. As they travelled along the roads they saw Lions sprawled across the middle, quite unwilling to move. Lions have right of way, so this naturally causes traffic jams.

They left Kruger Park and travelled down to the Drakensberg mountains where the weather was cold. However, their accommodation was extremely comfortable and the food was good. Whilst walking with their group along a road, they heard beautiful singing and came across a group of local school children who were raising money for their school. They had no accompaniment and sang in perfect harmony.

Their next stop was Swaziland and in Ndumo they saw African townships with kraals. Once again they had excellent accommodation and Mr. Oxley noticed swallows nesting in the roof above the dining table with faecal matter dropping onto their plates! They were introduced to the head teacher of the local school. The children were keen scholars and were proud to show them round their classrooms, which were quite empty. The tourists were told that as there was no money for desks or seats each child walked five miles to school each day carrying his/her own chair. Mr. and Mrs. Oxley and their party of ten people each contributed £6 and bought ten benches for the school at a cost of £ 60. In the evening they were entertained by Zulu villagers who were clearly very proud of their heritage.

They then travelled down to Cape Town and were fortunate to see Table Mountain on a very clear day. Normally visibility is poor and the area covered in fog. This is a favourite place for flower lovers and there are more species of plants growing on Table Mountain than anywhere else in the world. The best time to see these spectacular plants is in September. The most common birds were the Cape Sparrow and Sugar Bird.

Their final stop was the Kalahari Desert where, due to a lack of trees, the Weaver Birds built their immense structures on top of telegraph poles!

February 7th – Dr. Stephen Head - The Importance of Ponds (46)

Dr. Steve Head is Director of Pond Conservation: The Water Habitats Trust which has been active for the past fifteen years. Their basic aims are doing research, giving advice, education and training people to manage their ponds. Pond Conservation carry out practical pond work and there are various officers in the country who like to work with schools and other groups.

He raised several points as follows:

1. What are ponds?
2. Why are they important?
3. How do they work?
4. Problems with ponds today.
5. How you can help?

Ponds have no statutory protection at all and Dr. Head stressed the need for better protection in law and planning. A pond is a small water body up to two hectares in area which is either permanent or seasonal. They are important habitats for biodiversity and need careful conservation. At present there are 400,000 in the United Kingdom and many are of historical and archaeological importance. In the past the vast majority were agricultural ponds, village ponds for watering horses, moats, industrial mill ponds, ornamental ponds and retting ponds for making flax and hemp. Ponds are the richest water habitat with 660 species of aquatic vascular plants and 4,000 freshwater animal species, including the White-clawed Crayfish, the Water Vole, the Great Crested Newt, Tassel Stonewort and Glutinous Snail, most of which are now very rare.

Dr. Head explained that ponds start off as a hole in the ground; they are sinks and what goes in, stays in. Early stage ponds are bare with no sediment, little vegetation and no fish. Mid succession ponds often have many species but may hold fewer rare species. Late succession ponds rarely dry up

completely; have different species. Temporary ponds dry up in summer and hold water for about four months and have no fish. Pollution is a problem. Too many nutrients create masses of duckweed and fertiliser causes blanket weed.

Ponds have declined in number over the past hundred years. There used to be about 1,200,000; now there are 400,000. Alien plants, invertebrates and vertebrates include Australian Swamp Stonecrop Water Fern (*Azolla*), Parrots Feather, Mink, American Bullfrog and Signal Crayfish and are damaging pond ecology.

Pond habitats are under threat and need careful conservation. What can we do? Dr. Head suggested adopting a local pond or creating or restoring a pond. It is estimated that there are about 15 million of them in private gardens in the U.K. Informal natural ponds are preferred containing native species with no fish or ducks. Dr. Head concluded his talk by showing slides of his own garden pond containing newts and dragonflies.

Feb 21st – Ian Green – Flowers and Wildlife of Iran- (50)

There is no report for this meeting.

March 7th – Reg Tipping – Bat Conservation in Oxfordshire (49)

Prior to his talk Mr. Reg Tipping and his assistant Alison, invited the audience to look at a Whiskered Bat, a Daubenton's and a Leisler's bat and a long queue of interested members was soon formed.

There are 26 species of bat in the U.K., all of which eat insects, and Mr. Tipping explained the features of several of them commencing with the Pipistrelle which is the smallest. These tiny mammals are covered in fur and have two membranes stretching along elongated fingers. The females have nipples in their armpits. Bats are the only true flying mammal. Numbers of Pipistrelle have fallen by 90% in the last sixty years. They roost in crevices around windows, under tiles and under lead flashing. The females are mated during autumn but eggs are not fertilised until spring. Depending on weather and availability of insects the young are born in late June or early July.

Brown Long-eared bats like to be near woodlands. Their ears measure two-thirds of the body length and they use them to listen for insects moving on the bark or leaves of the trees. They roost in holes in trees or in older properties near woodland.

Another bat, the Natterer's Bat can be identified, in the hand, by a stiff row of bristles on the trailing edge of the tail membrane. Daubenton's Bats are associated with water and fly just above the surface trawling for insects. They have huge feet with which they catch insects and are easy to identify in flight by torch light. However, they may be confused with the Natterer's. They roost in cavities in trees and bridges; in fact anywhere near water. Only a few Barbastelle Bats have been found in Oxfordshire. This species roosts under loose bark and cracks in the branches and have been found to move roosts almost every night in summer. This has been discovered in the last few years with the aid of radio-tagging. Bechstein's Bats feed in the high canopy of woodland and are very rare in the U.K. One discovered a few years ago in Oxfordshire sparked a series of bat box projects in the hope of finding more. The previously known distribution was restricted to parts of the south coast and Wales. Another bat mentioned was the Whiskered Bat which is difficult to identify in the field and is even difficult to separate in the hand from Brandt's.

Evidence that bats may be present includes accumulations of moths and butterfly wings, droppings and urine spots and grease marks. Mr. Tipping showed images of various types of bat boxes and mentioned the National Bat Monitoring Scheme. Pill boxes, converted to provide safe, stable conditions for bats have not been successful so far in Oxfordshire. Of half a dozen converted only one has shown signs of use by bats. Mr. Tipping and other members of Oxfordshire Bat Group also carry out bat conservation work in the surrounding counties. He concluded his talk by showing a slide of three bats, Natterer's, Daubenton's and Bechstein's.

17 October (51) – two talks on butterflies

Matthew Oates – Purple Emperor Mythology

Matthew Oates, Senior Ecologist with the National Trust, gave an excellent talk, illustrated with a PowerPoint presentation, on “Purple Emperor Mythology”. The Victorians considered this to be the “Monarch of all Butterflies”; the “High Spirit of the Woods”. This butterfly could be found gathered around the highest tree in the forest, invariably an oak, which they called a “Master Tree”. In 2001 Matthew began a project in several woods to test this Master Tree mythology. Apart from observations from the ground, he used a cherry picker and viewed the butterflies from a vantage point 25m up in the air. Viewed from above the iridescent purple colour of the flying male flickers rapidly from deep purple to royal blue to black, with the white bands standing out clearly and the *ocelli* showing pink: a lovely sight! The female butterfly is not purple but a drab brown. Their life cycle involves the leaves of willow, *Salix caprea*, where the eggs are laid. The emerging caterpillars feed slowly from August through September and October when they hibernate until the following April then begin to feed again and then pupate. The adults emerge in late June/July and live for 10-14 days. The males are very mobile and fly up each afternoon to a sheltered high point in the wood where they chase off other butterflies, bees and even birds such as Herons, Red Kites and Sparrow hawks! This research has disproved the idea of the “Master Tree”; instead in each wood there are “Master Territories” which may not involve oaks. Research has found two mate-location strategies: males search willow stands in mid morning for virgin females, if unsuccessful they then resort to master territories and await the arrival of females in need of their attentions!

Foot note: Following this talk the speaker appeared in a BBC Television programme called “Great British Summertime” which featured the Purple Emperor! Matthew certainly was a celebrity speaker for our 125th year.

Grahame Hawker – The Silver-studded Blue – a butterfly on the edge?

The second talk was by Grahame Hawker, Senior Ranger for Earley Town Council and species champion for the Silver-studded Blue and the Grayling. This was an excellent talk, well illustrated by a PowerPoint presentation, and addressing conservation issues. This butterfly is the flagship species of lowland heath, and Britain contains 20% of all of the lowland heath remaining in Europe, but sadly large areas of this type of habitat are disappearing. Nationally there has been an 80% decline in this butterfly in the last century, with 44% of this between 1982 and 1999. Its decline continues with the butterfly now being recorded from only two sites in Berkshire; Broadmoor Bottom and Wishmoor Bottom. However around Britain large populations still exist in Dorset and in the New Forest in Hampshire, with smaller populations in Norfolk, Suffolk, Surrey, Sussex, Portland Bill, North-east Hampshire, Devon, Cornwall, Pembrokeshire and North Wales including the Great Ormes Head. Grahame encouraged us to go out and see if we could find this butterfly at other sites in Berkshire. The male has a 30mm wingspan and its upper surface is a stunning deep blue with a thick black margin with a white fringe. The female is brown with blue central scales: both sexes have silver studs on the underside of their hind wings. There is one generation a year which is on the wing from mid-June into August on three main habitats; most widely seen on lowland heath, but recorded too on calcareous grassland and sand dunes. The female, possibly attracted by ant pheromones, lays white eggs the size of a pin head, on the ground, on the lower stems of heather or on moss/lichens on calcareous ground, near the ant nest of the black ants *Lasius niger* and *L. alienus*. The egg over winters and the caterpillar which emerges is flattened with a central purple band and grows to 15mm long. The caterpillars are often found inside the ants' nests during the day, coming out to feed at night on the reproductive and meristematic tissue of its food plants; normally heathers and gorse on heathland and Birdsfoot Trefoil or Rockrose on grassland. The caterpillars, pupae and emerging adults all produce amino acids and sugars which attract the ants. Tubercles and Newcomer's and pre-cupola organs on the larvae are used to attract the ants and produce the secretions. This symbiotic relationship gives the ants food and the butterfly protection from parasites and predators. The adults emerge after three weeks and the males show proterandry by emerging up to six days before the females. This butterfly is truly on the edge in Berkshire, as it is on the northern edge of its European and British range and is on the edge of extinction for several reasons: loss of heathland for development/agriculture/forestry; the heathlands remaining are either not managed or managed inappropriately; and fragmentation of habitat. The butterfly exists in metapopulations and when its habitat becomes isolated, any extinction in these island populations may not be followed by re-colonisation as very few individuals of this species travel as far as 1 km. To

survive, a diverse mosaic produced by a rotational cutting/scraping management scheme is necessary as heather of all ages and heights is needed to support the different life cycle stages of the butterfly. Sadly this rotational style of management is not the norm. However hope was offered as Grahame suggested that Greenham Common would be an excellent site for re-introduction of the Silver-studded Blue – so watch this space!

7th November – Mike Read – The New Forest

Mike Read is a professional naturalist who lives near the New Forest. His talk was well illustrated by fantastic slides projected onto a huge 8 ft. screen. They took us through the seasons showing us the plants and animals living in the New Forest and he explained some of the problems encountered with irresponsible visitors to the New Forest. In May this year a lighted cigarette fell on dry grass causing a fire which destroyed 100 acres of heathland together with nesting birds and reptiles. Dogs let loose have killed nesting ground birds.

He started with a joke about a chicken going to a library to borrow some books. The chicken did this several times, so the bookseller followed the chicken to see what it was doing with the books: as the chicken threw the books one by one into a lake a frog croaked “read-it! read-it, read-it!” This made everyone laugh, which got the talk off to a good start!

The New Forest is the newest National Park in Britain covering 150 sq. miles with woodland, both coniferous and broadleaved, heath land and mires. There is a great diversity of wildlife present and several species are present in their highest numbers in the New Forest than anywhere else in Britain. We saw high quality slides of about twenty species of bird including a Hobby with young in a nest 75 ft. off the ground, Honey Buzzards, three types of woodpecker and Merlins; ponies with their young; several types of snake; insects including the rare Wood Crickets; three types of deer; together with many types of broadleaved and coniferous trees, and a variety of plants. These slides, and his interesting, amusing presentation, whetted our appetites for a Society visit to the New Forest next year and hopefully one led by him.

21st November – Gareth Griffith – The Wonderful Waxcaps of Wales

Dr. Griffith, a lecturer at Institute of Biological Studies at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth kindly stood in for the advertised speaker who was unavailable at short notice. His studies have included a large number of collaborative organisations and individuals across Wales. He reminded us that fungi are important for breaking down cellulose and lignin into simpler substances such as carbon dioxide. The above ground parts of fungi are charismatic but it is the below ground parts that are huge. The largest organism in nature is *Armillaria bulbosa* covering 15 hectares and weighing 10.00kg. An aerial view of Stonehenge showed the “fairy rings” formed by parasol fungi in the adjacent grassland. Waxcaps have thick gills and brightly coloured caps of red, orange, yellow, brown, pink or white. They thrive in poor grassland in diverse habitats from churchyard to heather moors and mossy/rushy places. Pink Ballerina waxcaps are indicators of important habitats for waxcaps. Wales has 3 SSSI's for grassland fungi which are the best in Wales for abundance.

Threats to grassland fungi include nitrogen fertiliser and nitrate “fixed” from atmospheric nitrogen by *Rhizobacteria* in the nodules on the roots of legumes. Habitat loss is another problem but the changes are not always bad as Llanishen Reservoir now has 28 species on the banks. Reference was made to an experiment at Sourhorpe in Scotland where various replicated treatments were applied in a fully randomised trial. At Bronnyd Mawr in Wales a site ploughed in 1973 and intensively managed until 1993 is being monitored for fungus recovery. The Parkgrass experiment at Rothamsted in England looking at the effects of fertilisers on various rotational crops has been running since 1874 and various waxcaps are found on untreated plots. They appear to be tolerant of phosphatic fertiliser. Waxcaps cannot be grown on agar plates but staining can show whether spores are alive or dead. They are very different from other fungi and in soil they feed on “old” organic matter.

Dec – Christmas Party

As usual all members brought a plate of food or some drink – so there was an impressive spread. The mulled wine too was in hot demand. Meryl Beek and Ken Grinstead were among those who devised various quizzes. Meryl also organised her well-known Names on Backs game, which always helps to break the ice, and Tony Rayner organised the photographic competition – see below.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION

Tony Rayner

Ahead of the event there were worries that the Photographic Competition might not be well supported. How wrong can you be? We were overwhelmed by 114 entries. The categories matched our recorders: Botany, Fungi, Lepidoptera, Other Insects & Invertebrates, and Vertebrates. Although Graham Mulrooney scooped the pool by winning all categories, this masks the fact that in only one category was the winning margin of more than a single vote. Graham's photograph of Azure Damselflies was voted best overall. Next year we are likely to limit the number of entries per member, and perhaps to differentiate between subjects snapped in the wild and in captivity.

The crowning touch for the Photographic Competition was the generous donation of a trophy for the winner. Brenda (now Major) made a donation, plus a prize, in memory of her late husband. Many members will recall that John Marshall was an outstanding photographer.

Category	Subject	Photographer
Botany	<i>Cytinus ruber</i>	Graham Mulrooney
Fungi	Woolly Milkcap	Graham Mulrooney
Lepidoptera	<i>Dryas julia</i> butterfly	Graham Mulrooney
Other Insects & Inverts	Wolf Spider	Graham Mulrooney
Vertebrates	Grey Heron	Graham Mulrooney
Best photo	Azure Damselflies	Graham Mulrooney

A selection of the winning photos are shown in the colour section.

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS FOR 125th ANNIVERSARY PARTY

Chris Bucke

It is none too easy to give a name to a one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary. Weddings do not last that long, but could give hints of suitable names such as 5 times silver, 2 times gold plus a silver or two times diamond and a bit. This is not very satisfactory, so perhaps some of the rarer elements can be brought into use such as Rhodium anniversary or Osmium or even Praseodymium! Anyway the Society is 125 years old, an amazing achievement that demonstrates the lasting appeal of natural history.

I found myself speculating about the founders of the Society. Did they meet first by chance in say, Pamber Forest, equipped with shotguns and killing bottles, and agree to meet to discuss the best ways of pinning insects or blowing eggs? In those days when social niceties were so important, did they discuss what type of person could be invited to join?

How did they get to Pamber for that first meeting? Probably by horse-drawn vehicle through agricultural land which would be devoted to producing food for horses. The agriculture would be "organic". Things have moved on, access to places of interest is now far easier and we know more about the need for conservation and we know where to go to find the best displays of the most interesting species.

I think that we are in a golden age as enthusiasts for natural history. We may be leaving it: more drought years such as we are experiencing and increasing warmth must change things profoundly. So many people are visiting sites of rarities that naturalness is being lost. At present agricultural land is being returned to the wild, but it may not be long before more and more land has to be used for the production of fuel for vehicles and power generation. In other words land use will have gone full circle.

So let's live in the present and enjoy ourselves here and in Pamber Forest. The target number of butterfly species is 17.

Thanks to Jan and Graham, Ivy, Meryl and everyone.

DECEMBER IN PATAGONIA

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – by Chris Bucke

This is an illustrated account of an expedition organised by the Alpine Garden Society in November – December 2005. After some major glitches due to snow at Charles de Gaulle airport the party arrived, via Buenos Aires, at Puerto Madryn on the east coast of Argentina and spent one day in the Valdez Peninsula nature reserve, famous particularly for its populations of Magellan Penguins, Sea Lions and Elephant Seals. The reserve proved to have some spectacular plants also, in particular cacti and apparently innumerable species of spiny shrubs. Then we moved on due westwards for 600 km to Esquel, a ski resort, through vast empty areas of steppe with a very wide variety of shrubs and dwarf plants. Puerto Madryn and Esquel are on the latitude equivalent to Barcelona. From there we travelled north through the Andean lake district, staying for three or four nights in comfortable hotels in towns and villages, eventually reaching Caviahue, a small town located in an ancient volcanic crater at the latitude equivalent to Gibraltar. From there we drove to Neuquen and flew back, via Buenos Aires.

The days were spent exploring mountain areas or further areas of steppe. We were slightly unlucky in that the season was late and some mountain areas were too snowed up for botanising to be worthwhile. This provided time for one extra exploration of the steppe and a visit to the area of temperate rain forest beside Lago Nahuel Huapi, both of which trips were highly enjoyable. During the ten days the mountain areas provided good displays of plants but were chilly and, with snow still thawing, unpleasant under foot but as the season progressed and we moved further north the conditions improved, delightfully.

The range of plants seen came up to expectation: the late season meant that a few choice species were not yet in bloom but others were unexpectedly in prime condition. It is impossible to list all the plants seen in a summary but the “stars” included Monkey Puzzle trees (*Araucaria araucana*), much more plentiful than expected, several species of the remarkable rosulate violets, various small shrubby relatives of verbena, cacti in bloom even at 7000ft, many bulbous species and voted the favourite species by the party as a whole, *Ranunculus semiverticillatus*, a very beautiful buttercup that grows in screes and blooms as the snow melts. A fascinating aspect of the botany of the area was the different forms taken by species of familiar families. In addition to the rosulate violas, there were spiny shrubby members of the Apiaceae and *Oxalis* species of various shapes and sizes. The *Nothofagus* trees, that fill the ecological niche, roughly, of Beech trees in Britain are mostly evergreen, which has important consequences on the nature and timing of the forest floor flowers.

Altogether the expedition was most successful and enjoyable.

HERB PARIS – A QUICK FLIT THROUGH HISTORY

Linda Carter

There is a mysterious allure about the cradled golden flower, in its crown of leaves, atop the single stem that renders Herb Paris unforgettable. Although never a common, or even very widespread, species it has attracted the attention of herbalists and botanists alike, throughout recorded history.

To the Medieval herbalists, it was the numerical harmony of the parts of Herb Paris that appealed so strongly. No wonder they named it *herba paris*, 'pair herb', for it bears twice two leaves, twice four stamens, twice two outer and twice two inner segments to the perianth, twice two styles and twice two cells to the ovary.

William Turner, often referred to as the 'father of English botany', was the first to record this plant in Britain. He grew up in Morpeth in Northumberland, coming south to study to be a physician at Cambridge. There, he became embroiled in the religious ferment of his time and was ordained into the priesthood. In 1548 he named Herb Paris '*Libardbayne or one bery. It is much in Northumberland in a wodd besyde Morpeth called Cottingwod.*' Cotting Wood exists to this day, but we no longer confuse Herb Paris with Leopard's-bane. It remained for Henry Lyte, translating the Herbal of Dodoens into English, in 1578, to translate the apothecaries' Latin '*herba paris*' into the accepted common name of today, 'Herb Paris'.

Paris quadrifolia is often dubbed 'True-love' or 'True-lover's Knot'. Culpeper enlightens us as to the meaning of the true-love's knot. He tells us that 'at the top there are four leaves set directly against another, in the manner of a cross or ribband tied, in a true-love's knot'. In Perth, the local name was 'Devil-in-a-bush', presumably from the poisonous berry sitting in the centre of the leaves. Amongst the many herbaceous plants that acquired the generic name 'grass', Herb Paris is no exception, attracting the Somerset name of 'Four-leaved Grass'.

Margaret Baker records a complex divination rite that developed round Herb Paris. Two girls sat in a room together from midnight to one o'clock. Each plucked hairs from her head, to match her age in years, and put them in a linen cloth with Herb Paris leaves. When the clock struck one, the girls burnt each hair individually, reciting:

*I offer this my sacrifice,
To him most precious in my eyes,
I charge thee now come forth to me;
That I this minute may thee see.*

This was intended to invoke the future husband who would walk round, before vanishing, though neither girl could see the other's lover.

The life of the physician in the first half of the seventeenth century was not a carefree one and Herb Paris was in the arsenal of herbal remedies called upon to combat infection. Culpeper informs us, in his 'Complete Herbal', that '*the leaves are very effectual for green [gangrenous] wounds, and to heal filthy old sores and ulcers, and powerful to discuss all tumours and swellings in the privy parts, the groin, or any other part of the body, and to allay all inflammations. The juice of the leaves applied to felons [whitlows], or those nails of the hands and feet that have sores or imposthumes [abscesses] at the roots of them, heals them in a short time.*' Here was a herb, intoned Culpeper, '*fit to be nourished in every good Woman's garden.*'

According to Mrs Grieve in 1931, the active constituent is a glucoside named Paradin, a toxic narcotic that, in large doses, causes nausea, vomiting, vertigo, dilierium, convulsions, profuse sweating and a dry throat. Needless to say, she adds immediately that the drug should be used with great caution! Overdoses have proved fatal to children and chickens alike and we do not recommend that you try any of the following at home! Small doses were used to treat bronchitis, coughs, rheumatism, cramp, and palpitation of the heart. The juice of the berries was considered efficacious in treating inflammation of the eyes. A cooling ointment derived from the seeds and the juice of the leaves was used to treat green wounds, tumours and inflammations, as in Culpeper's day. The powdered root, boiled up in wine was believed to relieve colic, though perhaps the wine alone would have done as well.

All in all, Herb Paris is indeed, a powerful herb, an antidote to arsenic and, if you should happen to feel the effect of witchcraft encroaching on your sanity, a handful of berries will put it right – or simply wander in the woodland this spring, and see the first of this year's Herb Paris unfurl its twice two leaves in the dappled sunlight.

HERB PARIS SURVEY: APRIL - JULY 2006

Meryl Beek – Project Co-ordinator

Following on from Rod d'Ayala's original sheet of facts and locations, published in March 2006, work has been carried out by the Society members during the spring and summer.

As the 2006 Herb Paris, *Paris quadrifolia*, season was a late one, 10 members of the Society met Rod at the Warburg Reserve on Monday 10th April. The leaves of Herb Paris were just beginning to appear, and for many in the party it was the first time they had seen Herb Paris, and 'our logo' for real!

The work on the plant in the Warburg Reserve will be monitored by Rod himself, and will be published in 'The Reading Naturalist' in due course.

Many of the other listed sites have been investigated by 14 members of the Society, who have worked either singly or in groups. The results are presented below. The original source for each site, eg the county flora, is given in brackets following the name.

OXFORDSHIRE LOCATIONS

1. Fire Wood, near Northend (Killick et al) SU7292

Brian and Roger Kemp spent 2 hours searching, using the public footpath (the Oxfordshire Way) through the wood. Herb Paris was not found, but they are prepared to look again next year.

2. Grove Wood, Aston Rowant (EN) SU7497

On 26th May Meryl Beek, June Housden, John Lerpiniere and Martin Sell spent 2¹/₂ hours, searching through much undergrowth without success. This is a difficult wood, with a trench running through the centre and bordering on Aston Wood (NT), which was also searched each side of the public footpath. Dog's Mercury, *Mercurialis perennis*, is in abundance in all parts of the wood, and the habitat looks right. Perhaps worth another visit?

3. Church Wood, north of Swyncombe (Killick et al) SU6890

On 2nd May a.m. Alice Ayers, Meryl Beek, Colin Dibb and John Lerpiniere searched diligently for 1¹/₂ hours in Church Wood, near Swyncombe. This is mostly a Beech, *Fagus sylvatica*, and Hazel, *Corylus avellana*, wood. There were very large patches of Dog's Mercury and the habitat appeared hopeful, but no Herb Paris was found.

An un-named copse to the west of the Ridgeway Path (SU682908), which appeared as unmanaged woodland, was unsuccessfully searched for 40 minutes.

The rest of the 4-figure square is Coates Wood, which is private property, and has not been searched.

4. North of Ewelme Downs (Killick et al) SU6690

On 2nd May p.m. Alice Ayers, Meryl Beek, Colin Dibb and John Lerpiniere searched at SU665905 on the path and copse east of Down Farm. It is an untidy mixed woodland and, incidentally, contains a fine colony of Common Twayblade, *Listera ovata*, (upwards of 50 plants), but no Herb Paris!

The entrance to Ewelme House is private, so not searched. A strip copse in the centre of the square, probably a wind break, proved fruitless in 1¹/₂ hour search.

5. North East of Benson (Killick et al) SU6292

May 2006, searched by Tony Rayner without success. This site is not worth revisiting.

Tony also visited a private site in the nearby area – again no Herb Paris.

The chief problem experienced in these Oxfordshire locations is that only 4-figure grid references have been given, and this has made hunting really very difficult. The squares on the ground can seem very large! Janet Welsh provided Meryl Beek with John Killick's address, and a letter back from him revealed some more sites with 6-figure references:-

Merricrofts Wood SU626789; Pishill Woods SU715902; Greenfield and College Woods SU719910; Park Wood SU727886 and an NT wood west of Howe Wood SU698918. These will be investigated in the 2007 season.

After this letter, Sally Rankin investigated Park Wood (SU727886) and although she didn't find Herb Paris, she will obtain the owner's permission to investigate more fully next season, in combination with her work for Oxfordshire Rare Plants Group.

BERKSHIRE LOCATIONS

1. **Basildon Grotto** (Druce) SU6077

Susan Twitchett investigated this site and searched for around 2 hours without discovering Herb Paris. She says the site is to be sold shortly.

2. **Greenham Common** (RDNHS) SU513653

Ken Grinstead had supplied information that he and Alan Brickstock had discovered a single plant there in the 1980's. Malcolm Storey investigated, but did not find Herb Paris.

3. **Widmead Wood**, Thatcham SU513662

Chris Bucke investigated on 24th April, and this proved to be the best find of 2006! He writes:

Widmead Wood is a small linear wood to the south of the K and A canal, almost a continuation southwards and across the canal of the Thatcham reedbeds nature reserve. I gained access by crossing over Widmead Lock and finding a gap in a fence used by anglers and ?poachers. The wood is wet: in a normal year wellington boots would have been essential. It is a mixed wood, including Ash but there are willows and poplars as well.

I found thousands of plants of Herb Paris, I was amazed how plentiful they were in places. Locating the plants is straightforward because an electricity power line runs through the wood and trees and scrub have been removed from the route of the line. Herb Paris occurs in woods on both sides of the power line. The area is generally swampy but not completely level: the Herb Paris occurs in areas that are slightly elevated and usually free of competing vegetation (at the time of visiting – in one area it grows among reeds which will obscure it from sight quite soon). The first plants I found were amongst Dog's Mercury but generally the presence of this was not an indicator of the presence of Herb Paris. Some of the first population I found were trifoliolate and, as usual, some plants in most populations had five leaves. The larger plants were coming into bloom but none was fully open.

The most impressive populations will be easy to relocate: the electricity power line kinks northwards slightly at SU513662 where the map indicates the eastern extent of Widmead Wood. Large populations of Herb Paris occur on either side of the powerline, the best of all being to the north. I found no Herb Paris west of SU507663 but they were plentiful between the two grid references given.

Since then, others in the Society have been along to look at these plants and were equally amazed! Photographs have been taken.

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE LOCATION

1. **Millfield Wood** SU870954

Contact has been made with Alan Showler, warden of Millfield Wood. On Monday 5th June Meryl Beek, Chris Bucke, June Housden and Martin Sell met Alan for a visit to the wood. He showed the group 2 colonies, a small one of c.35 plants and a larger one of c.1,150 plants. The plants were well hidden by

Dog's Mercury. No plants were in flower or fruit, but Alan assured the party that the colonies were increasing again after a recession. He demonstrated a gentle sweeping movement with a stick to reveal the plants growing below the Dog's Mercury. The party was doubtful if they could have found the plants without the assistance of Alan, who has known this wood well over many years.

This is the extent of the 2006 search, and the Society is extremely grateful to the people mentioned in this report who have supplied all the information.

No work has yet been done on North Hampshire where, due to the soil, it is less likely to find Herb Paris, but the Botanical Recorder will be contacted in 2007 to make sure nothing important is missed.

Meanwhile the searchers have learnt a lot, whether they found Herb Paris or not, and it must always be remembered even if the plant wasn't discovered, it doesn't mean it isn't hiding away there!

HERB PARIS AND OTHER ORGANISMS

Malcolm Storey

In these days of biodiversity, the justification for conserving plants includes the other organisms which are reliant on them at some stage in their life-cycles. Such relationships generally involve the plant being eaten or otherwise suffering at the hands or mandibles of its associates, but it also includes pollinators and species which recycle the dead plant material.

So what are the associates of Herb Paris and do they give any additional justification for conservation effort?

The larvae of two Scathophagid flies: *Paralleloma paridis* and (maybe) *P. vittatum* mine the leaves. *P. paridis* is restricted to Herb Paris and produces a conspicuous blotch mine on the leaf. *P. vittatum* is less choosy and mines various orchids and (occasionally) Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum* spp.). I've seen what I think is this on Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) in my garden in Upper Bucklebury. Unfortunately the leaves are very thin and once picked soon shrivel so I was unable to rear it.

The common polyphagous rust, *Puccinia sessilis*, is sometimes found in its aecial (cluster cup) stage on Herb Paris, although this stage is much more common on Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) and Cuckoo-pint (*Arum maculatum*). It is also sometimes found on Lily-of-the-valley (*Convallaria majalis*) and several orchids. The alternate host is Reed Canary-grass (*Phalaris arundinacea*).

Herb Paris is pollinated by small flies and the berry is said to be eaten by birds which distribute the seeds. I can find no references to caterpillars (butterfly, moth, sawfly or beetle) feeding on it or to plant galls.

In conclusion: there is one species of fly which is entirely dependent on this plant, so efforts to conserve Herb Paris are actually conserving two species. Perhaps the Herb Paris surveyors might look for rust infections, leaf-mines or insects feeding on the plant during the coming spring.



Society members following the walk round Silchester, April 8th
© Chris Bucke



Green Tiger-beetle (*Cicindela campestris*)
© Chris Raper



Cerro Colohuincul, North Patagonia
habitat of *Viola coronifera*
© Chris Bucke



Viola coronifera has probably been seen in the wild by less than 100 botanists, many of those on AGS expeditions © Chris Bucke



Meconopsis horridula found at 14,000ft on AGS trek
© Chris Bucke



Walking party in Colorado
Botanist's view – from the back!
© Chris Bucke



Botanising party at La Grave, Haute Alps.
Leader's view – from the front!
© Chris Bucke

Photographic Competition - winning photographs



Woolly Milkcap – Fungi – © Graham Mulrooney



Dryas julia butterfly – Lepidoptera
© Graham Mulrooney



Wolf Spider – Other Insects & Inverts
© Graham Mulrooney



Cytinus ruber flowers – Botany
© Graham Mulrooney



Azure Damselflies – Best Overall Photo
© Graham Mulrooney

125th Anniversary Celebration



RDNHS President, Chris Bucke, gives a speech
© Susan Twitchett



The Birthday Cake, presented by Ivy Brickstock
© Susan Twitchett



Lady Orchid x Monkey Orchid (*Orchis purpurea x simia*)
© Chris Raper



The reward for a good walk! (After the Alan Brickstock memorial walk, 8 May 2002)
Clockwise from left: Unknown, Cath Butcher, Meryl Beek, David Beek, Jane Crutchfield, Gordon Crutchfield, Ken Thomas, Judy Sell, Martin Sell, Unknown © Chris Bucke

THE HARTSLOCK HYBRID

Chris Raper

2006 was a momentous year for Hartslock Reserve, with the first recorded flowering in Britain of the hybrid between Lady Orchid (*Orchis purpurea*) x Monkey Orchid (*O. simia*) – see the photographs opposite. Even though we didn't advertise it, there was still immense interest and hordes of visitors descended on the site to take photos and witness the spectacle. This included experts from both the Natural History Museum and Kew who came to take measurements and tissue samples to analyse the plants both morphologically and genetically.

The hybrid came as a surprise but in hindsight it could have been predicted as Lady Orchids had been flowering next to Monkey Orchids since 1999 and this hybrid is not uncommon on the continent. Obviously there have been worries about polluting the genes of the 'pure' Monkey Orchids but, at the moment, the advice from the experts is that this is a natural process so let's see what happens. Crossing and back-crossing might actually produce a stronger and more healthy population and DNA work carried out in the 1990's by Mike Fay at Kew suggested that the Hartslock Monkeys might actually not be as 'pure' as we think and could possibly have hybridised in the very distant past.

Unfortunately, due to the sheer quantity of visitors to that one spot on the slope, and the wet weather in May, the ground became very muddy and many small orchids were trampled by well-meaning but careless people. The situation is still pretty dire up there and even with the warm winter there has been little or no recovery. This means we will have to change how people view the plants and possibly restrict access for the good of all the plants and the slope.

THE ANNIVERSARY EXHIBITION

David Cliffe

The idea began in my head when the President, at a meeting in Pangbourne Village Hall, mentioned the Society's 125th anniversary, and the desire of the committee to discover the whereabouts of the Society's records and photographs, in institutions and in private hands.

The least I could do, I thought, was to see what was in Reading Central Library, since I work there. So I responded by letter to Chris Bucke's appeal, and offered to go and see what was in the Berkshire Record Office as well. Since then, I've gone on to see what we had in the store at Reading Museum, and what was at Reading University. It was all very interesting, but not the main point of this article.

It was about this time that I was invited to join the RDNHS committee. Like most people I know, I'm not very keen on going to committee meetings, but I felt I'd gained so much enjoyment from my membership of the Society that I'd like to give something back if I could. (I suppose that by now I also knew several committee members, and knew that any meeting in their company couldn't be totally dull!)

Among many other things, in my (paid) work, I look after the two glass display cases in the local history section of the Central Library, on the top floor. Two or three times a year, I change the display. I knew that a display on the Society's history would be possible, would be appropriate, and could be made interesting, so at my first committee meeting I suggested such a display. My proposal was accepted with alacrity.

The two glass cases each measure about six feet by three, and are about seven inches high, so there was the possibility of including some small three-dimensional objects, to make the display more interesting and varied visually. Meryl Beek and I set about obtaining some three-dimensional material, and among other things, we borrowed a vasculum, a butterfly-net, some glass-topped inspection boxes for examining insects, and an old magnifier on a brass stand.

Three cartoons, by an unknown but fairly skilled artist, showing outings in the 1930s, were prominently displayed. All the situations were perfectly recognisable – as were some of the characters. We still do the same sorts of things, and the cartoons are still funny – to naturalists, anyway.

The item that drew the most comment was the scrap-book. I'd opened it where I did because the old newspaper cuttings of fifty years ago seemed suitably varied. There was the account and photograph of someone's wedding, which was noticed by a friend of the family. Then various family members came in to have a look, including the groom's parents. I only knew because I happened to be there when they came in. I was asked several times if I knew whether people were still alive, and if so, where they lived. I began to wonder if I should turn over a page of this scrapbook every day, like a book of remembrance!

The Society's publications were on display – "Quaestiones Naturales," the little book on plants near Reading, and, of course, "The Reading Naturalist," including the first and most recent issues. And I put in a few books by eminent members of the Society – Brian Baker on butterflies and moths, Humphrey Bowen's flora, F. Bayard Hora on fungi, and Eric Watson on mosses.

There was a photograph and a note about Herb Paris, the Society's emblem, and the project to record where it grew in the anniversary year.

Along the bottom of both cases (so people could get a better look) was a sequence of photographs of the Society, out on field excursions, from 1881 to 2006. Where necessary, I'd enlarged them up to about A4 size. It was interesting to note that in the early years, all those present were male, and that they wore suits with waistcoats, collars and ties when out in the field. Unfortunately, at this stage, I hadn't seen the photograph of the man with the gun among the party, or I would have tried to make a copy. Presumably, in the early days, if they saw an interesting bird, they asked the man with the gun to shoot it for them, so they could have a closer look! Ladies appear in the early twentieth century, mostly wearing cloche hats. Then, towards the end of the century, outdoor clothing make its appearance – sensible shoes, blouses, skirts and cardigans and jumpers give way to boots, gaiters, checked shirts, fleeces and anoraks.

I'd produced a take-away leaflet to go with the exhibition: on one side it described the exhibits, and on the other it listed the activities of the Society now, and gave contacts and the web address. Posters went up on the different floors of the Library, and I had a special article in the "Reading Chronicle" to advertise the exhibition, which included one of the cartoons.

During the run of the exhibition (July to December), various characters were spotted on the top floor of the Library who aren't normally seen there, and some of them had a word with me, or whoever was on duty, to say they'd enjoyed looking at it.

And now I can't help musing on what will happen in 2031. Will there still be Red Kites, Dormice, and Loddon Lilies? Will there still be agriculture as we know it? Or books and public libraries? And will there still be the RDNHS? I very much hope so.

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR BOTANY 2006

Michael Keith-Lucas

This has been an interesting year, with high summer temperatures and below average rainfall, which has affected many plants. As a result it has been a bumper year for wild fruit, such as sloes, and beech mast. An interesting new record is the hybrid between the Lady Orchid and the Monkey Orchid, which appeared spontaneously in the BBOWT Hartslock Reserve, and is new to the British Isles.

Not many records have been sent in this year, and it would have been useful to have had a few more from the excursions.

Bryophyta (Musci) Mosses

Hylocomium brevirostre

8/04/06 In Pamber Forest on an old log by the path. SU61813 61992. Found by Malcolm Storey. (SO). Very rare, only one other locality in Berks.

Magnoliidae

45 Chenopodiaceae

Chenopodium rubrum Red Goosefoot

9/09/06 Several plants in roadway on corner of Wilderness Road and Hartsbourne Road, Earley. (C&RG)

64 Brassicaceae

Arabis glabra Tower Mustard

25/05/06 Behind back gardens of Redwood Avenue, Woodley. One plant in rough grass near path, SU774724 (C&RG). According to Crawley (2005), not seen in this area since 1984, and then at a slightly different location. (Reported to Mick Crawley).

Lepidium heterophyllum Smith's Pepperwort

25/05/06 Air Museum car park, Woodley. (C&RG)

Diplotaxis muralis Annual Wall-rocket

12/09/06 Homebase car park, Kenavon Drive, Reading (C&RG)

79 Fabaceae

Lathyrus nissolia Grass Vetchling

7/06/06 Rough ground between Bader Way and Colemansmoor Road, Woodley. (C&RG)
8/06/06 Bramshill Plantation. SU 752621 C&RG

93 Euphorbiaceae

Mercurialis annua Annual Mercury

19/05/06 Homebase car park, Kenavon Drive, Reading. (C&RG)
10/06 Earley Station (C&RG)

Euphorbia lathyris Caper Spurge

19/05/06 East of Tesco, King's Meadow, Reading.

111 Apiaceae

Silaum silaus Pepper-saxifrage

3/10/06 Whiteknights Park, in grassland east of Park House. SU 736717 (C&RG)

120 Boraginaceae

Cynoglossum officinale Hound's-tongue

9/06/06 Steep chalk grassland below Chazey Wood, close to King's Hill. SU687757 (CB)



Hound's Tongue, *Cynoglossum officinale*

134 Rubiaceae

Sherardia arvensis Field Madder

20/05/06 In kerb of Cinnamon Close, Earley.
4/06/06 Also in grass at Leighton Court, Earley. Both (C&RG)

137 Valerianaceae

Centranthus ruber Red Valerian

18/05/06 Wilderness Road, Earley, growing in low wall outside University boundary. (C&RG)

139 Asteraceae

Silybum marianum Milk Thistle

27/04/06 On corner of Station Road and Wokingham Road, Earley. Presumably escaped from nearby old garden. Later mown to the ground! (C&RG)



Goat's-beard, *Tragopogon pratensis*

Tragopogon pratensis Goat's-beard

4/06/06 Several plants in Whiteknights Park, with large flowers, as in continental forms, growing with ordinary small-flowered ones. SU738718 (C&RG)

166 Orchidaceae

Epipactis phyllanthes Green-flowered Helleborine

30/07/06 In hedgerow at High Tree Drive, Earley. Reported by Mrs. Anne Booth of the Earley Environmental Group. Photos were sent to Prof. Richard Bateman (Natural History Museum) who determined it.

Anacamptis pyramidalis Pyramidal Orchid

11/06/06 One flower in front lawn of 99 Westwood Road, Tilehurst, which was turfed in 1988. Left unmown in May to enjoy the buttercups, and this was an added bonus. SU666742 (JH)

Orchis mascula Early Purple Orchid

1/05/06 Woods beside Bottom Lane, between Hozehill Lake and Sulhamstead. About 50 plants apparent, 20 in bloom. SU638694 (CB)

Orchis morio Green-winged Orchid

19/05/06 Two flowers in Shinfield Cemetery, Spencers Wood. Despite 'phone call to Wokingham District Council, cut down by council grass-cutters. SU719668 (JH)

Orchis purpurea x *Orchis simia* Lady Orchid/ Monkey Orchid hybrid. (= *Orchis x angusticuris* Franchet ex Humnicki)

6/06/06 Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, S. Oxon. *Orchis purpurea* arrived here spontaneously a few years ago, presumably from a nearby wood where there was a small colony, and has formed a natural hybrid with *Orchis simia* at its only site outside Kent. (MK-L)

See the article and photographs by Chris Raper on page 25)

Ophrys apifera Bee Orchid

9/07/06 a population on steep chalk grassland below Chazey Wood, close to King's Hill. SU687757 (CB)



Pyramidal Orchid, *Anacamptis pyramidalis*

Botanical names and numbers and names of families follow Stace (1997)

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(CB) Chris Bucke, (C&RG) Colin and Renee Grayer, (JH) Jan Haseler, (MK-L) Michael Keith-Lucas and (SO) Sean O'Leary.

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR MYCOLOGY 2006

Malcolm Storey

The damp autumn following a hot summer produced the best fungus season we've had for some years. Unfortunately I was out of the area for most of the season so didn't see how our local sites performed, but mycologists all over the country reported an excellent season and there have been some interesting local records.

Ascomycetes

Fujimyces oodes (a coelomycete)
Bucklebury Common, SU552688, on dead pine cone, 16/12/06. (MWS)
A rarely-recorded microfungus that grows on pine cones where it forms small pale patches which dry to tiny honey-coloured lumps.

Elaphomycetaceae

Elaphomyces granulatus, False Truffle
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU461714, with *Cordyceps capitatus*, near *Sphagnum* patch in wood, 16/9/06. (MWS).
A subterranean ascomycete.

Gyalectaceae

Dimerella pineti, (a lichen)
Bucklebury Common Cemetery, SU546688, abundant, 2m up Horse Chestnut trunks, 28/04/06. (MWS)

Helotiaceae

Chlorociboria aeruginascens, Green Elfcup
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)

Mycogone rosea (an anamorphic fungus)
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU461714, on ?*Amanita fulva* and moribund Blusher - *Amanita rubescens* (accompanied by *Syzygites megalocarpus*), 16/9/06. (MWS)

Stictidaceae

Stictis (a genus of discomycetes)
Bucklebury Common, SU552688, apothecia on dead pine cone scale under pines, edge of marginal woodland, 23/11/06 & 16/12/06 (MWS)
The material has been sent to Kew and Brian Spooner thinks it is probably new to science.

Nectriaceae

Calonectria pyrochroa (a pyrenomycete)
Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, on fallen, dead, black, wet, rotting, Holly leaves, 19/11/06 (MWS)
This tiny species is usually said to grow on Ivy, but is equally common on Holly, where it must be distinguished from *Calonectria ilicicola*.

Pezizaceae

Peziza violacea (a discomycete)
Bucklebury Common, SU551687, violet cup fungus on fire site, east of mound, 23/11/06. (MWS)
One of the commoner cup fungi on bonfire sites.

Pyronemataceae

Aleuria aurantia, Orange Peel Fungus
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)

Clavicipitaceae

Cordyceps capitata, Drumstick Truffleclub
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU461714, on *Elaphomyces granulatus*, near *Sphagnum* patch in wood, 16/09/06. (MWS & MW)



Drumstick Truffleclub, *Cordyceps capitata*
growing from *Elaphomyces*



Snake-tongue Truffleclub
Cordyceps ophioglossoides
growing from *Elaphomyces*

Cordyceps ophioglossoides, Snake-tongue Truffleclub
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU461714, on *Elaphomyces*, near *Sphagnum* patch in wood, 16/09/06. (MWS and MW)
The truffleclubs are parasitic on the buried fruitbodies of *Elaphomyces*. Nice to see both the common species!

Volutella ciliata, (an anamorphic fungus)
Bucklebury Lower Common, SU581699, on dead, wet, decaying Bogbean rhizome at edge of pond. 10/9/06, (MWS).
A very common microfungus on rotting plant material, in wet places and after rain. The numerous small white mucilaginous lumps with radiating hyaline hyphae are distinctive.

Basidiomycota

Agaricaceae

Lepiota castanea, Chestnut Dapperling
In Beech litter, Harpsden Wood, SU761802, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Lepiota cortinarius, (a dapperling)
In Beech litter, Harpsden Wood, SU761802, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Leucoagaricus leucothites, White Dapperling
Chapel Row, SU568696, in greenhouse, 9/9/06, (MWS)

Melanophyllum haematosperrum, Red-spored Dapperling
Holly Wood, SU526700, c. 6 fruitbodies on mashed tree debris at side of road, 5/09/06. (MWS)

Cortinariaceae

Cortinarius amoenolens (a webcap)
Under Beech, Harpsden Wood, SU761802, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Cortinarius torvus, Stocking Webcap
Under birch, Pamber Forest, SU614614, North Hants., 8/10/06. (PEC)

Crepidotus luteolus (Yellowing Oysterling)
On branch, Harpsden Wood, SU761802, Oxford, 20/10/06. (TVFG)

Gomphidiaceae

Gomphidius roseus, Rosy Spike
Under Pine and Sweet Chestnut, near *Boletus bovinus*, Simmon's Wood, SU813636, Berks., 22/10/06. (MW)
Said to be associated with *Boletus bovinus*.

Marasmiaceae

Merismodes fasciculata, (a cyphelloid basidiomycete)
Bucklebury Common, SU550689, basidio-cups on fallen stick in ditch under Oak, 23/11/06. (MWS)

Pluteaceae

Amanita echinocephala, Solitary Amanita
Harpsden Wood - lower part, SU75-76 80, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)
Under Beech, Bozedown Vineyard - New Plantation, SU643777, Oxford, 4/11/06 (SC).

Pluteus petasatus, (a shield)
Snelsmore Common, SU460710, Two fruitbodies on very rotten old birch stump, 12/9/06. (MWS)
A white *Pluteus* with dark fibrils at centre of cap and base of stipe.

Volvariella hypopithys, (a rosegill)
Holly Wood, SU526700, Single toadstool growing in mashed tree debris at roadside under Beech, 5/9/06. (MWS) A previous damaged specimen was seen a couple of weeks previously on the other side of the road a few yards further down - for once a revisit paid off!

Tricholomataceae

Tricholoma lascivum, Aromatic Knight
Under Beech, Harpsden Wood, SU761802, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Tricholoma sciodes (a knight)
Harpsden Wood - lower part, SU75-76 80, Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Lycoperdaceae

Lycoperdon echinatum, Spiny Puffball
With Beech, Harpsden Wood Lodge, SU758805,
Oxford, 20/10/06. (MW)

Thelephoraceae

Thelephora penicillata (an earthfan)
Under oak, Pamber Forest, SU614614, North
Hants., Conf.: P. Roberts, 8/10/06, Herb.: K. (MH,
PEC)

Boletaceae

Aureoboletus gentilis, Gilded Bolete
In oak litter, Pamber Forest, SU614614, North
Hants., Confirmed: B.M. Spooner, 8/10/06, Herb.:
K. (MH, PEC)

Leccinum aurantiacum, Orange Oak Bolete
Under Aspen, Pamber Forest, SU614614, North
Hants., 8/10/06. (PEC)

Pseudoboletus parasiticus, Parasitic Bolete
Snelsmore Common, SU457710. A group of
well-developed Boletes around *Scleroderma*
aurantium, 16/09/06. (MWS & MW)
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)
This used to be a rare fungus, but I now see it
every year.

Hygrophoropsidaceae

Tapinella atrotomentosa, Velvet Rollrim
Simmon's Wood, SU813636, Berks., 22/10/06.
(MW)

Hapalopilaceae

Ceriporiopsis gilvescens, Pink Porecrust
On Beech log, Harpsden Wood, SU761802,
Oxford, 20/10/06. (PEC)

Polyporaceae

Polyporus tuberaster, Tuberous Polypore
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU463710,
on birch branch, near car park, 16/09/06 (TVFG)

Lachnocladiaceae

Scytinostroma portentosum, Mothball Crust
On fallen Beech trunk, Bozedom Vineyard - The
Skippets, SU643779, Oxford, 4/11/06. (PEC)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(GC) Gordon Crutchfield, (MH) M. Harrison, (MW) Mike Waterman, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (PEC) Paul Cook, (RAF) Richard Fortey, (SC) Sandra Conn, (TVFG) Thames Valley Fungus Group.

Russulaceae

Lactarius controversus (a milkcap)
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU460710,
16/09/06 (TVFG)

Lactarius fulvissimus, Twany Milkcap
Harpsden Wood - lower part, SU75-76 80,
Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Lactarius glyciosmus, Coconut Milkcap
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)

Lactarius obscuratus, Alder Milkcap
Under Alder, Pamber Forest, SU614614, North
Hants., 8/10/06. (PEC)

Lactarius pallidus, Pale Milkcap
Harpsden Wood - lower part, SU75-76 80,
Oxford, 20/10/06. (RAF)

Lactarius quietus, Oakbug Milkcap
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)

Russula parazurea, Powdery Brittlegill
Pamber Heath, SU616622, 7/10/06. (GC)

Phleogenaceae

Phleogena faginea, Fenugreek Stalkball
On Beech branch, Harpsden Wood, SU761802,
Oxford, 20/10/06. (PEC)
On standing willow trunk, Pamber Forest,
SU614614, North Hants., 8/10/06. (PEC)

Pucciniaceae

Puccinia pelargonii-zonalis, Pelargonium rust
Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, Uredinia on
underside of *Pelargonium* leaves, indoors,
28/11/06 (MWS)
One of the prettiest of the rusts with uredinia
forming neat concentric circles on the undersides
of the leaves.

Zygomycetes

Mucoraceae

Syzygites megalocarpus (a pin mould)
Snelsmore Common Country Park, SU461713,
on moribund *Amanita rubescens*. Some growing
with *Mycogone rosea* 17/9/06 (MWS)

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR LEPIDOPTERA 2006

John Notton

The order of families and nomenclature use is that given in the standard Royal Entomological Society checklists, supplemented by Bradley and Fletcher for the Lepidoptera. Records presented have been selected and edited. Full details of all records are available for examination on application to the recorder. It is encouraged that voucher specimens are retained.

Once again a satisfyingly large number of records were submitted for consideration. 2006 was a remarkable year with plenty of migrants arriving, no doubt encouraged by the hot weather. The numbers reported suggest that many of these species bred here successfully. Later than usual records for some indigenous species suggest that the weather may have encouraged extra partial broods.

147 *Nemophora metallica* (a micro-moth)

One at Tilehurst on 11/07/06, and one at the Holies on 12/07/06, (JH).

173 *Apoda limacodes*, Festoon

Fourteen at light in Windsor Forest between 14/07/06 and 18/07/06 (BC, DJW, LF). One at Aldermaston on 6/07/06 (DJW) and one on 12/07/06 in Bracknell Forest: Swinley Brick Pits (LF) also at light. Scarce, usually associated with Beech.

181 *Taleporia tubulosa* (a bagworm moth)

Three pupal cases found on palings of a wooden fence by the BBOWT car park at Baynes Wood on 29/05/06. The cases were 17mm long, cylindrical, becoming triangular in section towards apex. 2 males emerged: 9/06/06 (MWS).

185 *Luffia ferchaultella* (a bagworm moth)

Larva and case found 2m up a Horse Chestnut trunk at Bucklebury Common Cemetery on 28/04/06 and a second specimen in the same place on 4/05/06 (MWS).

289 *Caloptilia falconipennella* (a micro-moth)

Numerous characteristic mines in Alder leaves at Maiden Erlegh Lake 9/09/06 and mines and pupal remains in Dinton Pastures Country Park on 24/09/06, (MC). A rare micro moth species, probably under-recorded

370 *Sesia apiformis*, Hornet Moth

Pupal exuviae found by searching the ground close to exit holes in poplar trees in Beale Park on 18/06/06 (MC). Pupal exuviae also found near poplar trees at Hodsell Road, Reading 17/07/06 (DGN).

409a *Argyresthia trifasciata* (a micro-moth)

Singles flying in daylight at Earley on 3/05/06 and 19/05/06 (MC). Singles at light at Tilehurst on 20/05/06 and 25/05/06 (JH). One at Shinfield Park on 23/05/06 (JH). One at light in Emmer Green on 2/06/06 (JHFN). A recent colonist.

464 *Plutella xylostella*, Diamond-back Moth

Several at light at Tilehurst between 3/05/06 and 14/10/06 (JH). Three at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN). A regular and often very common migrant micro-moth.

523 *Coleophora hemerobiella* (a micro-moth)

Larva found at Heath Hanger Copse on 23/05/06 in an 11mm long dark brown larval case on a Hawthorn flower. The moth emerged: 12/07/06 (MWS).

930 *Gynnidomorpha alismana* (a micro-moth)

This uncommon Tortricid on 29/07/06 at Dinton Pastures C.P. (NMH)

985 *Cacoecimorpha pronubana*, Carnation Tortrix

Moths seen showing

considerable interest in Clearwing moth pheromone lures on 2/06/06 and 7/06/06 (JHFN). Since the lures are synthetic chemicals, cross-species effects are probably not very unusual. In real life, visual attraction will also be involved at close range.

1292 *Calamotropha paludella* (a micro-moth)

Three at light at Swinley Brick Pits between 12/07/06 and 9/08/06 (DJW, LF). A very local Pyralid moth dependent on marshes and flooded gravel pits, etc. for Reedmace, its food plant.



Coleophora hemerobiella - case and imago

1323 *Pediasia contaminella* (a micro-moth)
One at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 23/09/06 – a late date for this uncommon Crambid. (NMH)

1366 *Pyrausta nigrata* (a micro-moth)
A small Pyralid seen nectaring at Thyme in the lawn in an Emmer Green Garden on 16/07/06 (JHFN). An unusual location for a downland species.

1395 *Udea ferrugalis*, Rusty-dot Pearl
One at Streatley Warren on 26/08/06, one at Tilehurst on 14/10/06 and one at Shinfield Park (ECMWF) on 24/10/06 (JH). A regular migrant pyralid.

1398 *Nomophila noctuella*, Rush Veneer
Another migrant pyralid which, this year, has been reported in numbers from Tilehurst, The Holies, Green Park in Reading, Arborfield Cross, Lardon Chase and Warren Wood (JH). It was also recorded at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evenings at Padworth Common (18/08/06) and Dinton Pastures (23/09/06).



Rush Veneer, *Nomophila noctuella*
upper side and through glass

1413 *Hypsopygia costalis*, Gold Triangle
Five singles at light at Emmer Green between 22/06/06 and 11/09/06 (JHFN). A local Pyralid species which requires dried vegetable matter for its larva.

1433 *Cryptoblabes bistriga* (a pyralid)
A singleton of this uncommon Pyralid on 18/06/06 at Harcourt Drive (Earley) (NMH)

1461 *Assara terebrella* (a pyralid)
18/07/06 at Harcourt Drive (Earley). This Pyralid occurs occasionally in my garden despite apparent absence of mature spruce (NMH).

1494 *Capperia britanniodactylus* (a plume-moth)
At Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Greenham Common: Control Tower on 23/06/06 (NMH)
Brian Baker had 'no recent records' of this plume moth.

1517 *Adaina microdactyla* (a plume-moth)
This was seen in numbers in the daytime at Earley. Small clusters of about a dozen individuals were seen flying around clumps of Hemp Agrimony on eight occasions between 26/05/06 and 9/06/06 (MC). This is the smallest British Plume moth.

1545 *Colias croceus*, Clouded Yellow
One in Green Park, Reading on 17/08/06 and another one, very late in the year, on 2/11/06. The latter was a very fresh specimen; suggesting it might be offspring of the earlier specimen (JH). Singles recorded at Red Cow, Cholsey on 6/08/06, 17/08/06 and 25/08/06 (TR).

1558 *Satyrus w-album*, White-letter Hairstreak
A larva was found on Wych Elm in Clayfield Copse LNR on 25/05/06. Adult emerged on 10/06/06 and released (JHFN).

1569 *Cupido minimus*, Small Blue
Three seen at Lardon Chase on 2/06/06 (JH).

1576 *Lysandra bellargus*, Adonis Blue
27/6/06, Hartslock Reserve, male seen and photographed while emerging next to a large patch of Horseshoe Vetch. (CMTR)

1584 *Limenitis Camilla*, White Admiral
Second generation butterflies seen in Pamber Forest between 17/09/06 and 21/09/06 with a maximum of five on the last date (GD)

1593 *Aglais urticae*, Small Tortoiseshell
One at Shinfield Park on 28/03/06, four at Lardon Chase on 12/07/06, one at Tilehurst on 15/07/06 and one at Emmbrook Park on 20/10/06 (JH). Only 28 records at Red Cow, Cholsey – even worse than last year (TR).

1607 *Argynnis aglaja aglaja*, Dark Green Fritillary
One at the Holies on 12/07/06 (JH)

1608 *Argynnis paphia*, Silver-washed Fritillary
A tatty specimen of var. *valesina* was seen visiting Buddleia at Upper Bucklebury on 28/07/06 (MWS). A record year in Pamber Forest with a transect index of 566 and 6 var. *valesina* recorded between 11/07/06 and 2/08/06 (GD).

1667 *Comibaena bajularia*, Blotched Emerald
One at Shinfield Park (ECMWF) on 16/06/06 (JH). Also recorded at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Greenham Common: Control Tower on 23/06/06.

1692 *Scopula immutata*, Lesser Cream Wave
Two at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 17/07/06. A first for my garden. (NMH) Possibly under-recorded.

1699 *Idaea rusticata*, Least Carpet
Single moths at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 16,17,18/07/06.
First Berks record in my garden 1997. Then declined, but apparently increasing again. (NMH)

1716 *Rhodometra sacraria*, Vestal
One at the Holies on 30/07/06 (JH). Also recorded at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 21/09/06 (NMH) and two days later at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures on 23/09/06. Six recorded at Red Cow, Cholsey between 12/09/06 and 23/09/06 (TR). One at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN). One at Manor Farm, Peppard on 15/09/06 (JHFN).
This is another migrant species. Exposure of the pupa to different temperatures affects the appearance of this moth. Hotter (Continental) specimens often have bright pink markings whereas cooler (UK bred) specimens may have dull brownish markings

1720 *Orthonama obstipata*, The Gem
One of this migrant at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 17/10/06 (NMH)

1721 *Xanthorhoe biriviata*, Balsam Carpet
A singleton of this very unusual moth at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 18/07/06
Most records are in Thames valley (but once at Moor Copse).

1755 *Eulithis testata*, Chevron
Singles at light in Bracknell Forest: Swinley Brick Pits on 9/08/06 and 22/08/06 (LF).

1840 *Eupithecia subumbrata*, Shaded Pug
One at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Greenham Common: Control Tower on 23/06/06 (NMH)

1878 *Minoa murinata*, Drab Looper
26 were recorded at Pamber Forest between 11/05/06 and 10/06/06. Seven second generation moths were seen 30/07/06 and one on 24/08/06 (GD).

1884 *Abraxas grossulariata*, Magpie moth
One seen Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 20/7/06 (NMH), one at Red Cow, Cholsey on 23/07/06 (TR) and two at Dinton Pastures C.P on 29/07/06 (NMH). This once familiar species has been getting increasingly uncommon, but may now be increasing again.

1943 *Hypomecis roboraria*, Great Oak Beauty
Three at light in Windsor Forest: on 22/06/06 (LF, BC, DJW).

1980 *Smerinthus ocellata*, Eyed Hawk-moth
Two at light at Red Cow, Cholsey, on 12/06/08 (TR). Two at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN).

1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum*, Humming-bird Hawk-moth
One seen at Green Park, Reading 4/09/06 and singles seen in Tilehurst on 8/09/06 and 14/10/06 (JH). One at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN).

1990 *Hyles livornica*, Striped Hawk-moth
One at Mortimer West End on 26/07/06 (GD).



Elephant Hawk-moth, *Deilephila elpenor*

1991 *Deilephila elpenor*, Elephant Hawk-moth
23 at light in Emmer Green between 11/06/06 and 10/07/06 (JHFN). Six at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN). A very common species in 2006.

2009 *Ptilodon cucullina*, Maple Prominent

One recorded at the Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Padworth Common on 18/08/06. One at light at Emmer Green on 5/08/06 (JHFN). One at Mortimer West End on 20/07/06 (GD). Seen at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 8/06/06 and 6/08/06, the Society's moth trapping evening at Coromandel, Upper Basildon, on 22/7/06, Dinton Pastures C.P. on 29/07/06 (NMH). Commoner than usual in 2006.

2019 *Clostera curtula*, Chocolate-tip

One at light, Red Cow, Cholsey on 8/08/06 (TR) and one at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN).



Chocolate-tip, *Clostera curtula*

2026 *Orgyia antiqua*, The Vapourer

Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 23/09/06 and Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 18/10/06 (NMH).

Second brood, which are unusual in the wild.

2039 *Atolmis rubricollis*, Red-necked Footman

One at light at Woolley Firs on 17/06/06 (DJW), two recorded at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Greenham Common: Control Tower on 23/06/06 and one at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 25/06/06 (NMH)

Unexpectedly common this year in the S and SE.

2043 *Eilema sororcula*, Orange Footman

One at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 8/06/06 and two at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Greenham Common: Control Tower on 23/06/06 (NMH)

Becoming commoner in Berkshire

2068 *Callimorpha dominula*, Scarlet Tiger

Four seen at Linear Park, Calcot between 27/04/06 and 29/06/06 and three recorded in Widmead Wood on 30/04/06 (JH). Several seen flying in sunshine at Great Knollys Street on 11/06/06, and again on 14/06/06 around the tops of lime trees, of which the leaves were thickly covered in aphid honeydew. Two found resting on a wall *in copula* on 27/06/06 which laid eggs a few days later. These are being reared (DGN). Moor Copse Reserve: 29/04/06 (larvae), 1/07/06 & 8/7/06 (adults), (CMTR)

2137 *Eurois occulta*, Great Brocade

One at light, Red Cow, Cholsey on 5/08/06 (TR). This fine noctuid is an occasional migrant species. It is also resident in the Highlands of Scotland on peat moors.

2165 *Hecatera dysodea*, Small Ranunculus

Battered female flying around *Stachys* flowers at Great Knollys Street on 14/07/06, at 10pm (DGN) Batches of eggs and small larvae were found at a number of sites favourable for the growth of Wild Lettuce (*Lactuca serriola*) in Central Reading between 14/07/06 and 24/07/06, including;-Great Knollys Street, Wickes Car park, Chatham Street, Hodsell Road, Cardiff Road, east of Blake's lock on the Kennet towpath and by Reading Firestation in Caversham Road. In Woodley, they were also found at Rosedale Crescent and at the Woodley roundabout on 24/07/06. Some larvae were reared to confirm the identification (DGN)

Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 28/07/06 (NMH)

Two adults at light at Maidenhead, Hemsdale on 24/08/06 and one at the same place on 30/08/06 (LF, MF).

From being regarded as extinct in Britain less than a decade ago this species can now be regarded as locally common. However, the temporary nature of the sites so far found where its food plant grows may be a problem.

2195 *Mythimna vitellina*, Delicate

One at light at Mortimer West End on 19/08/06 (GD). A migrant Noctuid moth.

2219 *Shargacucullia lychnitis*, Striped Lychnis

One at the Society's moth trapping evening at Coromandel, Upper Basildon, on 22/07/06 (NMH)

2237 *Lithophane ornitopus*, Grey Shoulder-knot

One on 15/10/06 and two on 18/10/06 at Harcourt Drive (Earley) (NMH)

This Ash-feeder has been commoner than usual this autumn



Grey Shoulder-knot, *Lithophane ornitopus*



Small Mottled Willow, *Spodoptera exigua*

2260 *Conistra rubiginea*, Dotted Chestnut
One at light at Woolley Firs on 7/04/06 (MF) and another one at light at Shinfield Park on 12/04/06,(MC).

2268 *Parastichtis suspecta*, The Suspected
One at the Society's moth trapping evening at Coromandel, Upper Basildon, on 22/07/06 (NMH)
Probably under-recorded.

2300 *Mormo maura*, Old Lady
Six pupae and one larva found in an old bird's nest in *Clematis vitalba* at Great Knollys Street on 10/06/06 (DGN). Identification confirmed by JHFN by rearing pupae. One at light at Tilehurst on 11/09/06 (JH). One at light at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN).



Old Lady, *Mormo maura*

2315 *Dicycla oo*, Heart Moth
One at light in Windsor Forest on 22/06/06 (BC).

2385 *Spodoptera exigua*, Small Mottled Willow
Two singles at light at Red Cow, Cholsey on 16/09/06 and 23/09/06 (TR).
Two each at the Society's moth trapping evening at Coromandel, Upper Basildon, on 22/07/06 and at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 29/07/06 (NMH)

2396 *Elaphria venustula*, Rosy Marbled
One at Mortimer West End on 12/06/06 (GD).
A small Noctuid moth which resembles a Pyralid.

2400 *Helicoverpa armigera*, Scarce Bordered Straw
One at light at Red Cow, Cholsey, on 3/08/06.
One each at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 23/09/06 and Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 24/09/06 (NMH)
A migrant species which occasionally breeds in this country.

2403 *Heliothis peltigera*, Bordered Straw
One seen nectaring at Abelia in daylight at Emmer Green on 23/06/06 (JHFN). Four singles at light at Red Cow, Cholsey between 5/08/06 and 23/09/06 (TR).
A migrant species which breeds in this country in suitable years

2437 *Polychrysis moneta*, Golden Plusia
One at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 25/06/06 (NMH).

2473 *Laspeyria flexula*, Beautiful Hook-tip
Two at Harcourt Drive (Earley) on 23/06/06, and one on each of 29/06/06, 17/07/06 and 27/09/06, and six at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 23/09/06 (NMH)

2480 *Hypena rostralis*, Buttoned Snout
One at light at Red Cow, Cholsey on 22/08/06 (TR) and two at Queen's Road, Caversham (SN)

2484 *Schrankia costaestrigalis*, Pinion-streaked Snout
One at Berkshire Moth Group trapping evening at Dinton Pastures C.P. on 23/09/06 (NMH)
Under-recorded because it looks like a micro.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(BC) Bernard A.J. Clark, (CMTR) Chris Raper, (DGN) David G. Notton, (DJW) David J. White, (GD) Graham Dennis, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JHFN) John Notton, (LF) Les J. Finch, (MC) Mark Calway, (MF) Martin J. Finch, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (NMH) Norman Hall, (SN) Susan Nicholls, (TR) Tony Rayner

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR ENTOMOLOGY and OTHER INVERTEBRATES 2006

Chris Raper

In general 2006 wasn't a very good year for going out and seeing invertebrates and that is backed up by the relative lack of records this year. That said, several species thought to be expanding their range with the recent warmer average temperatures, have been seen in new localities in our area.

Odonata

Libellulidae

Libellula depressa, Broad-bodied Chaser
Cholsey (Red Cow), singles on 6/05/2006,
3/06/06 & 6/06/06. Not recorded in 05. (AR)



Broad-bodied Chaser (*Libellula depressa*)
Freshly emerged female, just after its maiden flight

Libellula quadrimaculata, Four-spotted Chaser
Cholsey (Red Cow), 11/06/06. (AR)

Calopterygidae

Calopteryx splendens, Banded Demoiselle
Cholsey (Red Cow), 17/06/06, 23/06/06,
21/08/06. (AR)

Aeshnidae

Aeshna cyanea, Southern Hawker
Cholsey (Red Cow), a good year for this species
– seen on 13 days between 4/08/06 and
24/10/06. (AR)

Aeshna mixta, Migrant Hawker
Cholsey (Red Cow), singles on 24/07/2006,
17/08/2006, 22/08/2006, 31/08/2006 &
16/10/2006. (AR)

Aeshna grandis, Brown Hawker
Cholsey (Red Cow), 1 or 2 recorded on 7 days
between 12/06/06 and 25/08/06. (AR)

Gomphidae

Gomphus vulgatissimus, Club-tailed dragonfly
20/05/06, Hartslock Reserve (CMTR)

Raphidioptera

Atlantoraphidia maculicollis, (a snakefly)
16/05/06, female imago at Heath Hanger Copse
WHS, SU363697, roadside on Denford Lane.
(MWS)



Atlantoraphidia maculicollis

Ephemeroptera

Ephemera lineata, (a mayfly)
16/06/06, Hartslock Reserve. (CMTR)

Orthoptera

Tetrix undulata, Common Groundhopper
Hartslock Reserve, 11/05/06 (CMTR)

Tetrix subulata, Slender-winged Groundhopper
Moor Copse Reserve, 27/08/06 (CMTR)

Metrioptera roeselii, Roesel's Bush Cricket
Cholsey (Red Cow), once again frequently heard
and seen throughout the summer. (AR)

Coleoptera

Lucanidae

Lucanus cervus, Stag Beetle
Cholsey (Red Cow), males on 7 evenings
between 26/05/06 & 17/06/06 (between 21:05 &
22:00) maximum count was 5 on 8/06/06 and on
17/06/06 males were seen fighting on the trunk of
a dead elm; females on 21/06/06, 27/06/06 &
22/07/06 crawling on the ground. (AR)

Carabidae

Cicindela campestris, Green Tiger beetle
Hartslock Reserve, 12/05/06. See colour section.
(CMTR)
This species is typical of sandy sites so it was
strange to find it on chalk. They are very good
fliers so no doubt it was only passing through.

Coccinellidae

Harmonia axyridis, Harlequin Ladybird
Tilehurst (Skilton Road), 12/10/06 (CMTR).
This recent coloniser (a Japanese species used for biocontrol) is set to be a common feature of our gardens. Look out for a large ladybird (as large as our 7-spot) but with more spots in varying patterns (black on orange or orange on black). Not to be confused with the Cream-spot ladybird.

Dytiscidae

Dytiscus semisulcatus, (a diving beetle)
Moor Copse Reserve (female). A very large (3-4cm) water beetle seen clinging to foliage beside the riverbank path, 8/07/06. (CMTR)
Diving beetles are actually very good fliers and are often seen out of water at lights but it is quite unusual to see one sitting out in broad daylight.

Hymenoptera

Andrenidae

Andrena cineraria, Grey Mining Bee
Hartslock Reserve, 12/05/06. (CMTR)
Common Wood WHS, SU58718012, resting on bare sandy ground near nest entrances, 18/06/06, (MWS)
A very distinctive solitary bee with a shiny, jet-black body and sparse pale yellow hairs on the front and back of the thorax.

Anthophoridae

Nomada flavopicta, (a nomad bee)
Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, male visiting Ragwort, 30/07/06, (MWS)

Apidae

Bombus hypnorum, (a bumble bee)
Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, female visiting Wall Cotoneaster 4/06/06. (MWS, MCH)

Vespidae

Vespa crabro, Hornet
Moor Copse Reserve (Moor Copse Wood section), a very active nest 2m up in a wide crack in a Beech tree. Very easy to observe as it was next to the main path and butterfly transect route. Initially I noticed a large pile of sawdust below the crack and as I was pondering what could have caused it, looked up and saw the huge worker Hornets buzzing in and out just above my head!
9/09/06. (CMTR)



Dytiscus semisulcatus

Cynipidae

Diplolepis rosae, Robin's pincushion gall wasp
Hartslock Reserve, female ovipositing into Sweet Briar buds, 12/5/06. (CMTR)
This is now a regular sight in spring and readers are encouraged to examine any Sweet Briar or Dog Rose that shows previous-year's Robin's Pin Cushion galls.



Grey Mining Bee (*Andrena cineraria*)



Criorhina berberina var. *berberina*

Diptera

Tachinidae

Cistogaster globosa, (a parasitoid fly)
Moor Copse Reserve (1 male). 22/07/06 (CMTR)
This species was once considered very rare but has been expanding rapidly in recent years. Now it should be found on almost any rough grassland site in our area with Wild Carrot, Parsnip or other low-growing umbellifers.



Cistogaster globosa

Aplomya confinis, (a parasitoid fly)
Hartslock Reserve, 20/05/06. This species parasitizes Chalkhill & Adonis Blues so it was interesting to note they were seen on low foliage within 1 meter of emerging Adonis Blues! (CMTR)

Thelaira nigripes, (a parasitoid fly)
Moor Copse Reserve, 8/07/06 (CMTR).

Sarcophagidae

Miltogramma punctatum, a flesh fly
Tilehurst (Skilton Road) 6/07/06 (CMTR).
A kleptoparasite of aculeate bees – the larvae live within the nest eating the bee's nest or food.

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(AR) Tony Rayner, (CMTR) Chris Raper, (MCH) Martin Harvey and (MWS) Malcolm Storey.

Syrphidae

Criorhina berberina, (a hoverfly)
A bumble-bee mimic hoverfly which is typically found in areas of ancient woodland, where the larvae live in old rot-holes.

var. berberina

Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, female, indoors, at window during afternoon, 11/06/06. (MWS)

var. oxyacanthae

Moor Copse Reserve 27/08/06. (CMTR)

Ferdinandea cuprea, (a hoverfly)

Moor Copse Reserve, 17/09/06. (CMTR)

Another hoverfly typical of old woodland.

Volucella inflata, (a hoverfly)

Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, visiting Buddleja, 26/07/06. (MWS)

Another hoverfly typical of old woodland where it has been seen ovipositing in sap-runs.

Volucella zonaria, (a hornet-mimic hoverfly)

Male, Tilehurst (Skilton Road) 22/07/06. (CMTR)

This species seems to be well established in our area and I see it every year in my garden.

Conopidae

Myopa buccata, (a bee parasitoid fly)

20/5/2006, Hartslock Reserve (CMTR)

Tephritidae

Anomoia purmunda, (a picture-winged fly)

Tilehurst (Skilton Road), 6/07/06 (CMTR)

Tephritis hyoscyami, (a picture-winged fly)

Hartslock, 12/05/06. (CMTR)

Tabanidae

Chrysops caecutiens, Splayed Deerfly

Female, came indoors, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, 21/07/06. (MWS)

Asilidae

Asilus crabroniformis, Hornet Robber fly

Cholsey (Red Cow), seen on most days between 23/07/06 & 11/09/06 with a peak of 18 on 15/08/06 – at least 5 were seen on 16 days. After the hay was cut the flies disappeared. A better year than last year, which it is assumed was because the neighbouring land was planted with beans and not set-aside. The beans being less competition for the grassland study area. (AR)

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR VERTEBRATES 2006

Tony Rayner

The significant increase in members' contributions is much appreciated. My feeling is that this increase has resulted in a more meaningful report than achieved in my previous reports. Keep up the good work, fish and bat observations still lacking.

Where the location is not stated, the reports relate to Red Cow, Cholsey SU592868

AMPHIBIANS

Bufo bufo Common Toad

27/03/06 One adult in Range Pond, Warburg reserve. SU719879 (Rd/A)

5/04/06 Few in pond at Rushall Farm SU584724 (JL)

25/04/06 Adult in allotment at Tilehurst SU670748 (JL)

16/05/06 Tadpoles in Jacks Pond SU700873 and Sea Pond Nettlebed Common SU701871 (Rd/A)

10/07/06 Tadpoles in Round Pond, Kingwood Common SU693829 (Rd/A)

16/07/06 One in Tilehurst garden, only 2nd record here in 30 years SU666742 (JH)

28/06/06; 20/08/06; 23/08/06; 16/09/06 Up to three juveniles at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

7/10/06 One adult at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

1/10/06 Juvenile lakeside at Aldermaston GP SU5966 (JL)

11/10/06 One in bracken at Kingwood Common SU6982 (Rd/A)

Triturus vulgaris Smooth Newt

26/04/06 Adult in Brookfield School, Tilehurst pond SU6674 (JL)

1/04/06 Two pregnant females in bottle traps at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

14/10/06 Four juveniles at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

22/6/06 Two pregnant females and tadpoles at Thatcham Discovery Centre SU507670 (JL)

12/06/06; 23/06/06; & 3/07/06 Tadpoles at Rushall Farm SU584724 (JL)

Triturus cristatus cristatus Great Crested Newt

1/04/06 Adults in Sulham pond SU649744 (KD)

16/05/06 One adult female in Jacks Pond, Nettlebed Common SU700873 (Rd/A)

4/06/06 One adult female & numerous larvae in educational pond, Church Meadow, Little Wittenham SU567934 (Rd/A)

14/06/06 One adult at Sutton Courtenay Environmental Educ Centre SU501918 (Rd/A)

12/09/06 Juvenile near Kintbury Newt Ponds SU3866 (JL)

Triturus helveticus Palmate Newt

16/05/06 Adult female at Jacks Pond, Nettlebed Common SU700873 (Rd/A)

10/07/06 Adult male at Highmoor Pond SU701846 (Rd/A)

10/07/06 Three adults at Round Pond, Kingwood Common SU693829 (Rd/A)

Rana temporaria Common Frog

6/03/06 First sighting of the year in Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

12/03/06 First spawn SU666742 (JH)

26/03/06 Over 200 frogs SU666742 (JH)

4/01/06 One adult; 28/3/06 10 adults and 10 spawn balls; 1/4/06 15 spawn balls at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

29/04/06 to 29/10/06 Up to 3 every month except August in Tilehurst garden SU666743 (JL)

5/04/06 Adults and spawn at Rushall Farm SU584724 (JL)

25/04/06 to 3/7/06 Tadpoles at Rushall Farm SU584724 (JL)

27/06/06 Over 20 while raking meadow, Turnpike, Newbury SU4867 (JL)

27/03/06 Spawn in two ponds at Warburg reserve SU720878 & SU719879 (Rd/A)

10/07/06 Froglets common at Round Pond, Kingwood Common SU693829 (Rd/A)

Trochemys scripta Red-eared Terrapin

15/09/06 One at Red Cow, Cholsey. This was one of at least three that escaped from a Cholsey garden. (TR/RR)

REPTILES

Lacerta vivipara Common Lizard

28/03/06 to 21/10/06 Seen on 72 days on a total of 175 occasions. Maximum count was 14. Although there was less evidence of breeding



Common Lizard, *Lacerta vivipara*

compared to 2005, the colony continued to increase and expand over a larger area. (TR/RR)
 3/04/06 One adult in Snelsmore Common heather SU460710 (JL)
 31/08/06 One in Wildmoor bog SU843628 (JL)
 13/05/06 One in Wishmoor heath SU8763 (JL)
 11/10/06 One at Kingwood Common in bracken SU6982 (Rd/A)

Anguis fragilis Slow-worm

23/03/06 Three young dug up in Tilehurst vegetable patch SU666742 (JH)
 20/08/06 Three more young in same vegetable patch.(JH)
 3/04/06 Two adults under tin at Snelsmore Common SU460710 (JL)
 16/08/06 Two dead at Snelsmore Common (EA)
 18/10/06 Three young under slab in Tilehurst waste ground SU666743 (JL)
 26/03/06 to 30/10/06 seen on 101 days on a total of 765 occasions. Maximum count 29 on 28/4/06. Once again there was plenty of evidence of successful breeding. Individual sightings were about double those of 2005, an amazing result given that the colony was only established in 2000. (TR/RR)

Natrix natrix Grass Snake

15/04/06 to 26/10/06 Seen on 62 days on a total of 132 occasions. Maximum count was 10. This snake achieved a modest increase in numbers despite the lack of frogs and other obvious prey subjects on site. The year ended with several sightings of newborn individuals. (TR/RR)
 25/04/06 Three in sunny nettle patch in Swallowfield Churchyard SU731649 (JH)
 23/06/06 A large adult swimming in Linear Park, Calcot SU661713 (JH)
 18/07/06 An adult in dry pond at Snelsmore Common SU460710 (JL)
 27/07/06 Shed skin at Chapel Lane pond SU703869 (Rd/A)
 28/07/06 Squashed on path, Park Lane, Shaw. SU675805 (JaW)
 9/08/06 Half full size individual at Snelsmore Common SU460710 (JL)
 4/09/06 On margin of wood, New Copse, SU688513 (JaW)
 18/09/06 Juvenile in car park pit, Burghfield Mill SU669703 (JL)
 7/10/06 Adult basking on grass heap at Hosehill SU6469 (JL)

Vipera berus Adder

1/04/06 Small male sunning by twig pile at Warburg reserve SU719880 (AB)
 10/04/06 One sunning next to sheet at Warburg reserve SU718879 (Rd/A)
 4/07/06 Adult female with one eye at Warburg Reserve SU717879 (Rd/A)
 1/05/06 One at Decoy Heath SU613638 (JH)
 16/08/06 Shed skin at Snelsmore Common (EA)

BATS

Pipistrellus pipistrellus Pipistrelle

15/04/06 One by tractor shed and another by cottage.(TR)
 25/05/06 Several flying above moth trap (TR)
 26/05/06 At least three flying at dusk (TR)
 Several unrecorded dates – small colony using Caps Lane, Cholsey as flightpath. SU596871 (TR/RR)
 31/05/06 One feeding over Didcot garden. SU514904 (Rd/A)
 August 06 At least 3 feeding over same garden (Rd/A)
 7/09/06 Two feeding over Didcot garden SU522896 (Rd/A)
 Numerous sightings in Grove Road garden, Sonning Common (JaW)

Nyctalus noctula Noctule

3/05/06 Two flying over field at Cholsey at 21.00, before parting to fly off in opposite directions. SU593873 (TR/RR)

INSECTIVORES

Erinaceus europaeus Hedgehog

19/01/06 One young animal in Tilehurst garden (CR)
 27/04/06 One crossing A4 at Hare Hatch SU813724 (GC)



Grass Snakes *Natrix natrix*

25/05/06 One on Westfield Road, Cholsey at 23.30 (TR)

2/07/06 One in Tilehurst SU666742 (JH)

6/08/06 Shepherds Lane, Reading, SU700766 – daytime and very hot (JeW/JaW)

7/08/06 A youngster in Earley garden (AA/EA)

20/09/06 Adult in Earley garden in daylight – seemed unsteady (AA/EA)

11/10/06 Adult dead beside Wallingford Road, Cholsey SU591869 (TR)

Sorex araneus Common Shrew

24/03/06 to 23/10/06 Seen on a total of 54 days in this period. (RR/TR)

Sorex minutes Pigmy Shrew

2/04/06 to 5/09/06 seen on 7 days in this period (RR/TR)

Talpa europaea Mole

A noticeable increase in molehills in November/December, probably due to wet weather and flooding in their local haunts. (TR)

CARNIVORES

Meles meles Badger

23/09/06 Two dead beside roads – one by A4 near Theale SU637636, one opposite ILAM near Lower Basildon. SU603794 (RR/TR)

13/10/06 Tunnel dug under fence (TR)

Mustela nivalis Weasel

26/01/06 One crossing road at Whitecross, Winterbrook SU604881 (RR)

19/08/06 on the road below Wheeler's Farm SU655838 (JeW)

27/08/06 One at Sonning Common SU700782 (GC)

18/10/06 One ran across the road at Clifton Hampden SU548962 (Rd/A)

Mustela erminea Stoat

9/04/06 One bounding along minor road near Yattendon SU542753 (TR)

15/08/06 One at Grazeley SU686680 (GC)

10/10/06 One beside Caps Lane, Cholsey SU602868 (DN)

Mustela putorius

Polecat

22/06/06 One dead beside road at Fulscot SU542888 (RR)

Mustela vison Mink

17/08/06 & 18/08/06 Two females caught in rat traps by Cholsey Brook (SL)

31/12/06 Two dead by Wallingford Road, Cholsey, probably trapped. SU595873 (TR)

Vulpes vulpes Fox

27/01/06 One dead beside road at Lower Basildon SU604793 (TR)

29/10/06 One walking along Gurney Close, Caversham SU6976(MB)

6/07/06 One at Pingewood SU690699 (GC)

19/09/06 One by front gate of Earley garden (AA/EA)

19/09/06 One crossing Bath Road, Reading (CB)

20/09/06 One in Downshire Square garden, Reading SU706728 (CB)

Lutra lutra Otter

22/03/06 Adult dog otter crossing Wallingford Road, Cholsey SU596874 (TB)

6/04/06 One in river at Blakes Bridge, Reading at 17.15 (DC)

Sus scrofa Wild Boar

13/12/06 A piglet in Hawkridge Valley, Ashampstead SU5777 (CD)

Rattus norvegicus Brown Rat

16/08/06 to 24/09/06 One or two under metal sheet, where they stored field beans from the adjoining field. (TR)

Big Cat

The following records appeared in the Henley Standard:-

Aug 06 One in Common Lane, Binfield Heath (HM)

23/08/06 One in Swan Wood Devils Hill, Nettlebed – 2 feet 6 inches long and black. Observed stalking deer. Possibly a puma or panther. SU6985 (DH)

DEER

Muntiacus reevesi Muntjac

30/01/06 & 31/01/06 Barking in evening and first thing the next morning. (RR)

10/01/06; 10/02/06; 14/02/06; 15/02/06; 8/04/06 one on drive in daylight (TR)

10/04/06 Two in neighbour's garden (TR)

31/01/06 Two at Streatley, grazing beside main road, one at each end of the village. SU592812 & SU592806 (TR)

5/06/06 One at Streatley Hill SU585807 (GC)



Dead Mink, *Mustela vison*



Muntjac, *Muntiacus reevesi*,
footprint with 20p piece for scale

20/06/06 One at Burghfield SU681709 (GC)
20/06/06 One at Pingewood SU679700 (GC)
16/09/06; 19/09/06; 12/10/06; 5/11/06 Further
appearances on drive (TR)
24/10/06 One at Medmenham SU819845 (GC)
21/12/06 One at Theale SU643723 (GC)

Capreolus capreolus Roe Deer
5/02/06 six in Hithercroft meadow SU589883
(TR)
8/05/06 One at Burghfield SU672676 (GC)
2/11/06 Two beside Caps Lane, Cholsey – not
noticed there before SU600866 (TN)
22/12/06 Three at Green Park, Reading
SU701696 (JH)

Dama dama Fallow Deer
28/06/06 One at Woolhampton SU574662 (GC)

RABBITS & HARES

Lepus europaeus Brown Hare
5/02/06 One in Hithercroft meadow SU591883
(TR)
16/02/06 to 30/04/06 One or two seen in a
Cholsey field on 22 days. SU595867 (TR)
2/05/06 Five in same field (TR)
1/11/06 to 14/12/06 One resting by day in same
field on at least 13 days. (TR)
25/02/06 Two at Inkpen SU359649 (CB)

Oryctolagus cuniculus Rabbit
Feb 06 Skin of adult found six foot up a Wild
Service tree. Gone following day! (TR)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(AA) Alice Ayers, (AB) Andy Burdock, (CB) Chris Bucke, (CD) Colin Dibb, (CR) Chris Raper, (DC) David Cliffe, (DH) David Hatch, (DN) Dot Nelson, (EA) Eric Ayres, (GC) Gordon Crutchfield, (JaW) Janet Welsh, (JeW) Jerry Welsh, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lepeniere, (KD) Karen Davies, (HM) Helen Morton-Cameron, (MB) Meryl Beek, (Rd/A) Rod d'Ayala, (RR) Ro Rayner, (SL) Simon Lord, (TB) Tim Brett, (TN) Ted Nelson, (TR) Tony Rayner

RODENTS

Sciurus carolinensis Grey Squirrel
Common and probably increasing. In Winter
seen feeding on apples, both fallen and direct
from the tree. (TR)

Apodemus sylvaticus Wood Mouse
The following records come entirely from daytime
observations, so undoubtedly understate the
presence of this largely nocturnal creature.
14/09/06 to 23/09/06 A total of six records in this
period, often with young. A total of 11 sightings in
the year which compares with just three in 2005
(TR)

Microtus agrestis Field Vole
24/03/06 to 9/06/06 seen on just 20 days. Clear
evidence of a population crash as illustrated by
the following figures for the site (TR):-

Year	Sightings	Sightings of >1
2004	160	38
2005	107	19
2006 to 9/6	24	0
2006 from 9/6	0	0

Clethrionomys glareolus Bank Vole
30/03/06 to 26/10/06 Seen on 59 days in this
period. Only scarce from mid April to early May.
Plenty of nests with young – a good year for this
species. (RR/TR)



Bank Vole, *Clethrionomys glareolus*
at bird feeder

Arvicola terrestris Water Vole
6/02/06 Nine at Linear Park, Calcot SU662713
(JH)

THE WEATHER AT READING DURING 2006

Ken Spiers

Department of Meteorology, University of Reading

Annual The long spell of dry weather, which started in late 2004, continued into most of the year. The winter, as well as being dry, was also a cool one, with its mean temperature below the thirty year average (1971-2000), making it the coldest winter since 1995/1996. April was the first month with its mean temperature above average, with the rest of the months following suit. This made 2006 the warmest on record, with a mean 0.4 Celsius degrees above the next highest, 2003. July was by far the warmest month of the year, with February the coldest. The rainfall during the last three months changed what was potentially a very dry year into one with its total just above average. October and November together, was the fifth wettest two month period since 1921, with total rainfall for the last three months making up nearly half the annual total. Every month up to and including May, had its sunshine totals below average, however, there was a remarkable turnaround in June and July. July was the sunniest month since May 1989 and together with June was the sunniest two month period since July and August 1976. Although August had a well below sunshine average, it was still the sunniest summer season since 1989.

January This month was dominated by high pressure; this had the affect of blocking any weather systems crossing the country. As a result, this was the driest January since 1997, with most of the rain, for the month, falling by the 19th. There was very little in the way of sunshine, with the 7th to the 10th inclusive, recording no sunshine at all. It was during this period that the heaviest daily rainfall was recorded, 5.8 millimetres on the 8th. High pressure had moved away for a few days during the middle of the month but by the start of the third week, had re-established itself, resulting in a drop in temperatures, with air frosts at night. It was cold enough for a fall of snow during the evening of the 27th.

February Weather conditions were dominated by high pressure during the first week of the month. Cloudy and dry with air and ground frosts nearly every day during this period, in fact, the temperature never went above zero on the 2nd. There was a brief interlude on the 7th and 8th when temperatures recovered and it became very sunny for a time. However, we were once again under the influence of high pressure by the 9th and it was during this period when the coldest night of the month was recorded, -4.4° Celsius, on the 11th. The weather then turned unsettled, becoming very wet and cloudy; however, temperatures did rise above average for February. During the last week, high pressure had established itself, with cold northerly winds blowing. Temperatures dropped and with showers coming off a cold North Sea, any precipitation fell as snow.

March A wintry start to the month, with northerly winds keeping temperatures well below average. At times, bands of cloud moved southwards over the country, occasionally producing showers that fell as snow. There were also some hard frosts at night culminating in the lowest reading for five years, on the night of the 4th, of -5.4° Celsius. The second week was cyclonic in nature, winds westerly in direction and fronts crossing the country with light to moderate falls of rain at times. There was a brief interlude when high pressure developed over Scandinavia, becoming cold enough for light snow during the morning of the 12th. From the 15th until the 24th high pressure over the British Isles produced dry and near normal temperatures. However, the last seven days of the month, witnessed showers and sunny intervals, with temperatures rising to well above the average expected for March.

April A changeable start to the month, with light rain at times but plenty of sunshine and near normal temperatures. However, the next week high pressure developed and it became dry, sunny, with temperatures dropping to give night frosts. By the middle of the month, the weather had turned more typical for April, with sunny periods and showers and near normal temperatures. Rainfall amounts remained low, with the start of the third week becoming warm, with a temperature of 17.6° Celsius on the 22nd. This changeable weather was replaced by high pressure, remaining cloudy at times but fairly dry. The wettest day of the month was on the 30th when a low pressure came in off the North Sea, producing a total of 12.2 millimetres. However the total rainfall for the month was still well below average.

May A dry start as temperatures began to rise dramatically, reaching 26.9° Celsius, the highest of the year so far, on the 4th. The 6th witnessed the first rain of the month and after a short changeable spell, which was accompanied by thunder, it became dry, sunny and warm as high pressure traversed the country. However, the month was to buck the trend of previous dry months becoming very wet, with temperatures at or slightly below average and remained that way until the end of the month.

June This was a fine month to start summer off with; the driest month since September 2003, often hot, and very sunny. High pressure was well established right from the start of the month, temperatures began to rise, culminating on the 12th with a reading of 29.8° Celsius. There were only a couple of short periods when the weather appeared to break down, the 13th, first rain of the month and the start of the third week. The 26th was the wettest day of the month, 8.5 millimetres, 77% of the month's total rainfall. After that high pressure began to build with temperatures rising: a prelude to July.

July This was by far the best month of the year; very hot at times, with daily sunshine totals high and amounts of rainfall mainly low. The first three days of the month, were hot, dry and very sunny. However, it became showery with sunny periods, for a time but remaining warm. By the 10th, high pressure, was established and producing a spell of unbroken sunshine and with temperatures rising they reached a peak on the 19th of 35.3° Celsius, the highest July temperature since records began. The rest of the month remained very warm, only interrupted by the 22nd, when low pressure and front crossed the country producing the wettest day of the month and the 26th which witnessed a couple of thunderstorms.

August Although temperatures remained around average and it was reasonably dry throughout, it was still a noticeably disappointing month after June and July. There were very few glorious sunny days, with daily levels remaining below average throughout the month, resulting in a total 17% below the expected monthly average. With high pressure in attendance at the start of the month it was dry and warm, however as it moved away, it became showery with sunny periods and temperatures around average. These conditions remained the same through to the end of the month.

September The first couple of days were cloudy with light rain, however by the 3rd the weather had changed, as warm air blew up from the Bay of Biscay, producing warm, dry and often very sunny conditions. This period of fine weather peaked on the 11th with a recorded temperature of 29.6° Celsius. This was followed by a period of unsettled weather, with heavy rain on the 13th. The rest of the month was characterised by short periods of warm, dry and sunny conditions, interspersed by short periods of unsettled weather. However, the 22nd was a very wet day, 19.6 millimetres, with its maximum temperature ten degrees below the previous days maximum; nighttime temperatures remained very high.

October After a very dry period, lasting twenty-three months, of which nineteen were below average, October was a huge shock. There were two periods of very heavy rainfall: 1st to the 11th and the 17th to the 24th. The result was that this October was the wettest since 2000, with three times the long term average rainfall. However, sunshine was near to the average, with temperatures, day and night, well above average; making this October the warmest on record – records going back to 1921. Also the number of ground frosts was the lowest since 2001 and the third lowest since 1951, giving weight to the very high minimum temperatures.

November The month opened dry, rather mild and very sunny, with night frosts, all due to the presence of high pressure. It was not until the 11th that the first rain of the month was recorded. From then on after high pressure had receded and with winds blowing from a westerly direction, this brought a series of depressions and fronts over the country, with heavy rain at times. As a result this was the second wettest month of the year and together with October, provided much needed rain.

December With depressions and associated fronts moving across the country at regular intervals it was a wet and mild start to the month. Amounts of rainfall varied from light to moderate, interspersed with an odd sunny day, 3rd and 9th recording over five hours of sunshine. High pressure began to re-establish itself by the 12th becoming very dull as anti-cyclonic gloom set in. The 19th to the 23rd witnessed thick fog, with temperatures barely reaching zero during the day. No sunshine was recorded for nine days, from the 18th to the 26th inclusive, the longest period since December 2000. The last three days of the month were characterised by stormy weather, with high winds and half the month's total rainfall falling during this period.

DAILY WEATHER RECORDS: 2005 – UNIVERSITY OF READING (WHITEKNIGHTS)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Daily Temperatures °C													
Mean	4.9	4.0	5.9	9.8	13.1	17.0	21.1	17.4	18.0	14.1	8.6	7.0	11.7
Mean Maximum	7.2	6.5	9.1	13.6	17.2	22.5	27.2	21.8	22.3	17.2	12.4	9.4	15.5
Mean Minimum	2.5	1.4	2.7	5.9	9.0	11.5	15.0	13.0	13.7	10.9	4.8	4.5	7.9
Mean Daily Range	4.7	5.1	6.4	7.5	8.2	11.0	12.2	8.8	8.6	6.3	7.6	4.9	7.6
Extreme Maximum	12.9	11.9	15.2	17.6	26.9	29.8	35.3	28.0	29.6	20.4	16.4	14.2	35.3
Date	16 th	14 th	31 st	22 nd	4 th	12 th	19 th	6 th	11 th	9 th	13 th	4 th	19 th July
Extreme Minimum	-4.4	-4.4	-5.4	-0.3	2.5	5.5	10.8	8.2	7.0	6.6	-1.5	-2.0	-5.4
Date	18 th	11 th	4 th	6 th	2 nd	1 st	12 th	25 th	8 th	25 th	3 rd	22 nd	4 th March
Extreme Grass Minimum	-9.5	-9.0	-12.5	-8.5	-3.8	-0.8	3.8	1.1	-2.1	-1.0	-6.5	-5.3	-12.5
Date	25 th	10 th	4 th	6 th	2 nd	1 st	17 th	25 th	8 th	27 th	10 th	10 th	4 th March
Days with													
air frost	9	7	8	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	36
ground frost	18	18	16	12	4	1	0	0	1	2	16	11	99
Hrs at/below 0.0°C	67.0	92.0	86.0	4.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	XXXX	XXXX	249.0
Sunshine Hours													
total	52.0	66.4	96.4	146.3	150.8	254.4	291.8	162.9	145.3	106.0	86.8	38.6	1597.7
% of Possible	19.7	23.6	26.2	35.3	31.4	51.6	58.7	36.2	38.3	31.9	32.3	15.5	35.7
Daily mean	1.59	2.37	3.11	4.88	4.86	8.48	9.41	5.25	4.84	3.42	2.89	1.25	4.36
Precipitation													
Amount in mm	15.7	52.6	41.6	28.3	82.0	11.1	25.4	31.0	49.0	137.5	118.8	75.5	668.5
Rain days	11	9	14	13	18	4	11	11	11	16	15	15	148
Maximum rain in one day													
(mm)	5.8	15.7	9.6	12.2	14.9	8.5	8.9	8.2	19.6	27.6	22.8	17.1	27.6
Date	8 th	19 th	7 th	30 th	7 th	26 th	22 nd	17 th	22 nd	11 th	17 th	29 th	11 th Oct
Mean wind speed													
(mph)	3.8	4.5	5.6	4.0	3.7	2.7	3.5	3.3	3.2	3.2	3.6	4.8	3.8
Days with													
Sleet or snow	1	4	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10
Snow lying	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2
Fog at 0900 GMT	1	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	4	1	4	14
Thunder	0	0	1	0	3	0	2	2	0	2	2	1	13
Hail	0	0	1	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	4
Pressure													
Mean (mbs)	1024.3	1017.6	1012.0	1016.9	1013.9	1022.1	1019.5	1013.8	1014.4	1011.1	1015.4	1020.7	1016.8
Highest	1038.4	1034.9	1031.3	1027.9	1027.3	1032.2	1033.6	1024.5	1032.5	1032.0	1036.6	1045.2	1045.2
Date	22 nd	5 th	12 th	28 th	31 st	3 rd	14 th	8 th	8 th	13 th	2 nd	22 nd	22 nd Dec
Lowest	1001.3	988.5	992.5	1006.2	987.9	1011.0	1009.3	1001.7	1002.0	990.5	985.4	985.4	985.4
Date	1 st	16 th	24 th	1 st	22 nd	19 th	9 th	17 th	14 th	20 th	23 rd	8 th	Nov+Dec
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year