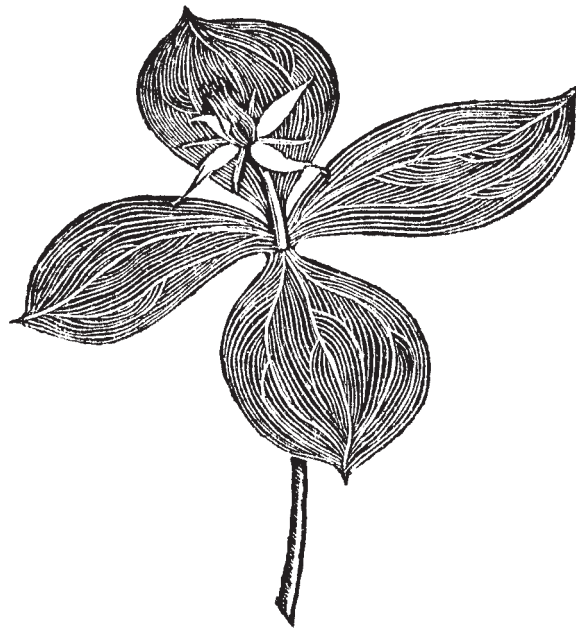


The Reading Naturalist

No. 60



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THE READING NATURALIST

No 60 for the year 2007

The Journal of the
Reading and District Natural History Society

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to another edition of *The Reading Naturalist*. The major local event for wildlife conservation last year was the purchase of a large extension to BBOWT's Moor Copse Nature Reserve. Our president, Jan Haseler, takes us on a tour.

2007 was final proof of the saying "what we expect is climate, but what we get is weather!" It will long be remembered for the bad floods in parts of our area during an already very wet summer. Ken Spiers' regular feature on the local weather explains the statistics, and Jan Haseler relates it to the wildlife in her *President's Ramblings*.

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ANNOUNCEMENTS

We regret to report the death of T.G. Homer (Theo) who passed away on Jan 17th, 2008 (aged 94.) He was a member of the society for half a century, joining in the late 1950's and resigning in 2007. He audited the Society's accounts for 12 years from 1976-1989.

We're also sorry to report that Vic Mason, a member since 1995, passed away during 2007.

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLINGS

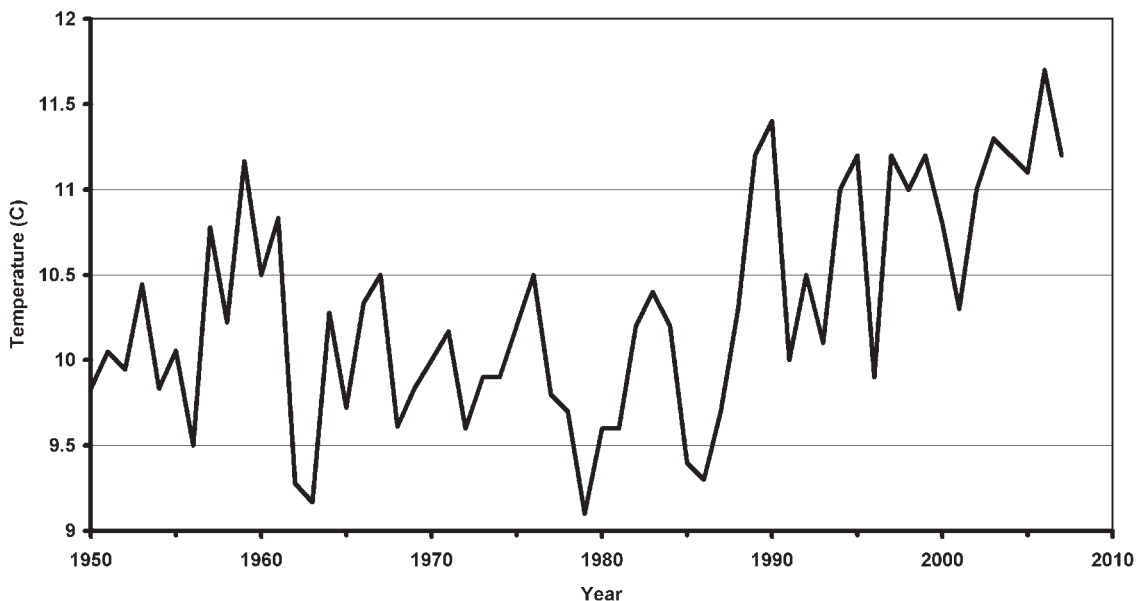
Jan Haseler

2007 is likely to be remembered for its weather. On Friday 20th July, a band of torrential rain with embedded thunderstorms moved slowly north-north-westwards across the region. 51 mm of rain fell in 63 minutes at Maidenhead and 111 mm of rain was recorded at Chieveley. The storm rainfall fell on ground which was already saturated by the heavy rainfall from the preceding months. Widespread flooding was reported throughout the region, with the valleys of the Pang and Kennet particularly badly affected.

How will the summer floods have affected our wildlife? The Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) newsletter reports that the floods were disastrous for ground-nesting birds and invertebrates at its Chimney Meadows Reserve. In early July, there were high numbers of Meadow Brown butterflies in the meadows next to the River Blackwater at Finchampstead. On a return visit soon after the flood waters had receded, all the butterflies had gone. The meadows at Moor Copse, with their uneven surface and mix of low-lying areas and higher terraces, appeared to fare better. Although the lower parts were inundated, the higher ground provided a refuge above the flood waters.

Since the third edition, which contained the weather data for 1950, *The Reading Naturalist* has included a detailed annual report from the weather station at the University of Reading. We are grateful to Ken Spiers who continues this tradition, and whose 2007 report can be found in its usual place on the final pages of this edition. Ken reports on the mild winter, which was followed by an exceptionally warm and sunny April. Red Admiral butterflies used to be regarded as migrants that could not survive the British winter, but they were observed in our area during every month of the winter of 2006 – 2007. In August 2007, second brood Duke of Burgundy butterflies were reported from Noar Hill, near Selborne in Hampshire. The butterfly is double-brooded in parts of its range in continental Europe, but this behaviour is very unusual in Britain. The favourable conditions for the first generation earlier in the year must have been an important factor here.

Annual Mean Temperature at Reading



Then, as Ken Spiers reports, the mild winter and glorious April were followed by the wettest summer since 1941. A moth recorder from Abingdon noted that normally abundant species such as Common Wainscot, Setaceous Hebrew Character and Heart and Dart were seen only in very low numbers in his garden in 2007. He suggested that this might be because these are ground-pupating species and the soil was waterlogged for an extended period. Low numbers of moths meant fewer caterpillars and the garden birds appeared to be hungrier than usual. The peanut feeder in our garden, which is usually ignored by the local bird population, was emptied twice in early summer, mainly by Blue Tits and Great Tits.

The graph on the previous page shows how the annual mean temperature at the University of Reading, as reported in *The Reading Naturalist*, has changed between 1950 and 2007. From 1950 until the mid 1980's, the signal appears to have been stable with an average value of about 10°C. During the 1990's, the average value was about 10.5°C. Since 2002, the annual mean temperature at the University of Reading site has been at or above 11°C.

A side effect of these changes is that flowering times and flight times in field guides are becoming out of date very rapidly. The revised edition of Francis Rose's book 'The Wild Flower Key', published in 2006, gives the flowering time for Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) as March to June. But the first Primroses are now coming into flower in December, with quite widespread flowering by the end of January. 'The Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland' by Paul Waring, Martin Townsend and Richard Lewington, published in 2003, gives the flight time for the Coronet (*Craniophora ligustri*) as June to July, but in 2007, one was recorded at the end of April.

Each year, *The Reading Naturalist* gives an invaluable snapshot of the state of wildlife in our area. In a time of climate change, it records how our wildlife is changing in response to the changing environment.

MEMBERSHIP

Norman Hall

A record number of 45 new members were welcomed to the Society in calendar year 2007:

Ruth Angus, Winnersh	Dr Roger Kemp, Ford (Aylesbury)
Sally Arnot, Caversham	Dorothy Knight, Mortimer Common
Olwen Badziak, Caversham	Mal & Ann Leslie, Earley
John & Anne Booth, Earley	Nick & Margaret Manousos, Calcot
Linda Booth, Woodcote	Cliff Marriott & Pam Goddard, Bradfield
John & Ann Bridgens, Whitchurch Hill	Sir Alan & Lady Winifred Muir Wood, Pangbourne
Steve Chown, Reading	Fred & Sue Nickson, Peppard Common
Paula Craven-Humphries, Caversham	Nina O'Connell, Caversham
David Dare, Tilehurst	Clive & Margaret Ormonde, Emmer Green
Jim & Joan Dawson, Pangbourne	Jane Skyrme, Highclere
Alice Fenton, Taplow	Fred & Barbara Taylor, Reading
Colin & Sue Hatcher, Caversham	Tony & Bron Towner, Tilehurst
Jeremy Hilton & Kim Taplin, Kidlington	Bernard & Marion Venners, Purley on Thames
Andrew Hood, Reading	Jane Wolstencroft, Caversham
Mary Hoskins, Whitchurch Hill	Sheena Wooding, Peppard
Don Kaine, Earley	

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.

- 2nd Jan 07 Tony Rayner reported 4 Blackcaps at Red Cow Cottage, one seen daily on a peanut feeder and a Hare at Red Cow Cottage. He saw at least 40 Corn Buntings on Lollingdon Hill, Cholsey.
Ro Rayner had seen two dead Mink beside Wallingford Road, Cholsey. They were thought to have been killed locally and dumped.
Martin Sell saw 30 Redwings in his garden one evening.
Chris Bucke saw a large migrating group of Blackbirds on the Downs in the evening.
Throughout the whole of December, Ken Thomas did not see one bird in his garden even though he had put out a good supply of food. Possibly there has been a big decline in the garden bird population over the past three to four years. Alternatively as we have recorded there has been a big supply of natural native seeds for birds this Autumn and they have been feeding on this rather than on bird food put in people's gardens.
Colin Dibb had seen Goldfinches feeding on Lemon Balm seed in his garden, and 1 Wild Boar piglet in Ashampstead woods.
- 16th Jan 07 Chris Bucke saw Snowdrops in flower in his garden very early this year. Also Redwings feeding in a holly tree.
Alice Ayers recorded Reed Buntings in her garden feeding on fat balls.
Heather Baker saw an unidentified butterfly and a Red Admiral in her garden.
Martin Sell observed a Bumblebee in his garden.
- 6th Feb 07 Chris Bucke saw 8 Red Admirals and 1 Brimstone in Saville gardens. At Eversley Gravel pits 15 Goosanders were seen and 1 Egret.
Heather Baker saw 1 Red Admiral in her garden on the following dates: Fri Jan 19th, Sat Jan 20th, Fri Jan 26th, Sun Jan 28th and Thurs Feb 1st .
Maureen Baggaley saw 2 Bumblebees in the car park, and at Blackwater a wintering Yellow-Browed Warbler.
Roger Frankum brought in a fungus which he had received through the post from his sister. This was identified as *Mycena inclinata*
- 20th Feb 07 Maureen Baggaley saw 7 Goslings on the ground under a log canopy at Maiden Erlegh Lake.
Jan Haseler observed more than 40 Frogs in the pond in her garden.
Martin Sell saw 3 Short-eared Owls and 200 Golden Plovers at Bury Down. Also a Bittern at Vales Lake, Dinton Pastures.
Observation that the Hawthorn is nearly out in bloom. This is probably European material and not native. The Cherry-plum is out in bloom.
Ken Grinstead brought in a small fungus and hand lens to use.
1 bag of Snowdrops of unknown species since has not flowered.
Malcolm Storey brought seeds of Corn Buttercup for members to help themselves.

- 6th Mar 07 Chris Bucke saw Blackbirds building a nest in his back garden. In addition he had seen a Brimstone Butterfly in Moor Copse on March 3rd.
 Tony Rayner saw a Stonechat, a species new to his garden, also Slow-worms and a Common Lizard in his garden.
 Roger Frankum had seen 2 Chiffchaffs at Cotswold Water Park.
 Heather Baker saw a Comma butterfly in her garden on March 3rd.
- 2nd Oct 07 A Sparrowhawk and a mouse were seen by Heather Baker on September 7th & 21st in her garden.
 Martin Sell recorded 2 Pectoral Sandpipers and 1 Curlew at Farmoor Reservoir.
 David Owen saw a Slime Mould fruiting which was quite unusual in Harpsden Woods, and a Silver Y Moth.
 Tony Rayner saw a huge flock of Swallows circling around in the air between Hambledon and Turville. Also on his way to the meeting tonight he saw a Common Toad crossing the road in Lower Basildon (SU612786) on a wet night.
 June Housden found a small dismembered owl in her garden.
- 16th Oct 07 Tony Rayner saw a Common Toad crossing the road in Cholsey. Also for the past 14 out of 16 days there has been a Wood Mouse under the snake sheet in his garden. This is quite exceptional. He also saw a Weasel and a freshly dead Field Vole under a snake sheet. (SU592868)
 Ro Rayner recorded a Robber Fly (*Asilus crabroniformis*) in the same garden; this is an exceptionally late record for this fly.
 Ted Nelson saw a covey of 11 Grey Partridges at Cholsey (SU594867).
 Chris Bucke observed a thriving nest of Hornets (*Vespa crabro*) in Nest Box 17 at Hosehill Lake.
- 6th Nov 07 Jan Haseler had observed yellow and bright red Waxcaps at Bearwood Churchyard.
 Maureen Baggaley saw a Red Admiral in her garden last Thursday.
 Martin Sell had seen a Lesser Scaup and Fieldfares at Woolhampton Gravel Pits.
 Tony Rayner (at Cholsey, SU592868), saw a Migrant Hawker, a late season dragonfly, flying beside a hedge, beyond its normal flying period. Also a male Grey Wagtail on the thatched roof of his house eating insects: he has never seen this in 21 years at the cottage. He observed that the Tawny Owls, frequent noisy evening visitors, disappeared over 5th Nov period (fireworks & bonfire night) but now the owls have returned!
 Heather Baker reported a Red Admiral in her garden on 3rd November.
 Mr F. Taylor saw a Grass Snake on the 1st November basking near the Thames by the Oracle Park at midday when the temperature was 16/17°C
- 20th Nov 07 Jan Haseler reported that she saw a Scarce Umber moth at Shinfield Park.
 Heather Baker had seen a Red Admiral in her garden on 10th November and a Peacock in her garage on 14th.
- 4th Dec 07 Xmas party – no recorded observations

EXCURSIONS: January – December 07

Meryl Beek

After the excitement of the 125th celebrations in 2006, this year has been a normal and steady one for the Society's excursions. Some new locations have been visited, and botanical, entomological and mycological records have been well maintained.

Saturday 27th January saw 5 members and 2 visitors at Eversley Gravel Pits joining a small party from the Alton Natural History Society for a combined bird watching morning. Among other sightings was a Yellow-browed Warbler, described in one bird book as "a tiny Siberian waif that wanders westwards across Europe every autumn"!

A party of 19 visited both Frilsham and Bucklebury churchyards on Saturday 17th February. They were led by Malcolm and Christine Storey on a bracing walk between the two churches. In both places the snowdrops were flowering well. Varieties seen included Greater, Green, Caucasian and Pleated Snowdrops.

The sky on the morning of Saturday 24th March was grey, and there were no distant views. Although the sun broke through for a short time, the wind remained cold. In spite of this, Eric and Alice Ayers led a circular walk around Farley Hill and Arborfield Cross, which 11 people attended. Spring flowers included Primroses, Greater Stitchwort, Celandines and Wood Sorrel, and the first Blackthorn blossom was beginning to appear. Lapwings, Skylarks, a Buzzard and a Red Kite were among the birds spotted. The unusual plant, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (*Trachystemon orientalis*) was noted growing in several large stands by a shaded roadside.

There was glorious sunshine on Saturday 14th April when Martin Sell ran a field trip to Tring Reservoirs, looking for spring migrants. Highlights of the day were an Osprey and a Little Gull. Swallows and Grey Wagtails were seen, and Common Terns appeared to be arriving as the day progressed.

There was a large turnout of 24 people, including some visitors, on Saturday 5th May when Sean O'Leary led a walk in the Swyncombe area. The surprise awaiting the party was Ravens, calling and seen, in the coppice at the top of the hill near the Ridgeway Path. Near the same spot was a 10 ft. x 5 ft. patch of Moschatel (*Adoxa moschatellina*). Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigegios*), Glaucous Sedge (*Carex flacca*), Wood Sedge (*Carex sylvatica*) and False Brome (*Brachypodium sylvaticum*) were also seen and studied.

On Monday 14th May, Meryl Beek ran an evening walk which started from Rushall Manor Farm, Bradfield. 9 people attended. The Rushall Farm Chalk Pit is an important geological site, with an exposed boundary between the chalk and the overlying sands, clays and gravels. This was viewed from above. In the hillside field, flowers included an unusual white/pink-flowered Bugle, and Ragged Robin where the ground was wetter. Moths on the site included the Speckled Yellow day-flying moth, a faded Green Carpet Moth, and the Drab Looper moth (UK BAP). Great Woodrush (*Luzula sylvatica*), which likes acid soil, was a remnant from the previous autumn, when it had been growing in profusion.

Sally Rankin led a fairly strenuous walk near Turville Heath, in the Chilterns, on Saturday 19th May, when 14 people attended. The walk passed through beechwoods, chalk grassland and fields, and included some steep slopes. Flowers seen included White Helleborine (*Cephalanthera damasonium*), and Fly Orchid (*Ophrys insectifera*). A Buff-tip Moth, which is camouflaged to look exactly like a piece of birch twig, was spotted by a sharp-eyed member of the group.

On Tuesday, 22nd May, Chris Bucke met 8 members at the southern end of Circuit Lane, Southcote, and strolled in Kennet Meadows on a fine balmy evening, primarily to watch birds and listen to birdsong. The first observation was a Red Kite being harassed by an unidentified corvid. Thereafter, many birds were observed and songs noted, but they did not include the Nightingales and Cetti's Warblers that were heard on a similar visit in 2005. A pair of Mute Swans had a nest with at least seven healthy cygnets, and nearby, four female Mallards seemed to have a communal nest, or at least a communal roosting area. A very large number of Banded Demoiselle damselflies was noted, and also numerous mayflies. A Roe Deer watched the party from deep grass, and showed no sign of moving away,

suggesting that it had a fawn. The flowers expected were seen, including many Yellow Flag irises. A single specimen of Alexanders (*Smyrniium olusatrum*) was found. This is plentiful in the Southcote and Coley areas, but not in this wilder area. The tipped soil on which Corn Marigolds and Cornflowers had been seen in previous years had been moved, and there was no sign of these species. In all, nothing sensational was noted, but the stroll in this quiet and beautiful area was much enjoyed.

Michael Keith-Lucas led a combined BBOWT-RDNHS field trip to the Aston Upthorpe Reserve on Sunday 3rd June. 23 Society members and 11 other people from BBOWT and friends were present. Deadly Nightshade (*Atropa belladonna*), a splendid display of Wild Candytuft (*Iberis amara*), and Warty Cabbage (*Bunias orientalis*) were recorded. Butterflies included Grizzled, Dingy and Large Skippers, Green Hairstreak, and Small Blue. A sunny and memorable afternoon!

On Sunday, 17th June, 8 people attended a walk led by Grahame Hawker to Holtspur Bank (a Local Nature Reserve) and Holtspur Bottom (a Butterfly Conservation reserve) in a valley on the chalk near Beaconsfield. The caterpillars of Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma, and Red Admiral butterflies were found feeding on nettles, and caterpillars of the Mullein Moth were seen on Dark Mullein. Butterflies seen were Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Small Skipper, Red Admiral, Comma, Brimstone, Large White, and Small Heath, and moths seen included Burnet Companion, Six-spot Burnet, *Pyrausta aurata* and *Crambus perlella*. Also, a list of plants was made, which included Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*), and Long-stalked Cranesbill (*Geranium columbinum*).

The annual coach outing took place on Saturday 30th June, and this year 34 members of the Society went to the New Forest. The weather was definitely not good – but the friendliness and general atmosphere was of the best! At the site near Beaulieu Road Station in the morning, several spikes of the magenta-coloured *Gladiolus illyricus* were found, and another 18 interesting plants recorded by Renee Grayer. This was compared with a list of 24 plants listed by Humphrey Bowen on the Society's previous visit in August 1995. Only 7 plants were on both lists, but it must be remembered, the recent visit was 2 months earlier.

After lunch at the Beaulieu Road Station Hotel, the coach drove via very narrow lanes and a ford to Blissford, on the north east side of the Forest. Unusual plants seen on the walk up to Hampton Ridge included Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Lesser Skullcap (*Scutellaria minor*), Dodder (*Cuscuta epithimum*), the Round-leaved and Oblong-leaved Sundews, and Pale Butterwort (*Pinguicula lusitanica*). The distress call of a Curlew alerted the group to the presence of a Fox. Then it started to rain heavily and everyone raced back to the coach.

It was good to meet old friends who joined the party at different times during the day, namely Lin and Bob Carter, Mary and Neville Diserens, and Iris and Michael Fletcher.

On Saturday 6th July, 6 members met Malcolm Storey, who led a late evening walk round Bucklebury Common. Woodcock were flying overhead and calling. A single pair of Nightjars was seen, and another was heard calling from farther away. The highlight of the evening was on the darkened path on the way back, when 5-6 Glow-worms were spotted, including a mating pair – who turned off their light!!

Sandra Conn from Bozodown, near Whitchurch-on-Thames, hosted the Society's annual moth night on Saturday 14th July. This was a superb site, with flower-rich chalk grassland in a valley with mature beechwoods above. More than 130 species of moth were identified, including the striking black-and-white Leopard Moth, 10 nationally scarce Chalk Carpets, bright green Common and Small Emeralds, and the spectacular Pine, Poplar and Small Elephant Hawkmoths. The real enthusiasts stayed up till 3 a.m., and more members turned up next morning to inspect the catch before it was released.

On Saturday 21st July, Martin Sell led 9 members on a field trip to Dorney Wetlands, on the Jubilee River near Maidenhead. This was a new venue for the Society. As happened so often this summer, a heavy shower passed through. Nevertheless, some interesting water plants were seen, including Branched Bur-reed (*Sparganium erectum*), Lesser Bulrush (*Typha angustifolia*), and Galingale (*Cyperus longus*). Later, a Little Egret was spotted at the edge of the reeds, and a flock of Ring-necked Parakeets were first heard, then seen, feeding in a cherry tree.

A trip to another new venue for the Society was led by Chris Bucke on Saturday 28th July – to the Chiltern Society's reserve at Bottom Wood, near Stokenchurch. 11 BBOWT members joined 10 Society

members and friends on this walk. The reserve is an area of deep woodland and open grassland. In the wood, ferns and mosses were in good condition. The Violet Helleborine (*Epipactis purpurata*) is present, but was not seen by the party. On the open chalky area, three species of orchid and several species of butterfly and moth were seen. There was evidence of Badgers, deer and dormice. Bottom Wood is one of the few locations in England where both resident species of dormouse occur.

On Saturday 4th August, Tony Rayner co-ordinated a recording day at Withymead Nature Reserve, near South Stoke. The reserve had reed-beds, open marshland and wet woodland. Michael Keith-Lucas recorded a fantastic list of 133 plants. 74 different moths were recorded by Jan Haseler, Norman Hall and Tony Rayner. Other groups included butterflies, dragonflies, reptiles, beetles and birds. Most of these were recorded by Tony Rayner and Chris Raper. The surface has been skimmed, but there is a lot more work to be done next year!

On Saturday 11th August, 9 members explored the south-east corner of Bramshill Forest on a bright but not brilliantly sunny afternoon. This is an area that has been very much messed about by human activities – gravel extraction and commercial forestry. It is definitely not a scenic area, but it proved to have an impressive biodiversity, including some rare species. On entering the Forest, one member commented: “This looks like Grayling territory,” and one specimen of this butterfly was seen and photographed. A Common Lizard was also noted. Plants were the stars of the trip, and included Trailing St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum humifusum*), Sand Spurrey (*Spergularia rubra*), Common Spike Rush (*Eleocharis palustris*), Broad-leaved Pondweed (*Potamogeton natans*), and, of course, Yellow Bartsia (*Parentucellia viscosa*), the speciality of the site.

The Society is grateful to Michael Keith-Lucas for leading this excursion at short notice, owing to the illness of the chosen leader, Colin Grayer, to whom best wishes are sent from the Society.

As a result of Right to Roam, Shirburn Hill in the Chilterns, north of Christmas Common, is now open to the public. The new site was exciting to visit for the first time, and 19 people enjoyed the afternoon there on Saturday 25th August, with leader Tony Rayner. Both Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*) and Chiltern Gentian (*Gentianella germanica*) were present as expected, and the unusual white form of Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Silver-spotted Skippers were numerous, but these butterflies were hard to watch because they were so active in the hot sunshine. There was Heather on top of the hill, which was interesting as it indicated an acid soil on top of chalk. A discussion followed on geology. Do you know why the following can be so useful? “Camels often sit down carefully: perhaps their joints creak? Engine oil may perhaps produce relief.” Answer to be given out at a winter meeting – perhaps!

Sunday, 16th September was a warm, sunny afternoon when Janet Welsh led a small group on a gentle stroll from the East Gate of Greenham Common, heading towards the woodland on the southern edge. The aim of the walk was to explore the contrast between the gravel plateau, and the heads of the gullies that collect iron-rich water and drain south towards the River Enborne. On the plateau, between patches of Common Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*), Dwarf Gorse (*Ulex minor*) and Heather (*Calluna vulgaris*), there was short turf with occasional spikes of Autumn Lady’s Tresses (*Spiranthes spiralis*) possibly indicating more basic conditions. Spiders’ webs were admired on the gorse. We descended from the plateau into one of the branches of Brushwood Gully, where tall coppiced Alders (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*), the latter indicating strongly acidic conditions, were found. The boggy ground had an abundance of Lady Fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*), Hart’s-tongue (*Phyllitis scolopendrium*), and Broad Buckler Fern (*Dryopteris dilatata*). Marsh Horsetail (*Equisetum palustre*), Marsh Violet (*Viola palustris*), Devil’s-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*), Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage (*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium*) and Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*) were also present. Farther along the plateau edge, in a very squelchy mire, Marsh St. John’s Wort (*Hypericum elodes*) – rare and decreasing in Berkshire, Bog Pimpernel (*Anagallis tenella*), Marsh Bedstraw (*Galium palustre*) and Cross-leaved Heath (*Erica tetralix*), all good acid bog indicators, were found, as well as sedges and rushes. Nearby, close to a pond with Marsh Pennywort (*Hydrocotyle vulgaris*), Royal Fern (*Osmunda regalis*) was spotted, and in a nearby gully was the (certainly introduced) Ostrich Fern (*Matteucia struthiopteris*). This gully had a carpet of sphagnum mosses and scattered Wood Horsetail (*Equisetum sylvaticum*) under Silver Birch, which provided a wonderfully ethereal landscape.

Gordon Crutchfield led 19 people on a fungus foray at Harpsden Wood, near Henley, on Saturday 29th September. The discovery of the afternoon was a group of Earth Star fungi. The gruesomely-named Dead Man's Fingers was seen growing out of a fallen tree. Other finds included the gleaming white Porcelain Fungus, Oyster Mushrooms, and Blushing Brackets. Altogether, about 40 different fungi were identified, and the list has been sent to the Fungi Recorder.

On Saturday 13th October, Susan and Peter Twitchett were scheduled to lead a party round the Ashampstead area, but this was changed at fairly short notice to a walk round the grounds of Basildon Park. There is a chance here to work with the National Trust in the future on recording in the Park, and more excursions here are planned for 2008. On this occasion, 24 people arrived and admired the wide variety of berries on the trees and bushes, including red Guelder Rose berries, black Purging Buckthorn, pink Spindle, black Privet, and the red berries of Black Bryony.

On Thursday 8th November, the Society and the Reading Gardeners combined for the third time to visit an arboretum in autumn. Winkworth Arboretum, Godalming, Surrey, was chosen, and 38 people (about half from each group) enjoyed a very happy day. The Holly Wood, containing 40 different kinds of holly, was particularly significant, as was the Sorbus Hill with its fine collection of Whitebeams. The intrepid party descended to the lake and wetland area, while others contented themselves with the upper slopes. From here there were magnificent views over the surrounding Surrey countryside. Dorothy Knight, on behalf of Reading Gardeners, is thanked for organising this outing – and actually making a financial profit!

Theale Gravel Pits was the final venue for 2007, when 9 people met on Sunday 9th December for a short afternoon winter bird watch led by Martin Sell. Various ducks, including Shovellers and Tufted Ducks were seen, and Cormorants drying themselves on the central lake platforms were admired. On the side of the lake, some Redwings were resting in a tree. Nothing spectacular – but just nice to be out!

And so the Society goes forward into 2008. The year has been rewarding, with good excursion leaders, who are thanked for their hard work, and good numbers turning up. Let's keep up the good work!

WEDNESDAY WALKS

Meryl Beek

There have been eleven Wednesday walks this year, which continue to be popular with an increasing number of people. Six of these walks are announced in the summer programme, and the other five are described as "unofficial winter ones" meaning the venue is not established until the Monday evening of the week concerned. Of these Ken Thomas has been responsible for nine walks, and in the autumn Chris Bucke led two Wednesday walks. Both are thanked for their contributions as walk leaders.

On 17th January twelve members visited the North Street and Englefield area. The weather was described as "improving", and the route followed through various habitats including farmland, brookside, hard surfaces and hedged footpaths. Being January, only four different plants were seen in flower, and among the birds observed were collections of Fieldfares and Redwings; but the greatest excitement of the day was on the golf course. Here, in two of the intervening ditches and in a pond were plants that looked like Water Violet in leaf. Could members have made a wonderful discovery?

The answer came in June, when five members of the party returned unofficially and found that there were indeed large quantities of Water Violet (*Hottonia palustris*) in flower and growing thickly in the ditches and pond! This was an amazing find and had never been recorded previously in this location.

The Stratfield Saye area was visited by nineteen people on the 21st March. The Blackthorn was coming out and some of the first Primroses were seen. Coltsfoot (*Tussilago farfara*), was growing at the field edge on the headland of a south facing slope. Birds included a Red Kite, Chiffchaff and Kestrel. It was interesting to see bees drinking from a puddle in a muddy lane.

18th April was the first Wednesday walk of the summer season, and the location was Rotherfield Greys and Lambridge Woods. Twenty three people came and were pleased to see Small Copper, Peacock and Holly Blue butterflies. Spring had really starting bursting and the flowers coming out included Wallflower (*Erysimum cheiri*), Cowslip (*Primula veris*) and Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*). Also Hairy Woodrush (*Luzula pilosa*) was identified.

Thirteen people came to the walk on 16th May when the venue was Finchampstead Ridges and the River Blackwater. It was interesting to see Celery-leaved Buttercup (*Ranunculus sceleratus*) growing in the river. Swifts, Swallows and House Martins were flying round, and a Kingfisher was spotted, and later two Hobbies and Lapwings were observed.

It was high summer when twenty people visited Compton and the Downs on 20th June. Twenty nine interesting plants were recorded, including Sainfoin (*Onobrychis viciifolia*), Hairy Tare (*Vicia hirsuta*) and Yellow Rattle (*Rhinanthus minor*) on the Downs, and the Duke of Argyll's Teaplat (*Lycium barbarum*) in the lower hedgerow. Common Blue and Marbled White butterflies were around, also Burnet and Brimstone moths.

Christmas Common was the venue for twenty two people on 11th July, and the walk went through nearby Queens Wood and Fire Wood. Under some trees were three interesting grasses, namely Wood Barley (*Hordelymus europaeus*), Wood Melick (*Melica uniflora*) and Wood Millet (*Milium effusum*). When found growing together like this it is a sign of old woodland. By the side of another woodland path Slender St John's-wort (*Hypericum pulchrum*) was seen and recorded.

15th August saw a party of twelve people exploring the Cookham Dean, Winter Hill and Cock Marsh area. In the wetland section Tubular Water-dropwort (*Oenanthe fistulosa*) and Water Dock (*Rumex hydrolopathum*) were growing. In complete contrast, the Winter Hill area showed a good display of chalk grassland plants, including Autumn Gentian or Felwort, (*Gentianella amarella*), Clustered Bellflower (*Campanula glomerata*), Dark Mullein (*Verbascum nigrum*) and Musk Thistle (*Carduus nutans*). Interestingly, in another place Ploughman's Spikenard (*Inula conyzae*) was growing high up in a railway arch brickwork.

On 19th September a party of fifteen people enjoyed a pleasant walk in the Crowmarsh, Mongewell and Newnham area. This location has not been visited for a long time, and there were superb views across the Thames Valley, then through the fields and parkland on the way back to the cars – and the Thai Orchid Pub at Crowmarsh!

A trip out to Bagnor, near Newbury, was the venue chosen by Chris Bucke for the walk on 17th October. This more remote countryside looked beautiful in the autumn light, and was a new venue for most of the party. Fungi were the main attraction and included Shaggy Pholiota (*Pholiota squarrosa*), Lilac Bell Cap (*Mycena pura*), Amethyst Deceiver (*Laccaria amethystea*) and Clouded Agaric (*Clitocybe nebularis*).

The group was nearer home with Ken Thomas on 21st November, when he led a walk round Kidmore End. The party of twenty was asked to note everything that was seen in flower, and quite remarkably the total came to twenty one! *Arum italicum* ssp. *neglectum* was observed in new autumn leaf and a Brown Fourteen-spot Ladybird was creeping along a gate post. Ken captured the flavour of the morning by reading Edward Thomas' poem 'November' during the "banana stop", which provided an extra dimension to all that was being observed.

On 19th December Chris Bucke decided on another trip out to Bagnor for a different walk, which was joined by fifteen people. A large number of Thorn Apple (*Datura stramonium*) plants now in seed were seen on an open field above Boxford.

It was another glorious weather day, and a fitting end to a good year of Wednesday walks.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2007

Susan Twitchett & Colin Dibb

2nd January – Philip Palmer – The Nightjar

Philip came all the way from Doncaster to give us this talk. He is a birding tour leader who has studied the Nightjar extensively for 20 years. He gave us a talk well illustrated with many excellent slides of this rather elusive bird.

In early May the male Nightjar flies north from South Africa to return to Britain to breed. The female follows a few weeks later at the beginning of June returning to the wilderness areas of Britain. They inhabit big heaths, moorland and forests with large clearings where they rest on the ground during the day. If a human approaches the bird closes its eyes to slits to prevent the visible gleam, and flattens its body into a long thin shape. It is a speckled brown colour, very well camouflaged against the ground and hence difficult to spot. At night they fly and feed on the wing. They have beady eyes to see moths at night, and a small beak which opens to reveal a wide gape by which insects are funnelled into the throat. If caught on the ground by a predator the Nightjar will open wide its mouth and hiss like a snake so startling the predator that the bird is dropped and it may escape. Their flat head shape resembles that of a swift, their nearest relative.

The males “churr” all through the summer evenings to attract a female, sounding rather like a loud sewing machine. At dusk he does a circuit of his territory and lands on a perch where he sings. The female joins him and they fly together for a few minutes. A good display can be seen in mid-June and then she will lay her eggs in a nest on undulating ground raised up slightly so that cold, damp weather does not kill the chicks. Adjacent to the nest will be some taller plants eg heather or bracken that offer cover, and close by this will be taller trees, often silver birch saplings, where the Nightjars feed on moths in the evening. The Nightjar female usually lays 2 eggs which are white with spots and blotches on them for camouflage: the egg pattern is unique to each female. She will incubate these only leaving at dusk for 50 minutes to collect enough moths to feed her for 24 hours. The male does not incubate the eggs; he returns to the nest very rarely and then only to copulate with the female. When the eggs hatch the two young chicks remain beneath the mother – a sign of hatching is the elevation of her tail to allow air under her wings for the chicks to breathe. The male helps the female parent in feeding their young from dusk to midnight, flying upwards towards the trees to catch moths, then returning to the chicks 30 minutes later. The chicks tug at the adult beak with their own, causing the parent to regurgitate the food and drill it into the throat of the chick. The remainder of the food returns to the adult’s mouth and 30 minutes later the regurgitation and drilling procedure is repeated. The two chicks battle with each other to get more food from the parent- this is “survival of the fittest”. However, since moths are plentiful usually both chicks survive at this stage. When the chicks are 12 days old the female leaves the nest and the male takes over the task of raising these chicks. She flies to a second nest where she lays her second clutch of eggs. The chicks grow fast, reaching the same size as the adult when they leave the nest. As the first brood take to the air in mid-July there is a second chance of a good display from the Nightjars at dusk.

The main predators of the young Nightjar are crows, which see the discarded egg shells by the nest of the newly hatched chicks, and foxes. Foxes kill 80% of the chicks in the first brood but thankfully 80% of the second brood survive.

By September 1st they leave Britain and migrate south travelling as far as South Africa.

16th January – Dr. Michael Keith-Lucas – The Natural History of South Africa and Namibia

This talk was based on a trip made with the curator of Bristol Botanic Gardens, Nick Wray, in the autumn of last year. Nick is an expert on the South African flora and he teamed up with a zoologist/archaeologist from the University of Cape Town, to lead a small group of like-minded people up the west coast of South Africa and through Namibia to near the Angolan border.

Starting in Cape Town, we went up Table Mountain the first day, which has a high altitude version of the fynbos, the evergreen shrubby vegetation of the small area in Cape Province which has a

Mediterranean type of climate. Table Mountain has some 1000 species of vascular plant, or 2,200 if taken together with the adjacent mountains.

Altogether the fynbos has 8,500 species, a high proportion of the total of 22,000 found in South Africa, and yet is confined to a very small area, making it the richest biome for its size in the world. There were many plants in flower, such as the yellow-flowered *Leucodendron gandogerii*, the red-flowered *Erica cerinthoides*, which is bird pollinated, and the yellow *Erica plunkenetii*, which is insect pollinated.

From Cape Town we made several expeditions, the first to Hout Bay, passing a troop of baboons and a fine view of Southern Right Whales on the way, to take a boat to see fur seals on a rocky island. We then went down to Cape Point, seeing many of the endemic plants of the fynbos, such as *Adenandra uniflora*, *Phaeocoma prolifera* and *Viscum capense*. We then went on to Boulders Bay to converse with the jackass penguins, and ended up in Kirstenbosch Botanic gardens, on the slopes of Table Mountain, where there was a fantastic display of native Leucospermums and Pelargoniums.

Our next expedition took us into the mountains to the vineyard region near Franschoek, where we encountered 300-year old camphor trees and some very pleasant wine, and on to Stellenbosch, where we went around the botanic garden and met a Hadada Ibis, an eagle owl, and a rather more international collection of plants.

Leaving Cape Town, we headed north to the Trinie Versfeld nature reserve, one of the last remnants of the bulb-rich grasslands known as renosterveld, or rhinoceros grassland, of which less than 4% remains, the rest having been lost to agriculture. Here we found the bulbs *Romulea hirsuta*, *Ixia maculata*, *Babiana stricta* and *Lachenalia pallida*, to name but a few, and the Arum Lily, *Zantedeschia*. There were also many of the daisy family such as *Arctotis* and *Aster* species.

The West Coast National Park was our next port of call. Here we met numerous ostriches, tortoises, and several species of antelope. The vegetation here was a specialised coastal low shrubland with a lot of bulbs again, including *Moraea polystachya*, *Gladiolus speciosus*, *Watsonia hysterantha*, *Ferraria divaricata*, and *Sparaxis tricolor*. The first 'Mesembs', members of the family now named after them, also appeared, such as *Lamprathus auranticus*, and also the first Namaqualand daisies (*Dimorphotheca sinuata*), indicators of the increasing drought as one heads north. At the coast there was a Cape Gannet colony at Lamberts Bay. Alan Titchmarsh had recently done a programme on Namaqualand, which he must have visited at very much the same time as us, and which definitely included some areas well south of Namaqualand, such as this.

Heading inland we went up from the coastal plain to the high plateau of Nieuwoudtville, visiting the arid gardens at Ramskop, with its quiver trees, on the way. Nieuwoudtville describes itself as the bulb capital of the world, and not without reason. We saw *Geissorhiza splendidissima*, *Gladiolus venustus*, and the remarkable beetle daisy, *Gorteria diffusa*, which attracts its beetle pollinators by mimicking a variable number of them sitting in the flower. Back to the plains a river valley had lesser masked weaver birds nesting in the trees, and a grassland full of yellow daisies and yellow mesembs, the yellow *Grielum humifusum*, and a yellow *Lachenalia*.

Now the desert started and we visited the quartz gravel plains with their stone plants, such as *Oophytum nanum*, *Agyroderma*, and *Phyllolobus digitatus*. At first sight these plants are so well concealed that you would not believe that there was anything growing there at all. On to Namaqualand National Park and we hit it off perfectly. Apparently one needs two successive wet winters to get the full display, and by pure chance this had happened. The orange daisies, *Ursinea*, and *Gazania krebsiana*, were in full bloom, along with *Osteospermum* spp, *Wahlenbergia prostrata*, *Lapeirousia silenoides*, *Diascia tanyceras*, and *Nemesia anisocarpa*. The insect life was quite impressive too, with large green hunting wasps and small termite mounds.

At this point we crossed into Namibia and immediately it was real desert. *Euphorbia kirkii* was the main succulent in this desert. We spent the night at Fish River Canyon, the second largest canyon in the world after Grand Canyon, and next day explored its sides. There were numerous large succulents such as *Euphorbia gregaria*, *Aloe rupensis*, and the quiver tree, *Aloe dichotoma* in which sociable weaver birds nested. Mesembs abounded, and rock hyraxes came out in the evening and basked on the warm granite boulders.

Moving ever northwards, we came to the mobile sands of the Namib-Naukluft desert, and climbed enormous red dunes at Sossusvlei. Here we met dune beetles, the wedge-snouted lizard, and the tracks of side-winding snakes and the golden mole. The vegetation was sparse in the extreme, and what there was was very well protected from grazing with thorns, such as *Acacia erioloba* and *Acanthosicyos horridus*, a member of the cucumber family. Nearby the narrow canyon at Sesriem had the shrub *Maerua schinzii*, of the caper family, growing inside.

The Namib Desert then became stonier, and we met further succulents, such as *Hoodia*, which is being over-collected because of its use as an appetite suppressant. The only wildlife we met here was a very fine chameleon. Approaching Swakopmund, we met our first *Welwitschia mirabilis*, a strange member of the gymnosperm order, *Gnetales*, which has only two leaves in its life, which continue to grow from the base and wear away at the tips. At the coast at Walvis Bay we saw flamingos, and we then stayed in the still very germanic town of Swakopmund.

Our next base was a game lodge near Twyfelfontein, where there are 5,000 year-old rock engravings of animals and their footprints. Nearby is a fossil forest of the conifer ancestor, *Cordaites*, amongst which the living fossil, *Welwitschia*, was abundant. From our lodge we went out to see elephants, which walked along a dry river valley predictably every evening. Here we also saw Ruppell's Khoraan, a bird resembling a small bustard.

Our final stay was in Etosha National Park, which is said to be one of the best places for seeing larger mammals in a comparatively short time in the whole of Africa, because they all congregate at the water-holes. We were not disappointed, and saw the famous white elephants, Burchell's zebra, a black rhino, lions, black-backed jackal, spotted hyena, giraffes, oryx, springbok, Kori bustard, secretary birds, impala, dikdik, and a few smaller things such as banded mongoose. Altogether it was a memorable trip, and I have not mentioned more than a small fraction of the plants (I recorded some 600 species) or even of the animals we saw. The people we met were delightful, though I did not include many photographs of them, apart from a pair of smiling Himba girls at the end, who were particularly keen to have their photos taken!

6th February – Professor Sir Ghilleen T. Prance FRS

The Galapagos Islands: a threatened paradise

The Galapagos Islands lie in the Pacific Ocean, 600 miles off the Ecuadorean mainland. This archipelago is volcanic in origin with the oldest island in the East only 5 million years old, very recent in geological time. The younger islands are in the West, where the volcanoes are still active. Because these islands are so young life is evolving fast on the Galapagos: the creation of new forms from old, some probably brought in on the Humboldt Current from South America, is occurring quickly as the plants and animals are effectively trapped on their separate volcanic islands.

Charles Darwin visited the islands in 1835 and was fascinated by the variation in organisms from one island to another: he is best known for his study of the finches. The varied altitude and vegetation shown on these islands allowed the original finch type to evolve to fill the available niches; e.g. large ground-finch, medium ground-finch, warbler finch, and small tree finch which had different diets and so displayed different beak types. However, Darwin also studied mockingbirds and tortoises and found similar variations between the islands. The tortoises differ in size, behaviour and shell type from island to island. He collected many specimens which he studied on his return to England in 1836.

Prof. Prance first visited the islands in 1970's on a research trip and has been back four times since, the last twice leading a group from The Eden Project. As a botanist he has studied the plants and they too show the same pattern of evolution that Darwin observed with the finches. The prickly pear cactus, *Opuntia* sp. arrived as one original form and has evolved into many different shapes. On Tower Island, a small Northerly island, this cactus is a prostrate form, while on the central islands, where the leaf-eating tortoise is present, a form of this cactus has evolved with a trunk. A plant in the daisy family, called *Scalesia* sp. arrived in the Galapagos and has evolved into 12 different species, making it botanically very interesting. It is a low shrub on the dry part of the islands, a tree on the mountain tops, while a third type, *S. affinis*, is found halfway up mountains in damp places. One of the dominant plants

is *Bursera* sp. with grey tree trunks with highly perfumed resin. When it rains in March and April the leaves come out giving a green flush especially noticeable on Santa Cruz where the cloud forest in the highest part resembles the High Andes with mosses and lichens clothing the leafy trees. Many plants e.g. *Castela galapageia*, an endemic, have red fruits which attract birds that eat the fruits and egest the seeds. *Darwiniothamnus tenuifolius*, also in the daisy family, has masses of white flowers with yellow centres, a lovely endemic flowering plant. There are 950 species of native plants in these islands. There are no butterflies and moths, it is too windy, and so pollination is effected by carpenter bees and bumble bees, as well as birds. There are only a few poisonous plants and no poisonous reptiles.

Most iguanas are terrestrial, but on the Galapagos there are also marine species grazing on seaweed, with each island having its own unique variety. Española has one with red and green skin; possibly evolution is under way.

The Galapagos Islands are very beautiful and important for Biologists, but they are suffering from two main threats. The first is that over time man has introduced donkeys, goats, pigs and also rats which damage the eco-systems. The goats chew vegetation and the bark of the *Bursera* plants even though it is highly resinous. An active eradication programme is now underway with goats and pigs being hunted, and donkeys gathered together and put onto just one island. Santiago is now goat free and the vegetation is beginning to recover. The second threat is from the fishermen who collect sea slugs for export to the Chinese and Japanese markets. These animals form an important part of the marine food webs, and their removal disrupts the balance which threatens the whole marine environment.

On a positive note the Tourism Industry is well controlled. Each tourist group is accompanied by a well qualified, trained Ecuadorean guide and is allocated places on a boat, whose numbers are controlled. Walking on the islands is only allowed on a recognised path; this allows the birds e.g. Galapagos Hawk, Frigate Bird to nest in the same place year after year. The wildlife has no fear of humans, making close-up photography possible; a \$100 tourist tax pays for the conservation of the Galapagos ecosystems, a small price to pay to preserve the history of Biology that can be seen there.

This was an excellent talk, well illustrated by many slides of plants and animals, which drew out many interesting questions from the capacity audience.

20th February – Martin Harvey – Moths in Berkshire

Martin's interest in moths was due to chance: a mothing expert visited his school and so inspired him that moths have become his life-long interest. He has been the Berkshire County Recorder for the past ten years, a post he took over from Brian Baker who also was a member of this Society. Martin is currently working at the Buckinghamshire and Milton Keynes Environmental Records Centre, in Aylesbury, Bucks.

In 1994 Brian Baker published a book giving the moth records for Berkshire. Then there were 617 species and since then another 14 species have been recorded, giving a total of 631 different species of moth recorded in Berkshire during the last 100 years.

Berkshire has a large number of moth recorders, around 200, of which Steve Nash has contributed the largest number of moth sightings.

These records show that three quarters of the common moths in Southern England are declining in numbers. 25 species went extinct in 1980's and another 32 species in 1990's. This includes Beautiful Arches, Dusky Clearwing last recorded in 1924, Garden Dart which used to be common in gardens has had no records since 2001. V Moth which feeds on red & black currants has not been seen since 1995 and White Spotted Pinion which feeds on elm trees has not been recorded since 1993. There are several possible causes of decline: loss of habitat, change in management of nature reserves, climate change and light pollution. Some research is being carried out but it is difficult to see what can be done to prevent these changes. On a positive note Scarce Footman has had a 200% increase, its caterpillars feed on lichens and since our air quality has improved so have the lichens and this moth. Treble Brown Spot also has increased nationally by 3,000%.

His excellent talk was well illustrated with many photos of moths and maps showing their distribution.

6th March – Dr. Pat Morris – The Hedgehog

His interest in hedgehogs started when as a youth Dr. Morris chased rabbits and they hid under brushwood where hedgehogs hibernated. He continued to study them as an undergraduate, postgraduate and lecturer at Royal Holloway College, London.

Hedgehogs are our only spiny mammal and are much loved. Many people put out bread and watered-down milk at night for them. Neat cow's milk will give the hedgehog diarrhoea so please dilute it 50:50 or better still give them goat's milk or the best – dog food! Radio-tracking hedgehogs has shown that the male can travel 1.8 km per night and visit several feeding bowls in up to 8 different gardens; the females travel less far. In nature they eat beetles, earwigs, slugs and dead birds, mainly dead pigeons. They will eat eggs from ground-nesting birds and even their chicks. They have a life expectancy of 2-3 years.

The biggest threat to the hedgehog in the last 150 years has been the changing use of the countryside. Small fields, kept short by horses, and surrounded by hedgerows were typical of the 19th century countryside. Now there are fewer hedgerows for hedgehogs to rest in, chemicals on the fields kill their food: the arable farm is a hedgehog desert. This combined with an increase in the number of badgers, the hedgehog predator, and competitor for the same food, coupled with a higher density of road traffic kills many hedgehogs. Their numbers have fallen by 30% from 1992-2002 and by 5% each year since.

To help hedgehogs, please take care when burning garden rubbish. Turn it over before you set it alight as the hedgehog likes to rest there. Before you strim long grass, feel for hedgehogs with your feet. Tidy up your garden netting so that they do not become entangled and put chicken wire or a pile of bricks in your smooth-sided pond so that hedgehogs can get out when they fall in.

Dr. Morris had an amusing style and was very informative. Many questions were asked and answered: yes they have fleas (500 per hedgehog) but these do not live on humans or cats or dogs. There are 5,000 hedgehogs on the Hebridean Islands and there is a good case for translocating them to the mainland. A most enjoyable evening.

16th October – Dr. David George – Coral Reefs

Coral grows in sea water with a minimum temperature of 20°C which occurs between 20° N & S. Coral is composed of many polyps, each like a sea-anemone, which secrete a hard calcium carbonate skeleton using a single-celled alga living inside the polyp. The alga requires light, but this decreases as sea depth increases. At 5m depth most of the red end of the spectrum has been absorbed so that only blue light is available, but at greater depths, 50 m, this too is absorbed. Consequently only soft corals with flexible polyps are found at depth since the alga cannot survive there.

The Crown of Thorns Starfish has achieved plague proportions on the Great Barrier Reef. Its spines produce a protein-digesting poison which "eats" the coral. If you happen to get a spine in your finger then place it quickly into very hot water! This will coagulate the poison (rather like boiling an egg) This starfish has increased in number dramatically because the shells of its main predator, Triton, are much prized by collectors. A recent world-wide ban on collecting them should enable numbers to rise again.

Many fish live in the corals too. The Clown Fish coat themselves with mucous to withstand the stinging tentacles of the anemones amongst which they live. The female Clown Fish is larger and more aggressive than her mate, but if the female is harmed then the male becomes female! Beware if you walk on the reef in bare feet as the Stone Fish, with poisonous spines, is very difficult to detect!

Dr. George has been photographing reefs since 1978. This fascinating talk was illustrated with his amazing slides.

6th November – John Tyler – The Ridgeway

This 87 mile long distance walking route is 10,000 years old and stretches from Ivinghoe Beacon to Avebury in Wiltshire. It was first used by nomadic hunter gatherers who left flint tools and arrow heads

on the path. Between 5,000-7,000 years ago the first settlers cleared the forest and farmed the land leaving their dead in long barrows, with huge Sarsen stones covering the entrance. The forest was easy to clear from the chalk, so a bigger population was supported from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age in 700BC. Due to tribal fighting a string of 8 hill-forts were built along this route, some with round houses with thatched roofs inside.

So many long distance paths have stretches along roads but not this one! From the air it looks like a white line snaking over the countryside. It can be walked in either direction in 4 days, passing through several nature reserves where, at the right time of year, Great Mullein, St John's-wort, Bee Orchids, Devil's-bit Scabious, Monkey Orchids and Horseshoe Vetch with Chalkhill Blue butterflies feeding on it, can be seen. The stretch at Hartslock, Goring is particularly lovely.

This talk was very interesting, informative and enjoyable.

20th November – Alastair Mackay – St. Kilda

The speaker, Alastair Mackay, spoke on St Kilda with which he has family connections in that his parents met there. The archipelago, comprising a number of islands, is an extinct volcanic crater which lies more than forty miles to the west of the Outer Hebrides and is the remotest part of the British Isles. It is a double world heritage site. He visited to study the archaeology with some primitive buildings going back some 2000 years. The Black Houses were double skinned with openings to allow a current of air which dried meat, particularly seabirds which were captured on the cliffs in springtime.

Not much is known about the original inhabitants as most of them were killed by introduced smallpox in 1726. New settlers came from Skye where the McLeods took feathers and oil (from birds) in lieu of rent as it was a cashless society. 8 out of 10 babies died from "the seven day sickness", which was typhoid and tetanus. The thirty remaining inhabitants were evacuated in 1930 although some visited in summer until 1940.

The island of St Kilda is now a military base. Six cottages and the factor's house have been restored. Soay sheep live wild. In spite of the absence of trees, wood mice are found and are genetically related to the Norwegian stock. House mice died out after the evacuation. Thirty land bird species are found including the St Kilda Wren which, at 115 pairs, is the rarest European bird. The gannet colony is the biggest in the north Atlantic at 60,000 pairs. The 250 pairs of Great Skuas have established since 1960. The last recorded Great Auk was seen in 1840.

4th December – James Butler – Bengal Tigers

James Butler had been fascinated by tigers since boyhood and decided to go to India to see them in the wild before his 30th birthday. In the last 100 years, tiger numbers have fallen by 95% through habitat loss and poaching; now just 5,000–7,000 tigers are left in the wild with 1,300-1,500 in India. The tiger is the largest cat, weighing up to 500lbs (35 stone!) and 9 ft in length nose to tail. They are masters of camouflage, highly evolved hunters at the top of the food chain so the only threat to them is Man. A poached tiger is worth £20,000 for its skin and body parts and there is a large market for this in China, Hong Kong and the Yemen. James travelled with Nature Worldwide to Kahna, in India. Driven by jeep, with a lodge naturalist, and park guard acting as a tracker they looked for tiger footprints in the ground and stopped frequently to listen to the sounds of the jungle which would alert them to the presence of the tiger eg. deer bark as the tiger approaches, monkeys call differently when a leopard or tiger is nearby.

At 6.00am daily the mahouts (elephant drivers), also go out tracking tigers and looking for signs of poaching. The poachers are armed, but not the mahouts so they are very brave. On the second morning a mahout caught a glimpse of a female tiger with two young cubs well camouflaged in dappled shade. He took James out to see this sight. Whilst there they heard a tiger roar nearby – a stomach churning noise! They saw prints of tiger paws in the sand and following these over the crest of a hill they found a male tiger sitting in the road! For 30mins they could photograph him as he scratched a tree high up to show how big a cat he was and scented his territory. James returned from his holiday there delighted with the tiger sightings he had experienced.

His photography was excellent, and we saw amazing close-up photographs giving very clear views of the tigers. Since we were fortunate to have a big projector screen that evening these photographs were certainly life size!

The solution to poaching is to generate wealth for the community through the tiger. Both Nature Worldwide and WWF encourage sensitive tourism to see tigers. It costs £40.00 pa to sponsor a tiger, with £1.00 going a long way in India. James encouraged us all to sponsor a tiger this Christmas.

17th Dec – Christmas Party

The Christmas party went with a swing! The usual games were fun, with “names on the back” being identification of birds this year. There was a new game for those who had never won a competition before and this was won by Mike Abraham. The food was excellent and the mulled wine delicious. The mini-talks took place over coffee, including “The House Sparrow” (Colin Dibb), “Ostriches” (Michael Keith-Lucas) and “Ecuadorean bird-names” (Martin Sell). The photographic competition was won outright by Graham Mulrooney, however Tony Rayner won one of the classes. Everyone had an enjoyable evening thanks to Meryl, Martin and Alice, who along with other members, collectively organised this event.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2007

Chris Raper – competition coordinator

It's starting to sound like a cliché but I really think the standard of entries for this year's competition was exceptional – the best yet.

Despite the many entrants, one thing remained the same as last year – Graham Mulrooney's eye for a subject and his skill with the camera brought him wins in all categories bar one (Lepidoptera – butterflies & moths). The well deserved winner in that category was Tony Rayner with a very eye-catching shot of a Garden Tiger moth.

Best overall picture & non-lepidopteran invertebrates Graham Mulrooney
A long-tailed Lacewing (*Nemoptera sinuata*), taken in Greece. These insects are a feature of the Mediterranean area but sadly we don't get them much further north.

Lepidoptera Tony Rayner
Garden Tiger moth (*Arctia caja*). This species is much rarer than it used to be and it is unclear what might have caused the population to collapse so rapidly – perhaps the same effect as was seen with the Wall Brown butterfly in the 1980's?

Botany Graham Mulrooney
Chiltern Gentian (*Gentianella germanica*). Superficially similar to the commoner Autumn Gentian (*Gentianella amarella*), this much showier species often grows with the latter on open chalk downland in the Chilterns.

Fungi Graham Mulrooney
Shaggy Parasol (*Chlorophyllum (=Lepiota) rachodes*) toadstool.

Vertebrates Graham Mulrooney
An unknown species of lizard taken in woodland in Tobago last year.

Birds Graham Mulrooney
Blue-crowned Motmot (*Momotus momota*) taken in Tobago last year.

Next year I hope to make some small improvements to the competition with a view to encouraging more entries and improving the system of voting. If any members have ideas they'd like to share with me then I'd be very happy to listen and take them onboard.

To close I'd just like to encourage everyone to get out there this year and take plenty of photos so that we have lots of entries in the autumn!

Some of the winning entries are shown on the following pages.

Photographic Competition - winning photographs



A Lacewing (*Nemoptera sinuata*) taken in Greece – Best Overall Photo & Best Invertebrate
© Graham Mulrooney



Shaggy Parasol (*Chlorophyllum rachodes*)
Best Fungus © Graham Mulrooney



Chiltern Gentian (*Gentianella germanica*)
Best Plant © Graham Mulrooney

Photographic Competition - winning photograph



Garden Tiger (*Arctia caja*) – Best Lepidoptera
© Tony Rayner

Jersey Tiger (*Euplagia quadripunctaria*)



Jersey Tiger from Bridport, Dorset, 1 Aug 2001, © David Green
see article by Norman Hall, page 34

Moor Copse – the Wildlife Haven on our Doorstep

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – by Jan Haseler

Moor Copse, a Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) nature reserve, lies in the Pang valley near Tidmarsh and Sulham.

History

Architect Lewis Trevers bought land in the Pang Valley at Sulham in the 1930s. With the help of friends and Bradfield College students, he carved out rides through the woods and organised coppicing work parties. He named the rides, including Baker's Ride, Hodsall Ride and Bradfield Ride, after friends and helpers. Vinula Ride comes from the latin name for the Puss Moth (*Cerula vinula*), whose caterpillar was found when the ride was cleared. In 1969, he leased the reserve to BBONT (as it was then called) for the peppercorn rent of one shilling per year. Brian Baker, a former President of this society, became the first voluntary warden. He was a great expert on moths and recorded the rich insect life of the reserve. When Lewis Trevers died in 1975, he left the freehold of the reserve to BBONT. In 1988, the small adjoining wet woodland of Barton's Copse was added, then at the end of 2006, land adjacent to the reserve came onto the market. Thanks to a generous response to the public appeal, and with help from various charitable trusts, the extra land was purchased, effectively doubling the size of the reserve.

Geology and Ecology

Moor Copse lies in a broad valley with steep sides. Through it flow the rather small River Pang and the even smaller Sulham Brook, but at the end of the last ice age the much bigger River Kennet flowed through the valley and joined the Thames at Pangbourne. The alluvial loams, gravel terraces and peat deposits left behind by the River Kennet mean that the reserve has a very varied surface geology and this gives rise to a rich and varied ground flora. The reserve is part of the Sulham and Tidmarsh Woods and Meadows Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). The citation for the SSSI describes the area:



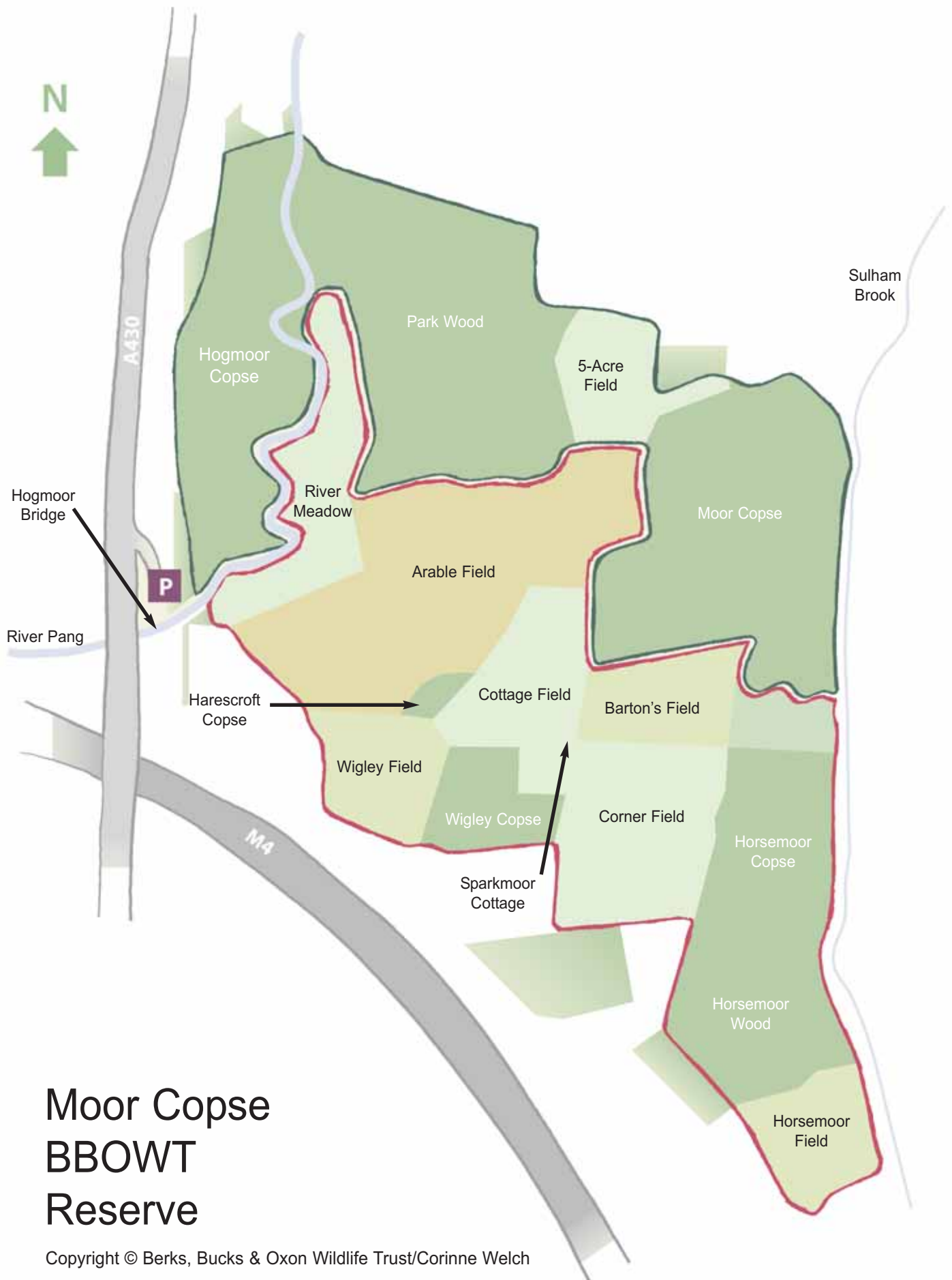
The River Pang running through Moor Copse

'a mosaic of damp copses and seasonally flooded meadow communities, all now much reduced in Southern England through intensified management and urban encroachment, but maintained here by a long history of coppicing and sympathetic grassland husbandry.'

The Original Reserve

Hogmoor Copse is the north-western block of woodland between the A340 Theale to Pangbourne road to the west and the River Pang to the east. It is wet alder and ash woodland, with hazel, willow, oak, field maple, spindle and various other trees. Following heavy winter rains, the Pang burst its banks in January 2007 and flooded Hogmoor Copse. In the winter of 2000/2001, much of Hogmoor was deep under water for weeks on end. The Pang is a chalk river and the flora of Hogmoor is of necessity lime-tolerant. On July 20th 2007, a day of exceptionally heavy rainfall led to widespread flooding across much of Berkshire, including the Pang valley, and almost the entire reserve was under water for several days.

Large Bitter-cress (*Cardamine amara*) is one of the Moor Copse special plants. The flowers are large, about 12mm across, with conspicuous violet anthers. The leaves are pale green with oval side and terminal leaflets. According to Michael Crawley's book, *The Flora of Berkshire*, Large Bitter-cress is now rare and infrequent in West Berkshire, but the best place in the county to see it is at bluebell time on the banks of the Pang in Moor Copse. Francis Rose's book, *The Wild Flower Key*, has a table which shows which plants can be considered to be ancient woodland indicator species in Central Southern England and Large Bitter-cress is included in the list. In isolation, these species prove little, but the more there are together, the more likely the woodland is to be ancient, and Moor Copse has a good number of them.



Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve

Copyright © Berks, Bucks & Oxon Wildlife Trust/Corinne Welch

Willows are insect pollinated, which makes them a good place to find moths when they are in flower in early spring. For the last 3 years, we have run our moth trap under a splendid Sallow or Goat Willow (*Salix caprea*) on the bank of the Pang in Hogmoor Copse. It is close to the car park, which is an important factor when carrying a heavy generator and bulky moth trap. The commonest moths under the Sallow have included Small Quaker (*Orthosia cruda*), Common Quaker (*O. cerasi*), Clouded Drab (*O. incerta*), Hebrew Character (*O. gothica*) and Twin-spotted Quaker (*O. munda*). These all belong to the Noctuidae, the largest family of macro-moths in Britain. They are medium-sized, stout-bodied moths which rest with the forewings together and the hindwings hidden underneath, and they have 2 characteristic wing marks, the oval and the kidney mark.

We have also found some less common moths under the Sallow. The Balsam Carpet (*Xanthorhoe biriviata*) is a relatively new species for Britain which is spreading from the south-east. The Hogmoor individual in March 2005 was the 5th record for Berkshire. The SSSI citation refers to the rich invertebrate fauna, including over 300 species of moth recorded at Moor Copse. It names 5 species explicitly, and 2 of these, the Water Carpet (*Lampropteryx suffumata*) and the White-marked (*Cerastis leucographa*), have come to light under the Sallow. A third, the Scarlet Tiger Moth (*Callimorpha dominula*), is a day-flying moth which can be found resting on the riverside vegetation in late June and July. The forewing is an iridescent black with white and yellow spots and the hindwing is scarlet. The larval food plant is Comfrey (*Symphytum officinale*), and the hairy, black and yellow caterpillars can be found in April by searching for well-chewed leaves and droppings. The Scarlet Tiger Moth is restricted to South West Britain and Moor Copse is one of its most easterly locations in Berkshire.

Kingfishers are occasionally seen flying along the River Pang. The river bank is one of the best places in the reserve to find Grass Snakes, which are good swimmers and can be over a metre in length. Former President Shirley Townend recalls that about thirty years ago, she sat down for a picnic tea by the bridge over the Pang and saw a Kingfisher, a Grass Snake and a Water Vole. Sadly the Water Vole is no longer to be found here.

In May and June, there are good numbers of Twayblades (*Listera ovata*) along the track which leads from the road to the bridge over the Pang. Water Avens (*Geum rivale*), another of the Moor Copse special plants and an ancient woodland indicator species, also grows alongside this track. It is a plant which is absent from South-east England, and according to *The Flora of Berkshire*, Moor Copse is one of its most easterly locations in the county. Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*) is another ancient woodland indicator species which can be seen in Hogmoor in late spring. The northern part of Hogmoor is treated as a non-intervention area, with a tangle of undergrowth, fallen trees and dead wood.



Water Avens



Bluebells in Park Wood

Across the river in Park Wood, there is a stunning display of Bluebells (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) in spring. The beginning of May used to be the best time for bluebells, but in recent years, late April has been more likely. The flora of Park Wood is very different to that of Hogmoor Copse. Park Wood lies on a gravel terrace which was deposited by the post-glacial River Kennet and the soil is drier and more acid than Hogmoor. Not all of Park Wood is covered with bluebells. Those parts which are a little lower-lying and which are wet in winter are yellow with Primroses (*Primula vulgaris*) and Lesser Celandines (*Ranunculus ficaria*) in spring. A difference in height of just a few inches is enough to change the ground colour from the blue of Bluebells to yellow.

An old Crab Apple (*Malus sylvestris*) tree (another ancient woodland indicator species) grows amongst the Bluebells in Park Wood. Volunteer warden Anne Booth has collected apples from this tree, potted up the pips on her kitchen windowsill and planted out the resulting seedling trees in various coppice plots. It is good to know that the descendants of this old tree are growing up around the wood.



Early Purple Orchid

Another of the Park Wood special plants is the Early Purple Orchid (*Orchis mascula*). In flower at the same time as the Bluebells, it can be seen in a variety of colours. As well as the standard purple flowers, there are a few pink and white specimens. The leaves are shiny dark green with dark purple blotches which are elongated longitudinally. On spotted orchids, the leaf spots are transverse.

Other Park Wood ancient woodland indicator species include Goldilocks Buttercup (*Ranunculus auricomus*), Guelder Rose (*Viburnum opulus*) and Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*). The Goldilocks

Buttercup, a rather small-flowered buttercup which never quite seems to have all its petals on at the same time, is in flower at bluebell-time. According to Druce, who wrote *The (first) Flora of Berkshire* in 1897, the Guelder Rose *luxuriates in moist spinneys in low-lying situations*. The Nettle-leaved Bellflower can be seen in July, near the bridge over the Pang.

Silver-washed Fritillary is a butterfly which is currently increasing in Berkshire. It was first recorded at Moor Copse in July 2005 by Martin and Dee Raper, who found it nectaring on bramble flowers in Park Wood. It is a large butterfly with a graceful gliding flight. The forewings are quite sharply angled at the tips, with a distinctly concave outer margin. The underside of the hindwing has silvery-grey streaks on a green-buff background. The males have broad black lines of scent scales radiating out along the forewings. The caterpillar food plant is Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), but the eggs are laid in crevices in the bark of a nearby tree. The caterpillar hatches after about 2 weeks, eats its egg shell and then hibernates in a crevice on the trunk. Next spring, it descends to feed on the violet plants.

In the centre of Park Wood is an open patch which is covered with Bluebells in spring and Bracken later in the year. It is one of the driest and most acidic parts of the wood. Given the high water table in much of the reserve, it is perhaps not surprising that this is where the Badgers have chosen to set up their headquarters. It is also one of the best places in the reserve to see Foxes.

Coppicing is the traditional form of woodland management where the trees are cut back to the stumps on a 10-20 year cycle. When the trees have first been cut there is a burst of spring flowers with the increased light on the woodland floor. As the undergrowth grows back densely, habitat becomes suitable for nesting birds such as the Garden Warbler. This form of woodland management is not currently financially viable, and without it many woods have become dark and overgrown; they have lost most of their flowers and all of their butterflies. High Brown Fritillary, Pearl-bordered Fritillary and Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary are all species of butterfly which have been lost from Berkshire in the last 50 or so years, due to the reduction in coppicing. With the help of volunteer labour, it continues at Moor Copse and helps to contribute to the rich flora.



Coppicing

The volunteers use hand tools, (bow saws and loppers), to cut the trees to within about a metre of the ground. Then the BBOWT staff use chain saws to take the stumps down almost to the ground, cutting with an outward slope so that rain-water drains away from the centre of the coppice stool. Logs which are at least a beer-can thick can be used by the Pang Valley Charcoal burners, who are based at Rushall Manor Farm, Bradfield. The logs are stacked up in 8-foot lengths by the ride-sides and, from time to time, a trailer is brought in to remove them. The brash is burned so that the woodland floor is left fairly clear for the flowers to come through. Wire mesh fences are erected around individual coppice stools to protect the regrowth from browsing by Muntjac deer. After a few years, the wire mesh can be removed and reused elsewhere. In the first spring after cutting, the coppice floor is carpeted with Lesser Celandines, Primroses and violets. Spring butterflies in the coppice plot include Peacocks, Commas,

Brimstones, Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites. Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) are biennials and they put on a splendid show in the second year.

Each tree has its own characteristic form and texture. Freshly cut alders are a rich orange colour. Alder charcoal was traditionally used in the manufacture of gunpowder. Ash wood is pale and fine-grained. It was used for making tool handles. Hazel is thinner and more flexible. It was used for weaving fences and hurdles.



Ringlet

5-Acre Field lies between Park Wood and Moor Copse. It is grazed by the BBOWT ponies for about 6 weeks towards the end of the winter. It is mostly dry and not particularly species-rich, but it is quite good for butterflies. Common Blue, Brown Argus, Small Copper, Large Skipper, Small Skipper, Marbled White, Meadow Brown, Ringlet and Gatekeeper are all seen here regularly. Brown Argus was first recorded at Moor Copse in 2005. It used to be found only on the chalk, with Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) as the larval food plant. In recent years its range has expanded dramatically and it now appears also to be using various crane's-bills as the larval food plant. The southern end of 5-Acre Field is a little wetter and has

different flowers, including Comfrey, Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*), Mint and Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*). Summer work-parties remove ragwort and thistles from the field.

As well as being the name of the whole nature reserve, Moor Copse is also the name of the wood beyond 5-Acre Field. The large section closest to the entrance was coppiced by contractors about 7 years ago. It has grown back quite densely and is now a good place to hear Garden Warblers – but not to see them – they are notorious skulkers and the cover here is just too dense. A big Wild Cherry tree (*Prunus avium*) grows close to the entrance to the wood and Bush Vetch (*Vicia sepium*) flowers in April in the nearby ride. Both of these are ancient woodland indicator species, as is Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) which is present here, as well as in most of the other woods of the reserve. Spindle is one of the last trees to lose its leaves in winter – they were still green in December 2006 when the other trees had finally dropped their leaves. The pink berries are poisonous. The wood is very hard and can be cut to a sharp point, which is why it was traditionally used to make spindles for spinning wool. Moor Copse also has some very wet parts with deep peat deposits which are probably the former course of the River Kennet. For the last few years, Buzzards have been seen here frequently and there are also regular sightings of Red Kite and Sparrowhawk.

The Drab Looper moth (*Minoa murinata*) is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. In the last 20 years, it has been recorded from only 3 locations in Berkshire, one of which is Moor Copse. The caterpillar food plant is Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*), another ancient woodland indicator species which flourishes in recently-coppiced woodland. The Looper part of the name comes from the caterpillar. It has 3 pairs of legs at the head end, 2 pairs of prolegs at the back end and none in the middle. It moves by drawing the prolegs up to the front legs and looping up its body in between. It belongs to the Geometrid family of moths. The name 'geometrid' means 'ground-measurer' in Greek and also refers to the way the caterpillar moves. As for the 'Drab' part of its name, its wings are a completely plain and unpatterned mud-brown.

The Reserve Extension, purchased December 2006

Three of the fields in the reserve extension are classified as species-rich grassland and are part of the SSSI. They have a mixture of wet flushes and drier ridges, with different plant communities on each. River Meadow is the species-rich grassland which lies between the Pang and Park Wood. In late spring, the wetter parts have Ragged Robin (*Lychnis flos-cuculi*), Silverweed (*Potentilla anserina*) and Water Avens. In June, a



Southern Marsh Orchid

single specimen of Southern Marsh Orchid (*Dactylorhiza praetermissa*) was found. Common Valerian (*Valeriana officinalis*) and Meadowsweet (*Filipendula ulmaria*) are in flower here in July.

Great Burnet (*Sanguisorba officinalis*) is one of the rarer plants of the reserve. It is to be found in the wetter parts of all 3 species-rich meadows in July. It can be up to 1 metre tall and has small, dark-red flower spikes. The *Flora of Berkshire* describes it as a flower of 'water meadows and ditches, very local and decreasing as a result of drainage, ploughing and pasture improvement'. In West Berkshire, its status is given as 'uncommon in the Thames and Kennet valleys and absent elsewhere'.



Great Burnet

In July and August Hemp-agrimony (*Eupatorium cannabinum*) and Purple Loosestrife (*Lythrum salicaria*) are in flower next to the river. Both are very attractive to insects and Peacocks, Commas, Red Admirals, Meadow Browns, Gatekeepers and White butterflies were observed nectaring on them. There are also a few spikes of Yellow Loosestrife (*Lysimachia vulgaris*) here in August.

Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Stinking Chamomile (*Anthemis cotula*) and Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) are typical flowers of the drier ridges and these are in flower in June and July. In July and August, a big patch of Burnet-saxifrage (*Pimpinella saxifraga*), a medium-sized white umbellifer, can be seen in flower in the dry central part of River Meadow.

The northern end of River Meadow, where it adjoins Park Wood, is very sheltered and good for butterflies. In early spring, there were always Commas and Peacocks here whenever the sun was shining. This woodland-edge habitat is very much a feature of the reserve extension. With its irregular shaped copses, there are a lot of edges, and whatever the wind direction, there is always a sheltered side somewhere.

The three species-rich meadows have a good selection of day-flying moths. The Mother Shipton (*Callistege mi*) tends to be seen in the wetter parts. The moth takes its name from its distinctive wing pattern, which resembles a witch's face with an eye, a long hooked nose and a pointed chin. The Burnet Companion (*Euclidia glyphica*) is a common moth on the drier parts. The forewing is a dark-striped brown, but the hindwing is barred with orange and the undersides of the wings are orange, so it looks relatively light and orange in flight. Small Yellow Underwing (*Panemeria tenebrata*) is a tiny little moth whose larval food plants are the seed capsules of Common Mouse-ear (*Cerastium fontanum*) and Field Mouse-ear (*C. arvense*). These three moths are on the wing in early summer.

In June, 3 Reed Buntings were seen in River Meadow – a new record for the reserve. Towards the end of July there was a family of Spotted Flycatchers in the hedge at the entrance to River Meadow. The leading bird conservation organisations in the UK have assigned 247 species of birds to red, amber or green lists. 40 species are red-listed because they are globally threatened, or because their population or range has declined by more than 50% in the last 25 years, or because their population has had a historical long-term decline. Both the Reed Bunting and the Spotted Flycatcher are on the red list, due to the recent rapid decline in the British breeding population.

The big, flat arable field stretches from the entrance to the reserve extension across to 5-Acre Field and Moor Copse itself. It had been ploughed by the previous tenant towards the end of 2006. Skylarks, another red-list bird, could always be heard singing here. Regular checks were made to see in which order plants would recolonise the arable field and how they would reach an equilibrium state. Plants found in April included Petty Spurge (*Euphorbia peplus*), Field Pansy (*Viola arvensis*), Parsley-piert (*Aphanes arvensis*), Red Fescue (*Festuca rubra*) and Thale Cress (*Arabidopsis thaliana*). The recolonising investigations came to an abrupt end in the beginning of June when the field was sprayed. BBOWT's aim is to restore this field to flower-rich meadow. The plan was to plough it in July and then spread it with green hay from adjacent species-rich grassland. The arable field is on a gravel terrace, so hay from the drier parts of the meadows would be most suitable. But on 20th July, a day of storms and unprecedented rainfall led to severe flooding across Berkshire. Most of the reserve was under

water and it was impossible to get heavy machinery into the fields. So the plans for meadow restoration have been put back by a year.

Some of the plants which are wanted for the new meadow had flowered and set seed earlier in the season, long before the green hay would be cut. One of these is Goat's-beard (*Tragopogon pratensis*), which is in flower in May and June. The big spherical seed heads are easy to spot, and volunteers collected the seeds in advance. It can be found in all the meadows of the reserve, in the species-poor fields as well as the species-rich ones, and there are also quite a few plants in 5-Acre Field. One of its common names is 'Jack-go-to-bed-at-noon', because the flowers open early in the morning, but close up again by midday. The Moor Copse plants are obviously strict union members, because an inspection at 12:06 found that all the flowers had already gone to bed.



Goat's-beard clock

There is a small patch of mature woodland on the South-East side of Hogmoor Bridge, next to the Pang. The bridge itself has been a good place to see Grey Wagtails this summer. In April Ramsons (*Allium ursinum*) and Yellow Archangel (*Lamiastrum galeobdolon*) can be seen in flower here. Both of these are ancient woodland indicator species. Ramsons has a very limited distribution in Moor Copse - just a big patch near the road in Hogmoor Copse and this patch. According to Francis Rose's *The Wild Flower Key*, it is to be found in moist woods, especially on calcareous or richer soils. Perhaps it has fairly exacting habitat requirements which are not met elsewhere in the reserve. The Yellow Archangel is also a flower of nutrient-rich soils, but it is more widely distributed in the woods of the reserve.

The original reserve had very little hedgerow but the extension has significant lengths of rich and varied hedge lines. Species of tree and bush on either side of the track which leads from Hogmoor Bridge into the main part of the reserve extension include English Elm, Wych Elm, Oak, Hazel, Blackthorn, Hawthorn, Dog Rose, Dogwood, Spindle, Field Maple, Ash and Elder. The hedge also contains Bramble, Ivy, Hop and White Bryony. During the winter, Redwings are frequently seen here.

The track leads to Wigley Field, which is classified as species-poor grassland. It has some good thistles which were covered with butterflies in late June. These included at least 30 Meadow Browns and a Small Tortoiseshell, which was a welcome sight. This used to be a very common butterfly but its numbers have plummeted in South-East England in recent years. There were also several tiny little Small Skippers on the thistles. The male has a line of black scent scales on its forewing. The Small Skipper can be told (with some difficulty) from the Essex Skipper in the field by the under-sides of its antennae, which are orange rather than black. On the motorway side of Wigley Field is a Blackthorn hedge. A pair of Yellowhammers was seen here in April when the Blackthorn was in blossom. The Yellowhammer is another bird species which is on the Red-list of Conservation Concern.

Harescroft Copse is a thin strip of woodland between the arable field and the north-east end of Wigley Field. It has oak trees with an under-storey of hazel. In March, there are Primroses and Wood Anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*) here and it is carpeted with Bluebells in late April. Like the Bluebell-covered parts of Park Wood, Harescroft Copse is on a gravel terrace.

Wigley Copse lies to the east of Wigley Field, on the southern side of the reserve extension. It is classified as wet woodland and is a Wildlife Heritage Site. In March, it is carpeted with Primroses, Wood Anemones and violets and a leaf rosette of Early Purple Orchid was discovered. Gooseberry (*Ribes uva-crispa*), Red Currant (*R. rubrum*) and Wood Spurge, all ancient woodland indicator species, grow here. In April the higher and drier parts of Wigley Copse are blue with bluebells.

We have run a moth trap in the species-rich meadows next to Wigley Copse on 3 occasions so far. Unlike the convenient Sallow in Hogmoor Copse, Wigley Copse is a long wheel-barrow push from the car park. Species identified at the beginning of April included Purple Thorn (*Selenia tetralunaria*), Early Tooth-striped (*Trichopteryx carpinata*) and Powdered Quaker (*Orthosia gracilis*). The commonest moth at the end of April was the Green Carpet (*Colostygia pectinataria*), whose caterpillar food plants are various bedstraws, including cleavers. Also seen were Seraphim (*Lobophora halterata*) and a very early Coronet (*Craniophora ligustri*). The catch in mid-July included Double Lobed (*Apamea*

ophiogramma), Large Twin-Spot Carpet (*Xanthorhoë quadrifasciata*) and Ghost Moth (*Hepialus humuli*). The latter is a large and rather primitive moth whose larval stage lasts for up to 2 years. The adult moth does not have a functioning proboscis and so cannot feed.

The 1st edition Ordnance Survey map of 1881 – 1887 shows all the woods and copses with the same names as today and the field layout is unchanged. It also shows Sparkmoor Cottage in the middle of the reserve. The cottage is no longer standing, but it is still possible to see a little of the brickwork. It is surrounded by a ring of Bullace trees, a plum with a sweet yellow fruit. In late April Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum angustifolium*) flowers in what must have been the cottage garden.

There are 2 species-rich meadows in the main part of the reserve extension, both part of the SSSI. Cottage Field lies between Sparkmoor Cottage, the arable field and Wigley Copse. Corner Field lies between Wigley Copse and Horsemoor Copse. Like River Meadow, both these fields have mixtures of wet and dry parts, and in early 2007, most of the wet parts were very wet indeed. Marsh-marigolds (*Caltha palustris*) flower in May in the wetter channels of Corner Field. They used also to occur in the wet ditches of Park Wood, but following several recent dry summers, they appear to have been lost from there. *The Flora of Berkshire* describes it as a plant which has suffered a marked decline in recent years. In late spring, Water Avens is present in reasonable abundance in the wet parts of all 3 SSSI meadows. It is described in *The Flora of Berkshire* as a local speciality of water meadows and damp woods on peaty soil and a great rarity in Berkshire.



Wet area of Corner Field

Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*), in March, is one of the first flowers on the dry grassland. It can be distinguished from the Wild Strawberry by the green sepals, which are visible between the petals and by the terminal tooth on the leaf, which is shorter than the side teeth. Cowslip (*Primula veris*) plants grow on the drier ridges, particularly in Corner Field. A few Common Spotted-orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) can be found in the drier parts of Corner Field in June. In mid-summer Betony (*Stachys officinalis*) is in flower in both Corner and Cottage Fields, particularly at the boundaries between the wetter and the drier parts. It is a plant of ancient grassland, woodland rides and roadsides, which, according to *The Flora of Berkshire*, is now much reduced in abundance in the county. It is very attractive to the Small and Essex Skipper butterflies and the Six-Spot Burnet Moths (*Zygaena filipendulae*). In early July most of the small orange skippers were Small Skippers. By late July they were mainly Essex Skippers. There are a few unusual white Knapweed flowers in Corner Field in July. Then in August Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) can be seen in Corner Field, growing in the same locations as the Betony – at the drier edges of the wet parts.



Knapweed with white flowers



Pepper Saxifrage

Pepper-saxifrage (*Silaum silaus*) flowers in the drier parts of Corner Field and River Meadow in June and July. There are also a few plants in Cottage Field and Barton's Field. It is a plant of ancient grasslands and unimproved pastures on clay or alluvium which is intolerant of fertiliser application. According to *The Flora of Berkshire*, it is now something of a rarity in the county. Chris Raper was invited to identify the varied collection of insects on the photograph of a Pepper-saxifrage flower-head. His reply was: "The 2 small orange beetles with brown tails are known colloquially as "Hogweed Bonking Beetles" (*Rhagonycha fulva*). The 2 small green

wasps with long ovipositors are Torymid wasps (family Torymidae, genus *Torymus*), but a species-level identification would require detailed examination under a microscope. The other 3 miscellaneous wasps are ichneumonids of some sort but again cannot be identified from a photograph.”

The SSSI meadows have proved to be very good for insects. Dingy Skipper is a new species for the reserve. It was first reported from Corner Field at the end of April, with a maximum count of 8 recorded on the butterfly transect in June. Its caterpillar food plant is Common Bird's Foot Trefoil. The sheer number of butterflies in the meadows has been outstanding. There have been large numbers of Meadow Browns, Ringlets, Gatekeepers and Large, Small and Essex Skippers, smaller numbers of Common Blues, Brown Argus, Peacocks, Red Admirals, Brimstones and Whites and a few Small Coppers, Marbled Whites and Small Tortoiseshells. Narrow-bordered 5-Spot (*Zygaena lonicerae*) and 6-Spot Burnet Moths have also been plentiful. In many of the fields there have been clouds of grasshoppers and the big Roesel's Bush Cricket (*Metrioptera roeseli*) was observed in a wet part of Cottage Field in July.

There have been regular sightings of Hobbies over the meadows this summer. First reported from Corner Field at the end of April, they have also been seen over River Meadow, 5-Acre Field, the arable field, Corner Field and Cottage Field. There were plenty of dragonflies around for them to feed on.

Barton's Field lies beyond Sparkmoor Cottage, between Moor Copse and Horsemoor Copse. The wood/field boundary with Moor Copse is sheltered and south-facing, with a big bramble bank in front. The first butterfly of spring, a Brimstone, was seen patrolling along here early in March. The extra-sheltered corner, where Barton's Copse juts out into the field, always held several Commas, Peacocks and Red Admirals in spring. The area next to Sparkmoor Cottage is wet, but most of Barton's Field is dry. It is classified as 'species-poor' grassland. The flora is certainly not as rich and varied as Corner Field or Cottage Field – but it is not totally poor. Bird's Foot Trefoil, Lesser Stitchwort and Lady's Bedstraw are plentiful and there are also a few Pepper-saxifrage plants. Field Wood-rush (*Luzula campestris*), also known as Good-Friday Grass, is one of the plants whose seeds were collected for the arable reversion scheme, since they ripened some time before the green hay was due to be cut. Around the gateway from Barton's Field into Moor Copse is a lawn-like area which is heavily grazed by rabbits. Good Friday Grass is usually out-competed by more palatable species of grass, but it can flourish where these are kept in check by rabbits. The other rabbit-grazed lawn where the Good-Friday Grass seed was collected is along the drier part of the boundary of River Meadow with Park Wood.

Barton's Field has proved to be a good field for bird-watching. In February, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker was seen at the edge of Barton's Copse. It is a tiny bird, about the size of a House Sparrow, with black and white bars on its back. The male has a red crown. The much commoner Greater Spotted Woodpecker is the size of a Blackbird, with bold white patches on its back and red in the ventral area under the tail. The previous winter, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker had flown calling over the coppice plot in Park Wood. It is on the red list of conservation concern, due to a massive 73% decline in the UK breeding population over the last 25 years. Marsh Tits, another red list species, have been seen fairly regularly at the edge of the woods here. They are quite common throughout the reserve.



Lesser Spotted Woodpecker
© John Bowers, BTO



Kingfisher
© Colin Wilson

Sulham Brook forms the eastern boundary of Barton's Field. Next to the stream, a shallow-sided pond area has been dug out for watering livestock. In July, we were down by the pond, looking at the plants – mostly Fool's Water-cress (*Apium nodiflorum*) and Mint – when a Kingfisher flew along Sulham Brook, just a few yards away. Sulham Brook is quite narrow and shallow with overhanging vegetation at this point, but that didn't appear to be a problem for the Kingfisher.

Horsemoor Copse and Horsemoor Wood make up the block of woodland at the eastern boundary of the reserve extension. They are classified as wet woodland and are part of the SSSI. The northern

section, Horsemoor Copse, has a rich ground flora. Primroses and violets are plentiful in early spring, and Solomon's Seal, Twayblades and Nettle-leaved Bellflowers are all found here. More than 30 Early Purple Orchid flower spikes were counted in early May. Lady Fern and Male Fern grow at the side of the path along the southern boundary of Horsemoor Copse and Broad Buckler Fern is also found here. Day-flying moths netted in May include Small White Wave (*Asthena albulata*), Grey Birch (*Aethalura punctulata*) and Silver-ground Carpet (*Xanthorhoe montanata*).

A small water channel divides Horsemoor Copse from Horsemoor Wood. During the January floods, the River Pang and Sulham Brook were very muddy, but this channel remained crystal clear, with the bright green leaves of Fool's Water-cress on the bottom. It rises from springs to the south of the motorway. Also growing in the channel are Yellow Iris (*Iris pseudacorus*), which flowers in May and Lesser Water-parsnip (*Berula erecta*), which flowers in July.

Horsemoor Wood is the darkest and wettest of the woods. The trees on the eastern side, closest to Sulham Brook, are mostly ash and alder. They are close together and all of a similar age. On the ground is grass, with a little Dog's Mercury (*Mercurialis perennis*). Running north-south through the centre of the wood is a slightly higher ride, where Primroses and Wood Spurge flower in spring, and Enchanter's-nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*) and Foxgloves can be seen in summer. A big old cherry tree grows in the ride. The western side of Horsemoor Wood is lower and wetter and the trees are mainly alder and willow. When the other woods in the reserve are carpeted with spring flowers this part is still



Clearing in Horsemoor Wood



Roe Deer
© Jerry O'Brien

dark and wet. Later in the summer the ground cover is mostly grass, with tall iris leaves marking the wetter parts.

The final section of the reserve extension is Horsemoor Field, which lies between Horsemoor Wood and the motorway. It is classified as species-poor grassland. From May onwards, it is covered with waist-high grass and nettles and is more or less impenetrable. On the eastern side of the field is a dense stand of Blackthorn. In winter it is a good place for Redwings. It is a relatively undisturbed part of the reserve and Roe Deer can often be found here. They are excluded by the deer fence from Park Wood and Moor Copse but are not uncommon elsewhere.

With its ancient woodland and wonderful spring flowers, Moor Copse has always been a very special place for

wildlife. The new extension, with its unspoilt meadows and wet copses, has proved to be a very valuable addition to the reserve.

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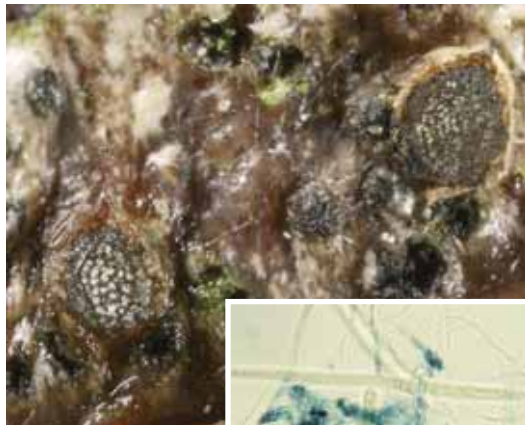
Dingy Skipper (*Erynnis tages*)
© Martin Mitchell



A Sunny Glade in Moor Copse
© Jan Haseler



Gymnopilus dilepis
see article by Malcolm Storey on page 34



Undesci bed Discomycete
see article by Malcolm Storey on page 35
Apothecia (above, left & right), Paraphyses and ascus (right) magnified



Club-tailed Dragonfly (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*)
© Chris Raper – see Invertebrate records



Case-bearing Clothes Moth (*Tinea pellionella*)
Larval cases right, adult below
see Lepidoptera records



Marpissa muscosa (a jumping spider) – see Invertebrate records © Chris Raper

Plant Records from Moor Copse Extension

collated by Michael Keith-Lucas

The following plants have been recorded in the new extension to BBOWT's Moor Copse Reserve. As far as I know, they are new to the Reserve:

<i>Armoracia rusticana</i> Horse Radish	River meadow (escape from cultivation)
<i>Centaurea x moncktonii</i>	River Meadow
<i>Chaerophyllum temulum</i> Rough Chervil	River Meadow
<i>Cruciata laevipes</i> Crosswort	River Meadow
<i>Dactylorhiza praetermissa</i> Southern Marsh Orchid	River Meadow
<i>Eleocharis palustris</i> Common Spike-rush	Cottage Field
<i>Knautia arvensis</i> Field Scabious	Area 31
<i>Ornithogalum ?umbellatum</i> (might be <i>O.angustifolium</i> , but not confirmed)	Cottage field (escape from cultivation)
<i>Pimpinella saxifraga</i> Burnet Saxifrage	River Field South, River Meadow
<i>Senecio erucifolius</i> Hoary Ragwort	Cottage Field
<i>Silaum silaus</i> Pepper Saxifrage	Cottage Field
<i>Sonchus arvensis</i> Corn Sow-thistle	River Meadow
<i>Stachys officinalis</i> Betony	Corner Field
<i>Stachys palustris</i> Marsh Woundwort	Area 29
<i>Stellaria uliginosa</i> Bog Stitchwort	Cottage Field

The following species, mostly annuals, were recorded in the arable field. I assume they are also new, but they are unlikely to persist in the longer term. All are common in our area:

<i>Aethusa cynapium</i> Fool's Parsley	<i>Lamium purpureum</i> Red dead-nettle
<i>Anagallis arvensis</i> Scarlet Pimpernel	<i>Raphanus raphanistrum</i> ssp. <i>raphanistrum</i> Wild Radish
<i>Chenopodium album</i> Fat Hen	<i>Senecio vulgaris</i> Groundsel
<i>C. polyspermum</i> Many-seeded Goosefoot	<i>Sinapis arvensis</i> Charlock
<i>Epilobium parviflorum</i> Hoary Willowherb	<i>Solanum nigrum</i> Black Nightshade
<i>Euphorbia helioscopia</i> Sun Spurge	<i>Sonchus oleraceus</i> Smooth Sow-thistle
<i>Fallopia convolvulus</i> Black Bindweed	<i>Thlapsi arvense</i> Field Penny-cress
<i>Kicksia elatine</i> Fluellen	<i>Veronica hederifolia</i> Ivy-leaved Speedwell
<i>Kicksia spuria</i> Round-leaved Fluellen	

Thanks to Chris Bucke and Jan Haseler for the above records.

HERB PARIS PROJECT APRIL – JULY 2007

Meryl Beek – Project Co-ordinator

Four sites have been investigated this year.

1. Widmead Wood near Thatcham, grid reference SU 513662, was investigated by Chris Bucke on 24th May. This was later in the season than in 2006. The Herb Paris population still thrived in large numbers, most of them in bloom. A few possible seedlings were noted, with two leaves, but that cannot be confirmed because of the rhizomatous nature of the species.

Visiting this site at this stage of the season cannot be recommended because of the need to penetrate breast high nettles, reeds and Water Dropwort. It is, however, completely unspoiled and several small moth species were noted, also Muntjac Deer. Access can be gained through grassland from near the swing bridge close to Monkey Marsh lock.

2. Berrick Trench near Nettlebed was investigated on 8th May by Jerry and Janet Welsh and Sally Rankin. This is a private site, and access had been arranged with the owner (Jerry and Janet have full details). Herb Paris was located in three closely associated patches:

a. SU 70509 88264, ninety leaves with fifteen in flower/fruit over c3metres x 2 metres. Some stems bitten off or chewed. This was midslope on the northwest side of the wood. The plants were both young and mature.

b. SU 70549 88305, twenty+ leaves, two in flower on the midslope.

c. SU 70576 88322, ten+ leaves but not flowering.

The sightings were often in association with other plants, including Solomon's-seal, *Polygonatum multiflorum*.

3. Langley Wood north of High Wycombe, SU 900981 was visited on 18th May by Meryl Beek, June Housden and Martin Sell, where they met Mrs Pat Morris of the Wycombe Wildlife Group together with Angus Idle, a grasses expert. After a general investigation of this ancient wood, Pat led the party to a secluded spot where banks of Herb Paris were seen in flower and fruit. The exact numbers were not calculated, but exceeded 50-60, and the plants have been left undisturbed for many years.

4. Howe Wood near Watlington, SU 702917, was visited on 2nd May by Chris Bucke, June Housden, Colin Dibb and Meryl Beek in the company of Robert Barber of the Watlington Environmental Group. After a time of general plant hunting, the party found two clumps of Herb Paris at SU 69894 91801. One group was of 100+ plants and the other of 60+. Many of the plants were young, and the number of leaves varied between two and six. No plants were in flower.

Following the 2006 and 2007 surveys, it is suggested that in 2008 and onwards members make up their own parties for hunting Herb Paris. The co-ordinator can supply grid references to some more possible sites, or hunting can be done by just observing old woodland and concentrating on places where Solomon's-seal grows. It will save so much dreadful "Dog's Mercury bashing"! As always, permission needs to be obtained before visiting private land.

Any findings, including "serendipity" ones should be reported to Michael Keith-Lucas as the Botany Recorder, or to Meryl Beek as Herb Paris co-ordinator.

Thanks to everybody who has participated to date, and go on hunting!

Various observations concerning the Girdled Snail, an invasive species

Henk K. Mienis, Curator Mollusc Collection, National Mollusc Collections at the Tel Aviv University and the Hebrew University of Jerusalem

While searching the internet for records of the invasive Girdled Snail *Hygromia cinctella* in Western Europe, I came across David Notton's note about its presence in Berkshire (Notton, 2003). Quite rightly he characterised this snail as being a typical garden species. Most gardeners were probably relieved by the following statement: "Fortunately there is no evidence of Girdled Snails becoming a pest at present, at least no more so than the other smaller snails in gardens." However, in the Netherlands the Girdled Snail is considered an invasive species. It is rapidly spreading in several towns: Amsterdam, Haarlem and Purmerend, all situated in the province North-Holland. In Purmerend, where I stay with my family during my annual visit to the Netherlands, I have come across this interesting snail in numerous private gardens and public parks. Within seven years the number of recorded localities in Purmerend increased from one in the autumn of 2001 to more than 30 in the same season in 2007 (Mienis, 2003, 2004, 2006, 2007 and unpublished).

Unlike most other garden snails, which usually adhere to the underside of the leaves, *Hygromia cinctella* rests and crawls on the upper side of the leaf or rests in the axils of leaves or branches. Its Dutch common name is therefore the Keeled Foliage Snail.

I have observed it commonly on Traveller's Joy *Clematis vitalba*, Corsican Hellebore *Helleborus corsicus*, *Inula* species, Plantain Lilies *Hosta* species, Dahlias *Dahlia* species, Ice Plants *Sedum spectabile*, Yellow Flag *Iris pseudacorus* and stuck to the stems of Pampas Grass *Cortaderia selloana*.

Contrary to Notton's statement quoted above, considerable damage has been observed in gardens to various species of Dahlias (leaves and flowers), Ice plants (leaves) and Plantain Lilies (leaves). If you buy new plants in a garden centre or nursery or you move plants from one garden to another, then there is a basic rule: always check for the presence of slugs and snails. Prevention is better than relying on any molluscicide. The latter usually cause side effects, while most of the slugs and snails survive!

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HORNETS

By Alan & Winifred Muir Wood, Pangbourne

In early summer this year we observed Hornets going in and out of a small hole at the base of a blackcurrant bush. This seemed an unlikely place for a nest and we later found there was a rotten root which they were presumably removing for a nest elsewhere. They did not seem to mind the blackcurrants being picked above their hole. After the heavy rain in July this activity ceased.



Later it transpired that they had made a nest in the roof of our house, getting in through a small hole by the gutter. The Hornets emerging from the nest always flew off in the same direction, back over the roof, presumably to a food supply; we do not know where. They were not evident on the rotting pears. They did not attempt to come into the house as wasps do. Some repairs to the house wall which were taking place within a few yards of their nest did not appear to disturb them. The nest activity ceased about the end of September.

Chris Raper comments: I think this article illustrates some interesting aspects of modern Hornet sightings. Hornets have traditionally been quite scarce and restricted to areas of woodland where they nested in cavities in old trees. They still live in

that habitat and I have personally observed a nest in a hollowed-out Beech in Moor Copse Nature Reserve. But recently they have been getting much commoner and are being found in less typical, urban habitats such as gardens. Hornets have quite a powerful sting but luckily they are much less aggressive than most other social wasps and if left alone will usually ignore humans and pets.

Jersey Tiger – *Euplagia quadripunctaria* (Arctiidae) – New to VC22 Berkshire

Norman Hall

The Jersey Tiger (see the photograph on p18) is a common moth in continental Europe apart from Baltic states and Scandinavia. It flies by day and also comes to MV light at night. Common in France, it is also common in the Channel Islands, which explains its rather parochial English name. At the time I started moth trapping, in the late 70's, it was common along the south coast of Devon, where it had been established since 1880, but occurrences elsewhere along the south coast were attributed to chance migration. I remember in 1995 visiting Portland Bird Observatory just after Martin Cade had caught a gravid female. He gave me a few larvae to raise, and I bred one through to adulthood, despite having to put the larvae in the refrigerator three times, for a total of 12 weeks during the winter while I was abroad!

Since then, the Jersey Tiger has started to colonise the country as a breeding species, establishing itself along the south coast (Dorset & Isle of White colonies are mentioned in the UKMoths website) and beginning to spread northwards. There is said to be "a thriving colony" in the central London area. I have not seen one there myself, but I have seen a photo taken at the London Wetland Centre.

Last year's National Moth Night (NMN) was held on the night of 11-12 August, with Jersey Tiger as one of the 'target species' which participants were asked to make a special effort to find, though records of everything seen were also requested. As I was doing a public mothing evening at Dinton Pastures for NMN, for which I needed all my equipment, I decided to run my trap in my garden on the night before. This is in Harcourt Drive, Earley, and backs onto Leighton Park School. Conditions were bad and there were less than 20 individual moths in the trap – but there on the top of the egg trays was a Jersey Tiger!

It turns out that records for NMN must be for that night alone, so my home records will not appear in the analysis of results that will appear in *Atropos* magazine. *N.B.* I am told that a Jersey Tiger also turned up unexpectedly in Buckinghamshire – on the correct night – and I look forward to reading the report to see if there were others.

Gymnopilus dilepis – a tropical toadstool in Berkshire

Malcolm Storey

Despite the best efforts of the conservation volunteers, the scrub on Bucklebury Common continues to thrive. In recent years, landfill tax money has paid for mechanical clearance of the worst affected areas. Trees and bushes (Scots Pine or birch) are chipped and the chippings piled into enormous heaps (several metres along each side and 2-3m high.) These heaps are often left on-site for several months and are colonised by various fungi before being taken to Slough Heat and Power where they are burnt for carbon-neutral energy.

The usual early colonisers of wood-chippings are myxomycetes, especially Flowers of Tan (*Fuligo septica*). This forms a dark brown crust, initially with bright yellow granules, but these are soon lost to leave something that looks decidedly canine in origin!

Last autumn though, a much more spectacular fungus appeared. Most of the pile had already been shipped out and the remaining wood-chippings weren't piled very high (only about 1.5m.) It was mid-October and there'd been a frost, traces of which remained on the wood-chips at the surface. However an inch or two down they felt warm to the touch from fermentation. The pile was covered in purple-capped toadstools of various sizes with bright golden gills. My first thought was Plums and Custard (*Tricholomopsis rutilans*) but these had a well-formed ring on the stipe. (See photograph on p29) They turned out to be *Gymnopilus dilepis*, a recent addition to our mycota which grows almost exclusively on piled wood-chippings that have become warm through fermentation. Originally from Australia, it was first recorded in Britain on a Surrey woodchip pile 1995; not seen again until 2001 when it was found in Norfolk and again in Surrey. Since then it has become increasingly common, helped no doubt by the increased chipping of birch and pine in heathland reclamation and the subsequent storage of the resultant woodchips. No doubt the vehicles used for cutting and transporting the chips are helping to spread the fungus – as they did Pale Stagshorn, (*Calocera pallido-spathulata*) 25 years ago.

New Species Everywhere!

Malcolm Storey

There are over 13,000 species of fungi known from Britain. This includes the familiar “larger fungi” (or “macromycetes”) such as mushrooms, toadstools, brackets, puff-balls, fairy clubs and morels as well as lichens. But the bulk of this number is made up of microfungi: cup-fungi, pyrenomycetes, rusts, smuts, mildews (downy and powdery), moulds and myxomycetes.

Each year about 200 additional species are added to the British list – as might be expected, the majority of these are microfungi. These additional species include foreign species that have found their way into Britain (eg plant parasites and saprobes brought in by the horticulture trade) and species that have been here all along but not been recorded, or varieties that had previously not been regarded as distinct, but on further study, turn out to be different species. Sometimes these species are already known to science, but often they are new, in which case it’s usually not clear whether they’re overlooked natives or some new colonist from a distant (and less well-studied) land.

This note reports three as yet unnamed species currently thought to be new to science and the following article reports a recently discovered, probably tropical, species which has turned up in our area.

Our first species probably belongs in the genus *Stictis*. It is a gelatinous, greyish discomycete (a small cup-fungus) that the present author found growing on Scots Pine cones on Bucklebury Common in November and December 2006 (see *The Reading Naturalist* No 59, p29). The fruitbodies are tiny, under 1mm diam. They are gelatinous, immersed in the ends of the cone scales, but bursting like a Jack-in-a-box through a tiny split when moist. They’re elliptical in outline (due to pressure from the sides of the split). See the photograph on p29. As they dry out they retract back into the cone scale and disappear. The margin is blackish grey surrounding the grey hymenium which is covered in a whitish bloom.

Under the microscope the ascospores are long, cylindrical and multi-septate so the numerous individual part-spores look more or less square. Brian Spooner of Royal Botanic Gardens (Kew) reports that they disarticulate into part-spores c.4µm long. The asci are up to 210µm, with tips not bluing in Melzer’s iodine; the 8 ascospores form a fascicle, although they are not completely aligned. The paraphyses are thin-walled, cylindrical, very narrow, and twice forked near the base. The apex is usually unbranched but strongly expanded into one to several, septate, moniliform, agglutinated, clavate cells (4-6.5µm diam) which are very strongly blued in iodine (a unique character).

This species seems to match nothing in the literature and awaits description as new to science. Pine cones are a well-studied substrate so it’s surprising to find something new. Possibly it has come in from abroad (the genus *Pinus* is widely distributed throughout the northern hemisphere and montane tropics) but we’ll probably never know.

Brian Spooner tipped me off about the next two undescribed species: the first is a coelomycete fungus, a type of mould that forms its spores inside a usually black capsule. In this case the black capsule is round with a very long neck through which the spores are released. The discomycete described above was tiny, but is a veritable giant compared to this fungus. It grows during winter, in huge numbers and very commonly, on dead, fallen leaves, especially of Laurestinus (*Viburnum tinus*) often covering most of the leaf surface in a black felt of sporebodies. Originally spotted on Laurestinus it has since been found on the dead leaves of other cultivated shrubs. And although first found in Britain it’s hardly likely to be native and has now been found (apparently very commonly) in one or two places abroad.

Following the tip-off, the author found it on dead, fallen Laurestinus leaves in the graveyard at Bucklebury Chapel in February last year.

The amazing thing about this fungus is that what is now such a common fungus was completely unknown just a few years ago. And more amazing still is that there is a second new species parasitic on it. This is a white mould which the author has yet to find.

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR BOTANY 2007

Michael Keith-Lucas

This year was marked by a hot and dry spring, bringing many plants into flower very early, followed by a cool and wet summer, which seems to have favoured the water plants, for which we have more records than usual. Many thanks to all those who contributed records, especially Meryl Beek, who sent in lists from most of the summer weekend walks and from Ken Thomas's Wednesday walks, amounting to an impressive collection of some of the less common plants in the Reading area.

The plant names follow C. Stace: (1997) *New Flora of the British Isles*, Second Edition, Cambridge University Press.

Pteropsida (Ferns)

6 Osmundaceae

Osmunda regalis Royal Fern
16/09/07 Near pond, Greenham Common (MB)

15 Aspleniaceae

Phyllitis scolopendrium Hart's-tongue
28/11/07 Right hand side of lane bordering Rumerhedge Wood in a ditch. 2 stands. Recorded as rare by Druce, but now increasing. SU679815 (MB)
Often growing in cracks in cement near water, eg in road drains [ed]

18 Blechnaceae

Blechnum spicant Hard Fern
28/07/07 Burnt Platt (near Kingwood Common). By a footpath under mature pine trees with bracken and bramble. Rare in Oxon. SU693833 (JW & JDW)

Magnoliidae (Flowering Plants)

30 Ranunculaceae

Ranunculus sceleratus Celery-leaved Buttercup
06/06/07 In one of the ponds between the M4 and Blossom Copse, near the 12th tee of the golf course near North Street (Englefield area). One plant in flower. Rather local in Berks. SU644725 (MB)
16/05/07 In the River Blackwater. SU809620 (approx.) (MB)

48 Caryophyllaceae

Stellaria holostea Greater Stitchwort
21/03/07 In various places along lanes in Stratfield Saye. Clusters of 5 or so plants – rather short-stalked, although in full flower. (MB)



Bog Violet (*Viola palustris*)

Spergula arvensis Corn Spurrey*
27/07/07 Farley Hill. SU749635 (CB)

Lychnis flos-cuculi Ragged Robin*
14/05/07 Rushall Manor Farm: several plants in second top field – wet and acid. SU5872 (MB)

Saponaria officinalis Soapwort
08/08/07 Where Hogmoor Lane meets the A321 near Whistley Green, S. of Twyford. New locality. SU792747 (AA+CD)

49 Polygonaceae

Persicaria hydropiper Water-pepper*
16/08/07 Cock Marsh. SU880862 (approx) (MB)

Persicaria laxiflora Tasteless Water-pepper*
16/08/07 Cock Marsh SU880862 (approx) (MB)

Rumex hydrolapathum Water Dock*
16/08/07 Cock Marsh. Lots of leaves in a pool. SU880862 (approx) (MB)

Rumex pulcher Fiddle Dock
16/08/07 By wayside near Cock Marsh. Several plants. New locality SU880862 (approx) (MB)

53 Clusiaceae

Hypericum pulchrum Slender St. John's-wort*
11/07/07 By side of path in Queen Wood, near Christmas Common. SU720923 (approx) (MB)

55 Malvaceae

Malva neglecta Dwarf Mallow*
03/10/07 Car park of the Sun public house, Whitchurch Hill. 1 or 2 plants. SU643792 (DC)

59 Violaceae

Viola palustris Bog Violet
16/09/07 Brushwood Gully, Greenham Common. (MB)

64 Brassicaceae

Bunias orientalis Warty-cabbage*

03/06/07 Hogtrough Bottom, by fence beside muddy farm track next to pig field, by fence. In flower. SU549841 (MWS)



Warty-cabbage (*Bunias orientalis*)
Unripe fruit

Arabis hirsuta Hairy Rock-cress

31/07/07 The Holies SSSI. Good number of plants with unripe and ripe fruits and a small number of late flowers, along and beside old tarmac path. Thought to be extinct in Berks by Crawley (2005). An important rediscovery. SU593798 (BFG/MWS)

Iberis amara Wild Candytuft*

03/07/07 Aston Upton Downs, over fence by path. In flower. SU545838 (MWS)

71 Primulaceae

Primula vulgaris Primrose

18/12/07 Shinfield Park, Reading. Exceptionally early flowering. SU 732695 (JH)

Hottonia palustris Water Violet*

06/06/07 Between the M4 and Blossom Copse, near the 12th tee of the golf course near North Street (Englefield area). In the ditches and in 3 separate ponds – at least two colonies? Hundreds of plants in flower. SU644725 (MB)

Lysimachia vulgaris Yellow Loosestrife

30/07/07 Arborfield Garrison. New locality. SU774657 (JH)
27/07/07 Farley Hill SU756636 (CB)*

77 Rosaceae

Potentilla anglica Trailing Tormentil

29/06/07 Crowsley Park. In short grassland with Bird's-foot-trefoil, Self-heal and Lady's Bedstraw. (Confirmed by John Killick). Uncommon in Oxon. SU732794 (JW & JDW)

78 Fabaceae

Lathyrus linifolius Bitter-vetch

21/04/07 Crowsley Woods. In flower on a steep bank with Wood Melick, Wood Meadow-grass, Bramble and Honeysuckle. New locality, rare in Oxon. SU740801 (JW & JDW)

Lathyrus nissolia Grass Vetchling*

06/06/07 Between the M4 and Blossom Copse, near the 12th tee of the golf course, near North Street (Englefield area). On a grassy bank near ponds. Several plants in flower. SU644725 (MB)

Trifolium arvense Hare's-foot Clover

15/07/07 Thatcham Railway Station. New locality. On roadside, left side of entrance of substation. SU527663 (MWS)
21/07/07 Dorney wetlands. Clump of plants in flower. New locality. SU923793 (approx.) (MB)

106 Geraniaceae

Geranium versicolor Pencilled Crane's-bill

06/06/07 Between the M4 and Blossom Copse, near the 12th tee of the golf course, near North Street (Englefield area). On grassy bank near ponds. Clump of flowers. New locality. SU644725 (MB)

Geranium columbinum Long-stalked Crane's-bill

31/07/07 The Holies SSSI. New Locality. Tarmac path at SU593798 (BFG/MWS)

111 Apiaceae

Oenanthe fistulosa Tubular Water-dropwort*

16/08/07 Cock Marsh. SU880862 (approx.) (MB)

Petroselinum segetum Corn Parsley

14/10/07 Shiplake. Four plants on a field edge. Very local in S. Oxon. SU758782 (JW & JDW)

114 Solanaceae

Datura stramonium Thorn-apple

19/12/07 Boxford Common (CB)

120 Boraginaceae

Anchusa (Lycopsis) arvensis (Lesser) Bugloss*

03/10/07 Field near Junior part of Oratory School, Whitchurch Hill. Several plants. SU638798 (CB)
27/07/07 Farley Hill. New locality. SU749635 (CB)

Trachystemon orientalis Abraham-Isaac-Jacob

26/03/07 Pudding Lane, Arborfield Cross area. Two stands at the side of a lane and one large stand at a nearby road junction. Both shady places. Presumably an escape from cultivation, and as such not recorded in Crawley. SU745653 (MB)

Cynoglossum officinale Hound's-tongue

29/05/07 Various locations in Mapledurham area, including two large stands by gates of churchyard. In flower and fruit, SU670768 (MB)
Scarce in Oxon.

122 Lamiaceae

Stachys officinalis Betony(* both sites)
30/07/07 Arborfield Garrison. SU774657 (JH)
09/08/07 The Marshes, Riseley. SU735633 (JH)

Stachys palustris Marsh Woundwort
09/08/07 The Marshes, Riseley. New locality.
SU735633 (JH)

Ajuga reptans Bugle
14/05/07 Rushall Manor Farm. Several plants
with white or pink flowers in both top fields.
SU5872 area (MB)

Clinopodium acinos Basil Thyme*
31/07/07 The Holies SSSI, tarmac path.
SU593798 (MWS)

123 Hippuridaceae

Hippuris vulgaris Mare's-tail
06/06/07 Between the M4 and Blossom Copse,
near the 12th tee of the golf course, near North
Street (Englefield area). In water, many plants.
SU641729 (MB)

128 Scrophulariaceae

Kicksia elatine Sharp-leaved Fluellen*
01/08/07 Ipsden/Mongewell area. Several plants
on a field edge. SU650870 (MB)

Kicksia spuria Round-leaved Fluellen*
01/08/07 Ipsden/Mongewell area. Several plants
on same field edge as above. SU 650870 (MB)

Melampyrum pratense Common Cow-wheat
02/07/07 Lackmore Wood. Locally dominant on a
road bank under mature beeches. SU666805
(JW & JDW)

133 Campanulaceae

Legousia hybrida Venus's Looking-glass*
01/08/07 Ipsden/Mongewell area. One
specimen on field edge. SU650870 (MB)

136 Adoxaceae

Adoxa moschatellina Moschatel or Town-
hall Clock*
05/05/07 Swyncombe area, a patch 10ft x
4-5ft in flower at SU678895 (MB)

139 Asteraceae

Onopordum acanthium Cotton Thistle
15/07/07 Thatcham Railway Station, on
roadside, left side of entrance to
substation. In flower. New locality.
SU527663 (MWS)

Lactuca virosa Great Lettuce
06/06/07 Several plants on right hand path side
on way towards Mapledurham House.
SU675765 (MB)

Solidago virgaurea Goldenrod
13/09/07 Deadmans Lane. On a mown roadside
bank, only three flower spikes, but 20 or more
rosettes. Uncommon in Oxon.(Killick, Perry &
Woodell, 1998) SU666804 (JW & JDW)

Chrysanthemum segetum Corn Marigold*
04/07/07 A whole field of corn marigolds – old
seeds disturbed by ploughing? SU642643 (MB)

Tussilago farfara Coltsfoot
21/03/07 Stratfield Saye area, field edge,
headland, on south facing slope. 6 flower heads
fully out. SU682613 (MB)

151 Araceae

Arum italicum ssp. neglectum Italian Lords-
and-Ladies
21/11/07 Kidmore End (MB)

155 Juncaceae

Luzula sylvatica Great Wood-rush
14/05/07 Rushall Manor Farm. Many plants all
over the top 2 fields (acid soil) in fruit. New
locality. SU582725 (approx.) (MB)

156 Cyperaceae

Cyperus longus Galingale
21/07/07 Dorney wetlands. Two plants noticed in
boggy patch by path – could have been more
further in. New locality. SU923793 (approx.)
(MB)

157 Poaceae

Calamagrostis epigejos Wood
Small-reed
0 5 / 0 5 / 0 7
Swyncombe (MB)

Catapodium (Desmazeria) rigidum Fern-
grass
06/06/07 In garden
of 7 Gurney Close,
Caversham. Some
quantity by front
gate and in
adjacent flower
beds. SU698761
(MB)



Cotton Thistle (*Onopordum acanthium*)

Molinia caerulea Purple Moor-grass
18/07/07 College Wood. One tussock in Beech woodland with Wavy Hair-grass and Soft Rush. First time encountered in Chilterns – possibly introduced on bicycle tyres? SU659814 (JW & JDW)

Echinochloa crusgalli Cockspur
09/10/07 Clump in garden of 7 Gurney Close, Caversham. Possibly from bird seed. Identified by CD. SU698761 (MB)

158 Sparganiaceae

Sparganium erectum Branched Bur-reed*
06/06/07 Between the M4 and Blossom Copse, near the 12th tee of the golf course, near North Street (Englefield area). One or two plants in one of the ponds with Water-violet. SU644725 (MB)

162 Liliaceae

Polygonatum multiflorum Solomon's-seal*
14/05/07 Rushall Manor Farm. Numerous plants in shady wood beyond Scratchface Lane. SU5872 area. (MB)

Paris quadrifolia Herb Paris
02/05/07 Howe Wood. One clump of 100+ and one of 60+ found. New locality (Brewis, Bowman & Rose (1996). SU6989491801 (RB)

Galanthus elwesii var. *elwesii* Greater Snowdrop
19/02/07 St. Mary's, Bucklebury, in churchyard. In flower. SU553708 (MWS)

Galanthus plicatus ssp. *plicatus* Pleated Snowdrop
19/02/07 St. Frideswide's Church, Frilsham. In churchyard. Leaves with recurved edges and flowers with green at apex of petals. SU 538732 (MWS)



Herb Paris (*Paris quadrifolia*)

166 Orchidaceae

Cephalanthera damasonium White Helleborine*
19/05/07 Turville area. 5-6 spikes in flower by path on left hand side, going up Holloway Lane towards Northend. SU745919 (MB)

Epipactis helleborine Broad-leaved Helleborine*
06/06/07 14+ plants by path under trees on hillside above Mapledurham. Not yet in flower. SU676767 (MB)

Anacamptis pyramidalis Pyramidal Orchid
20/06/07 Woolhampton. Road south of Rowbarg Inn, on right hand bankside, near a small nature reserve connected with gravel workings. New locality. SU573665 (MB)

Orchis mascula Early Purple Orchid
02/05/07 Witheridge Hill. One plant only seen near a cherry tree with Bluebell, Dog's Mercury and Ramsons. Protected from deer with twigs. Thought to be declining in Oxon. SU695839 (JW & JDW)

Orchis morio Green-winged Orchid*
09/05/07 Shinfield Cemetery, Spencers Wood. SU719688 (JH)

Ophrys apifera Bee Orchid
20/06/07 Woolhampton. At same site as Pyramidal Orchid. New locality, SU573665 (MB)

* Recent records for known localities of uncommon species.

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

CONTRIBUTORS:

Thanks are due to the following members and friends:

(AA) Alice Ayers, (BFG) Berkshire Flora Group, (CB) Chris Bucke, (CD) Colin Dibb, (DC) David Cliffe, (JDW) Jerry Welsh, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JW) Janet Welsh, (MB) Meryl Beek, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (RB) Robert Barber.

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RECORDER'S REPORT FOR MYCOLOGY 2007

Malcolm Storey

2007 started very promisingly with a warm, wet summer, but then just when autumn came into view it all dried out, so in the end the fungus season was rather disappointing, unlike the excellent season in 06. Very few records were submitted this year, so it's a short report, but there were some very good finds (including two rare brackets that are rarely seen outside the New Forest) so it makes up in quality what it might lack in quantity.

Ascomycota

Coelomycete – undescribed species
16/02/07, Bucklebury Common Cemetery,
SU546689, on fallen leaves of *Laurestinus*
(*Viburnum tinus*), (MWS) See article page 35

Orbiliaceae

Orbilina auricolor (a glass cup)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common, Oxon, on Beech,
(RF)

Leotiomycetidae

Helotiales

Dermateaceae

Catinella olivacea (a cup fungus)
24/11/07, SU4757, Old Burghclere Chalk Pits
with *Hyphodontia arguta* (HFG/EJ) on fallen
wood

Sordariomycetidae

Sordariales

Chaetosphaeriaceae

Chaetosphaeria myriocarpa (a
pyrenomycete)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common,
Oxon, on Beech, (RF)

Chaetosphaeria ovoidea (a
pyrenomycete)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common,
Oxon, on Beech, (RF)

Lasiosphaeriaceae

Podospora curvicolla (a pyrenomycete)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG/HFG)

Xylariales

Xylariaceae

Hypoxyton cohaerens var microsporum (a
woodwart)
11/12/07, Nuney Green, Oxon, on oak (PC)

Basidiomycota

Agaricomycetidae

Agaricales

Agaricaceae

Lepiota cortinarius var. cortinarius (a parasol)
27/10/07, SU4763, Newtown Common, under
Beech & conifer (HFG/EJ & AL)

Bolbitiaceae

Naucoria scolecina (an aldercap)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants,
under Alder (TVFG & HFG/RF)

Naucoria paludosa (an aldercap)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants,
under Alder (TVFG & HFG/RF)

Cortinariaceae

Cortinarius elegantissimus (a
webcap)
07/10/07, Sulham woods, in
Beech litter, (PC/AH) Deposited
at RBG Kew
This Red Data Book (Vulnerable)
species is a Sulham speciality

Gymnopilus dilepis (a rustgill)
18/10/07, Fanny's Lane,
Bucklebury Upper Common
SU534693, on warm, rotting,
piles of woodchips (MWS) See
article page 34.



Cortinarius elegantissimus

Simocybe sumptuosa (a twiglet)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG & HFG)

Entolomataceae

Clitopilus hobsonii (a toadstool)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG & HFG)

Clitopilus scyphoides (a toadstool)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG & HFG, Id: AH)

Marasmiaceae

Armillaria tabescens Ringless Honey Fungus
12/09/07, Bucklebury Avenue, SU574697,
(TVFG)
A regular at this site.

Psathyrellaceae

Coprinopsis (=Coprinus) stercorea (an inkcap)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants, on
Rabbit dung (TVFG & HFG, Id: DS)



Coprinopsis (=Coprinus) stercorea

Tricholomataceae

Mycena diosma (a bonnet)
27/10/07, Nettlebed Woods, Oxon, on Beech
wood (RF)

Rhodotus palmatus Wrinkled Peach
30/09/07, Lambridge wood, Oxon, on Beech
(TVFG)

Once rare and confined
to elm wood, became
much commoner followng
Dutch Elm Disease and
has since broadened its
host range.

Boletales

Gyroporaceae

Gyroporus castaneus
Chestnut Bolete
12/09/07, Bucklebury
Avenue, SU574697,
(TVFG)
A regular at this site.



Chestnut Bolete (*Gyroporus castaneus*)

Hymenochaetales

Hymenochaetaceae

Inonotus cuticularis (clustered bracket)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants, on
Beech log (TVFG & HFG)

Schizoporaceae

Hyphodontia barba-jovis (a resupinate)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common, Oxon, on Beech,
(RF)

Phallales

Geastraceae

Geastrum fimbriatum Sessile Earthstar
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne,
Hants (TVFG & HFG)

Polyporales

Atheliaceae

Athelia fibulata (a resupinate
basidiomycete)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne,
Hants (TVFG & HFG)

Byssocorticium efibulatum (a
resupinate)
11/12/07, Nuney Green, Oxon, blue
corticoid on wood (PC)

Fomitopsidaceae

Fomitopsis pinicola (a bracket fungus)
11/11/07, Snelsmore Common, SU456707, on
small deciduous tree trunk (birch?) (T & SK)
The nearest known site for this rare bracket is
Winchester (PC).

Hapalopilaceae

*Ceriporiopsis
pannocincta* (Green
Porecrust)
07/10/07, Sulham woods,
on Beech log. (TVFG/PC)
A resupinate polypore
with a distinctive lime-
green tint to the pores.

Hyphodermataceae

*Subulicystidium
longisporum* (a
resupinate)
11/11/07, Kingwood
Common, Oxon, on
Beech, (RF)

Meruliaceae

Mycoacia aurea (a resupinate tooth fungus)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common, Oxon, on Beech,
(RF)

Scopuloides rimosa (a resupinate fungus)
14/10/07, Morgastor wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG & HFG)

Russulales

Hericiaceae

Hericium erinaceum Bearded Tooth
27/10/07 Woodland edge next to golf course,
The Coombes, Bearwood near Wokingham.
SU775679, on trunk of deciduous tree (Horse
Chestnut?) (GC)

Lachnocladiaceae

Scytinostroma portentosum Mothball Crust
15/11/07, Bozedown, Oxon, on Beech
(TVFG/PC)
24/11/07, SU4757, Old Burghclere Chalk Pits on
willow branch (HFG/SC & AL)
This formerly rare fungus continues to spread in
our area.

Peniophoraceae

Peniophora proxima (a resupinate basidio)
15/11/07, Boze Down, Oxon, on Box (PC)

Thelephorales

Bankeraceae

*Hydnellum
spongiosipes* Velvet
Tooth
27/10/07, SU4763,
Newtown Common,
under Sweet Chestnut
(HFG/EJ)

Thelephoraceae

Thelephora penicillata
(an earth fan)
14/10/07, Morgastor
wood, The Vyne, Hants
(TVFG & HFG)



Thelephora penicillata

Tomentella crinalis (a resupinate)
11/11/07, Kingwood Common, Oxon, on Beech,
(RF)

Ustilaginomycetes

Ustilaginales

Glomosporiaceae

Thecaphora seminis-convolvuli (a seed smut
fungus)
19/08/07, Thatcham Reedbeds LNR, SU503667,
infected seeds of Large Bindweed (*Calystegia
silvatica*). Spores firmly aggregated into spore
balls, dark brown, outer face warty and with small
pore. Spore balls of very variable size, composed
of (1)2-12(20) spores, 18-58/18-42µm diam.
Ornamentation crowded, up to 2µm high,
hemispherical to cylindrical, avoiding the central
pore. (MWS)

Urediniomycetes

Uredinales

Pucciniaceae

Puccinia cnici-oleracei (a rust)
12/09/07, SU581699, Bucklebury Avenue. Telia
on Yarrow leaves, brown, amphigenous on leaf
segments. Teliospores: septate, smooth, end cell
pointed to rounded or square-ended, thick-walled
at tip and with apical germ pore, except when
pointed when germ pore is apparently absent.
(MWS)

Uropyxidaceae

*Tranzschelia pruni-
spinosa* (a rust)
12/09/07, SU568696,
Chapel Row. Telia on
underside of small
yellow spots on Damson
leaves. Teliospores
small, adhering in balls
almost like smut spores!
Septate, rough walled,
lower cell often slightly
smoother than upper,
and darkening more.
(MWS)

CONTRIBUTORS

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(AH) Alick Henrici, (DS) Derek Shafer, (GC) Gordon Crutchfield, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (PC) Paul Cook, (RF) Richard Fortey, (S & TK) Shirley and Theo Kirstein, (TVFG) Thames Valley Fungus Group, (HFG) Hants Fungus Group: (AL) A. Lucas, (EJ) E. Janke, (SC) S. Cadbury

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR LEPIDOPTERA 2007

Norman Hall

Most contributors reported that both numbers of species and numbers of individuals were considerably down on previous years. Most blamed the very poor weather in the summer of 2007. However, my catches were generally low even when the weather seemed promising. Fine weather might produce quite a good hatch on one special day, but then numbers would fall off rapidly on successive days as though everything that could emerge had already done so. This is more like the normal pattern of emergence in winter when moths must grab an opportunity to meet and mate when it occurs. It is possible that the poor season was as much due to the dryness of summer 2006, which would not help larvae, and the warmth of the following winter, which would not help pupae since they would have to use up more of their internal resources 'ticking over' at a higher temperature. Let us hope that the wet summer of 2007 will result in higher numbers in 2008.

A note on Vice-counties

Moth recording, especially for microlepidoptera, is often done by 'Watsonian Vice-counties'. Hewett Cottrell Watson, in 1852, gave a list of 112 vice-counties into which he proposed to divide the country, in particular for botanical recording. The object was to provide a set of unit areas more equal in size than the existing counties, so some were divided up and others left alone. The vice-counties, as defined by Watson, have the added advantage of being fixed. They are not changed if administrative boundaries change. For our area (within 20 miles of Reading) matters are relatively simple. Vice-county 22 is the 'old Berkshire' and includes in effect everything south of the Thames, as far west as Faringdon & Lechlade (though the western part is now in present day Oxfordshire) and Vice-county 23 is the 'old Oxfordshire' and includes everything north of the Thames (even though Caversham is now administratively part of Reading). Brian Baker's book *The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire*, 1994, has a subtitle 'Records of Lepidoptera from Vice-county 22'. He steeled himself to using the vice-county system, even though this meant he couldn't use his own records from his garden at Caversham! N.B. Authors sometimes have to use present county boundaries rather than vice-counties in order to get sponsorship from county organisations for publications of local interest.

2007 Lepidoptera Records. Systematic List.

In the list, the numbers before each species name are from the checklists of British Lepidoptera by J. D. Bradley. They are particularly useful when changes of scientific nomenclature have occurred, in keeping track of which species is which.

Sites that are mentioned several times are listed below for reference:

Sites in VC22 (Old Berkshire)

Dinton Pastures Country Park, Winnersh	SU782717
Harcourt Drive, Earley	SU735709
Lardon Chase, Streatley	SU586809
main slope	SU588809
top gate	SU583806
Little Hidden Farm, Hungerford	SU349713
Moor Copse BBOWT Nature Reserve	
extension	SU638736
original	SU634739
The Coombes, Bearwood (Barkham)	SU772679
The Holies	SU594798

Sites in VC23 (Old Oxfordshire)

Bozedown, (now Chalkhills), Whitchurch-on-Thames	SU644777
Queen's Road, Caversham	SU721743
Withymead, Goring	SU600827

Tineidae

0240 *Tinea pellionella* Case-bearing or Case-making Clothes Moth
19/06/07, Berry's Road, Upper Bucklebury SU542683, larval and pupal cases found on old walking socks and woollen insole in bottom of wardrobe (MWS). The rings of colours on the cases, from the wool on which the larva was feeding, clearly showed that the case was built as a pair of plates (held above and below) grown by adding new fibres around the margin. The larva can turn round in its case. MWS has seen it come out of 'the other end'. The case looks vertically symmetrical so it can presumably also be turned upside down. See colour photo p30
T. pellionella has been much in the news this year, causing more problems than usual nationwide. It even turned up in my own house for the first time. Harcourt Drive, Earley, 11-27/07/07 (NMH)

Gracillariidae

0366A *Cameraria ohridella* Horse Chestnut Leaf-miner
04/08/07, at Withymead, we found a Horse Chestnut with *Cameraria* flying around in swarms in warm afternoon sunshine and resting in impressive numbers on the trunk. This was amazing to see despite the small size of the individual moths, which are only about 6mm long (RDNHS, NMH)
This leaf miner is devastating Horse Chestnut trees (*Aesculus*). It is closely related to the leaf miners of the genus *Phyllonorycter* which are found on many British trees and shrubs, and are quite harmless. But *Cameraria* has no parasites in this country and can spread unchecked.

Sesiidae

JN has had further success attracting clearwing moths with pheromone lures, despite the fact that pheromones deteriorate with time and this was the third season he had used them. All records are for Crawshay Drive, Emmer Green. Four species were attracted:

0374 *Synanthedon vespiformis* Yellow-legged Clearwing
28/06/07, 2 at TAB/VES/HYL combination
07/07/07, 1 at TAB/VES/HYL
18/07/07, 4 at VES/HYL only
28/07/07, 2 at VES only
31/07/07, 1 at TAB/VES/HYL
01/08/07, 2 at TAB/VES/HYL
Larvae feed on oak (*Quercus*) and other deciduous trees.

0378 *Synanthedon andrenaeformis* Orange-tailed Clearwing
23/06/07, 3 at VES
Larvae feed on *Viburnum* sp.

0379 *Synanthedon myopaeformis* Red-belted Clearwing
07/07/07, 1 at TIP/MYO combination.
Larvae feed on apple (*Malus*).

0382 *Bembecia ichneumoniformis* Six-belted Clearwing
08/07/07, 1 female at API
22/07/07, 1 female, not at pheromone.
Larvae feed on Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus* ssp.) and vetches (*Anthyllis*, *Hippocrepis*).

Yponomeutidae

0431 *Yponomeuta sedella* (a small ermine moth)
14/07/07, 1, Bozedown SU644777 (RDNHS, NMH)
The larvae of this species feed on *Sedum* spp. and the adults occur more frequently in the Reading area than one might expect.
The commoner *Yponomeuta* spp. have larvae that feed in conspicuous webs on Hawthorn (*Crataegus*), Blackthorn & Cherry (*Prunus*), Apple (*Malus*) and Spindle (*Euonymus*), but the corresponding webs on *Sedum* are rarely reported.

Ethmiidae

718 *Ethmia dodecea* (a micro-moth)
15/06/07, 1, Lardon Chase SU586809 (BMG)
14/07/07, Bozedown (RDNHS)
This is a 'Notable B' species.

Gelechiidae

0729 *Isophrictis striatella* (a micro-moth)
19/07/07, 1, Bulmershe Local Nature Reserve SU752731. Daytime observation, adult sitting on Tansy flowers (NMH)
A decreasing species for which all records are of interest.

0757 *Recurvaria nanella* (a micro-moth)
11/08/07, 4, Dinton Pastures SU782717 (NMH)
Few records in VC22.

0861 *Acompsia schmidtellus* (a micro-moth)
14/07/07, 1+, Bozedown, (RDNHS, NMH)
Bozedown is in VC23 (Oxfordshire) and there is a considerable amount of this moth's foodplant: Wild Marjoram (*Origanum vulgare*). But Bozedown is just across the Thames from VC22 (Berkshire) where *schmidtellus* has not been recorded for years.

Tortricidae

0963 *Cochylis flaviciliana* (a cochyliid moth)
11/08/07, Little Hidden Farm, Hungerford
SU349713 (BMG)
A Notable B species.

1157 *Crociosema plebejana* (a tortrix moth)
12/10/07, Harcourt Drive, Earley SU735709
(NMH).
There are 5 VC22 records from East Berks, but
this is the 1st from West. *plebejana* is extending
its range northwards. Feeds on *Lavatera*.

Pyralidae

1321 *Thisanotia chrysonuchella* (a pyralid)
17/05/07 to 09/07/07, 12 noted, (6 on 15/06/07
BMG mothing night), Lardon Chase, Streatley
This very attractive grass-moth is Notable B.

1366 *Pyrausta nigrata* (a pyralid moth)
19/04/07, The Holies SU594798 (JH)
03/06/07, Aston Upthorpe Downs SU543831 on
grass blade on a west-facing slope (MWS)

1370 *Sitochroa palealis* (a pyralid moth)
03/08/07, The Holies SU594798 (JH). Notable B.

1375 *Ostrinia nubilalis* European Corn-borer
07/07/07 Queen's Rd, Cav'sham SU721743 (SN)

1396 *Mecyna flavalis* (a pyralid moth)
09/07/07-03/08/07 ca90 seen, The Holies
SU594798 (JH)
14/07/07, 1, Bozedown SU644777 (RDNHS, JH)
A Red Data Book 2 species, supposedly more
likely to be found near the south coast.

1398 *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer
01/08/07, Harcourt Drive, SU735709 (NMH)
Often a commonly occurring migrant, but very
few in 2007.

Pterophoridae

1512 *Merrifieldia baliodactylus* (a plume moth)
14/07/07, 6, Bozedown SU6447776 (RDNHS,
NMH)
Another marjoram feeder
grossly under-recorded 'over-
the-river' in VC22 cf the entry for
0861 *Acompsia schmidtillus*

1517 *Adaina microdactyla* (a
plume)
05/05/07, 1 on vegetation
around Hemp Agrimony,
Hogmoor Copse, Moor Copse
BBOWT Reserve SU634739
(MWS)



Purple Hairstreak (larva)
Neozephyrus quercus

Hesperiidae

1526 *Thymelicus sylvestris* Small Skipper
18/06/07, The Coombes, Bearwood SU772679
(First sighting by JH)

1527 *Thymelicus lineola* Essex Skipper
04/07/07, 2, Jouldern's Ford SU743636 (First
sighting by JH)

1531 *Ochlodes faunus* Large Skipper
06/06/07, 1, Arborfield SU748669 (JH)

1532 *Erynnis tages* Dingy Skipper
19/04/07, 3, The Holies SU594798 (First sighting
by JH)
29/04/07, 1, Moor Copse Extension SU638736
New species for reserve (JH). Found there at two
spots (JL)
End April, 2, Paices Wood Aldermaston (JL)

1534 *Pyrgus malvae* Grizzled Skipper
03/06/07, 3, Aston Upthorpe SU546837
(RDNHS)
End 04, several Paices Wood Aldermaston, (JL)

Pieridae

1545 *Colias croceus* Clouded Yellow
18/05/07, 1, Padworth Lane SU610670 (JL)
28/07/07, 1, Theale Lake (JL)
08/09/07, 1, Englefield SU6270 (R Crawford via
JL)
15/09/08, 1, Englefield SU6270 (K Moore via JL)
22/09/07, 1, Burghfield Common SU6566 (B
Uttley via JL).

1546 *Gonepteryx rhamni* The Brimstone
18/01/07, 1, Emmer Green SU7276, (via JL)
03/03/07, 1, Moor Copse Ext SU638736 (JH, JL)
29/11/07, 1 flying over heather, Broadmoor
Bottom, Crowthorne (JL).

1553 *Anthocharis cardamines* Orange-tip
1/04/07, 1f, Burghfield, Moatlands SU671704 (K
Moore via JL)
01/04/07, 1m, Theale Lake SU652699 (K Moore
via JL)

Lycaenidae

1557 *Neozephyrus quercus*
Purple Hairstreak
11/05/07, larva on Oak,
layby near Scout camp,
Bucklebury Common
SU550688 (MWS)
26/06/07, 1 at Beech Hill
SU707648. First sighting
by JH

1561 *Lycaena phlaeas* Small Copper
17/04/07-17/10/07, Red Cow, Cholsey, ever present but max count only 14 (AR).

1572 *Aricia agestis* Brown Argus
22/05/07-07/09/07, max count 8, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
22/05/07, 13, Green Park, Reading SU701696
First sighting by JH (on the same date as at Cholsey)

1574 *Polyommatus icarus* Common Blue
30/04/07, 1, Bearwood College SU777690 (First sighting by JH)
16/09/07, Red Cow, Cholsey (Last sighting by AR)

1575 *Lysandra coridon* Chalk Hill Blue
09/07/07, 19, Lardon Chase SU588809 (First sighting by JH)
15/07/07, 1, Bozedown SU644777 (RDNHS).

1576 *Lysandra bellargus* Adonis Blue
04/09/07, 1, Lardon Chase SU588809 (First sighting by JH)

Nymphalidae

1584 *Limenitis camilla* White Admiral
18/06/07, 1, The Coombes, Bearwood SU772679 (First sighting by JH)

1590 *Vanessa atalanta* Red Admiral
13/01/07, 1 flying strongly in garden, settled on wall, Tilehurst SU666743, (JL)
15/01/07, 2, Harris Garden SU738712 (JH)
10/03/07, 1, Hosehill LNR SU651695 (JL)
01/11/07, 1, Wildmoor (JL).

1591 *Vanessa cardui* Painted Lady
12/06/07, 1, Viking Field, Wokingham SU799671, (JH)
Decoy Heath, 1 on 6/7/07 (JL)
23/08/07, 1, Tilehurst SU666743 (JL)
24/08/07, 2, Tilehurst SU666743 (JL)
02/09/07, 2, Emmer Green SU723727 (A Tomczynski via JL)
13/10/07, 1, Tilehurst SU666742 (JH).

1593 *Aglais urticae* Small Tortoiseshell
07/03/07, 1, Paices Wood, Aldermaston SU5863 (JL)
Red Cow, Cholsey, "even worse than last year, max count just 3" (AR).

1597 *Inachis io* The Peacock
01/01/07, 1, Theale, Bottom Lane SU642698 (via JL)
01/01/07, 1, Theale Lake SU651699 (via JL);
03/03/07, 1, Moor Copse (JL)
01/12/07 flying strong circuits in pheasant pen, Bere Court, Tidmarsh SU624748 (JL)

1598 *Polygonia c-album* The Comma
08/03/07, 1, Warren Wood, Finchampstead SU793645 (First sighting by JH)
18/10/07, 1, Shinfield Park, Reading SU730696 (Last sighting by JH)

1607 *Argynnis aglaja* Dark Green Fritillary
09/07/07, 1, The Holies SU594798

1608 *Argynnis paphia* Silver-washed Fritillary
20/06/07, 2, Farley Hill SU746656 (First sighting by JH).
Further records from: Beech Hill SU707648; The Coombes, Arborfield SU772677; Paices Wood, Aldermaston; Whitmoor Copse, Frilsham; Beech Wood, Hamstead Norreys; Bowdown Wood, Greenham & Ashampstead Park.

1614 *Pararge aegeria* Speckled Wood
15/04/07, 1, Tilehurst SU6674 (JL)

1620 *Melanargia galathea* Marbled White
18/06/07, 1, The Coombes, Bearwood SU772679 (First sighting by JH)
11/07/07, 31 (max for 07) Red Cow, Cholsey, well down on usual numbers (AR)

1625 *Pyronia tithonus* The Gatekeeper
30/07/07, 35 (max for 07) Red Cow, Cholsey, a noticeably short season (AR)

1626 *Maniola jurtina* Meadow Brown
11/7/07, 81 (max for 07) Red Cow, Cholsey, 2 or 3 times that number in previous years (AR)

1627 *Coenonympha pamphilus* Small Heath
31/05/07, 1, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
01/06/07, 1, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)

1629 *Aphantopus hyperantus* The Ringlet
20/06/07, 2, Farley Hill SU746656 (First sighting by JH)



Marbled White
Melanargia galathea

Geometridae

1699 *Idaea rusticata* Least Carpet
14/07/07, 1, Bozedown SU644777 (RDNHS)
12/07/07, 1, Harcourt Drive, SU735709 (NMH)
15/07/07, 1, as above (NMH)
01/08/07, 2, as above (NMH)
04/08/07, 2, Withymead SU600827 (RDNHS)

1716 *Rhodometra sacraria* The Vestal
22/06/07, 1, Queen's Road, Caversham
SU721743 (SN).

1731 *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* Chalk Carpet
14/07/07, 10, Bozedown, SU644777 (RDNHS).
A Notable B species in the national Biodiversity
Action Plan (BAP). A new site.

1736 *Catarhoe cuculata* Royal Mantle.
14/07/07, Bozedown SU644777 (RDNHS)

1855 *Eupithecia phoeniceata* Cypress Pug
12/10/07, 1, Harcourt
Drive, Earley
SU735709
There is only one other
VC22 record. The
species is spreading
from the south.

1878 *Minoa murinata*
Drab Looper
02/05/07, 2 flying with
Speckled Yellows,
Rushall Farm, Bradfield
SU587732 (JL)
06/05/07, ca15, as
above (RDNHS).
A Notable B species.

1884 *Abraxas grossulariata* The
Magpie
26/07/07, Church Farm, Shinf'ld SU724681 (JH)
01/08/07, 1, Harcourt Drive, SU735709 (NMH)
11/08/07, Queen's Road, Caversham SU721743
(SN)
Generally considered 'common', but far less so
than it used to be and always a pleasure to see.

Spingidae

1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird
Hawk-moth
12/03/07, Southcote (via JL)
24/6/07, Westwood Rd, Tileh'st SU666742, (JH)
06/07, Sulham, Pingewood & Burghfield
Common (via JL)
24/08/07, Emmer Green (via JL)
(The records "via JL" were all from birdwatchers)

Arctiidae

2043 *Eilema sororcula* Orange Footman
11/05/07, Bucklebury Common SU550688
(BMG)
15/06/07, Lardon Chase SU583806 (BMG)

2057 *Arctia caja* Garden Tiger
21/06/07 1 day flying, Red Cow, Cholsey – see
colour pages.

2067 *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger
Harcourt Drive, Earley SU735709, 10/8/07

2068 *Callimorpha dominula* Scarlet Tiger
Moor Copse SU634739 (JL, JH)
09/06/07, Westwood Road, Tilehurst SU666742
(JH).
Also reported at Speen Moor, Newbury, and
Bradfield (JL).

Scarlet Tigers were also reported from gardens
in Wantage Rd and Norfolk Rd, Reading, which
are both south of the
Oxford Rd near the
site of the old
Reading football
ground (Elm Park).
Numbers in
Wantage Road were
into double figures
and several were to
be seen for over a
week at the end of
June (via JL).
Numbers of adult
moths in Norfolk
Road were lower,
but here some
larvae were found –
feeding on Forget-
me-not. The normal
foodplant in the



Scarlet Tiger (mating pair)
Callimorpha dominula

Kennet Valley is Comfrey, and larvae from there
in captivity will happily feed on garden Alkanet.
Comfrey, Alkanet and Forget-me-not are all in the
family Boraginaceae and are all present in the
garden in Norfolk Road. According to the text
books *dominula* can feed on many plants in
many other families but has local preferences
(via NMH).

Noctuidae

2140 *Cerastis leucographa* White-marked
16/03/07, Moor Copse SU634739 (JH)
13/04/07, Park Wood SU636741 (JH)
20/04/07, Queen's Road, Caversham SU721743
(SN)
A local species, best looked for as an adult
feeding on willow catkins in Spring.

2195 *Mythimna vitellina* The Delicate
15/06/07, Lardon Chase SU583806
(BMG)

27/10/07, 1, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
Normally a migrant, but larvae may have
survived the 2006-2007 winter in the
south.

2211 *Cucullia absinthii* The Wormwood
13/07/07, 1, Repton Road, Earley
SU753714 (M. Calway)
First record from the Berkshire part of
VC22.

2280 *Acrionicta leporina* The Miller
16/09/07, larva, Moor Copse (See photo)
(JL). Quite late for the larva, but David
Carter's 'Observers Book of Caterpillars'
gives July to September.

2399 *Pyrrhia umbra* Bordered Sallow
15/06/07, Lardon Chase SU586809 (BMG).



The Miller (larva)
Acrionicta leporina
© John Lerpiniere

2480 *Hypena rostralis* Buttoned Snout
14/04/07, 1, in house, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
22/11/07, 1, in garage, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
10/12/07, 1, in house, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
A BAP species.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(AR) Tony Rayner, (BMG) Members of the local Berkshire Moth Group on field trips, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (JN) John Notton, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (NMH) Norman Hall, (RDNHS) Members of the Reading & District Natural History Society on field trips, (SN) Susan Nicholls

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR ENTOMOLOGY and OTHER INVERTEBRATES 2007

Chris Raper

For me I think 2007 was an even worse year for invertebrate recording than 2006 with prolonged periods of wet, cloudy weather throughout the summer. Perhaps a good demonstration that if we are feeling the effects of global warming it doesn't mean that we will all have glorious, warm summers! Many thanks again to all those that have contributed records this year.

Arthropoda

Acari

Ixodida

Ixodidae

Ixodes trianguliceps Vole and Shrew Tick
28/09/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, adult
female, on dead young Brown Rat with fleas and
lice (MWS)

Prostigmata

Eriophyidae

Eriophyes viburni (a gall-mite)
20/05/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-
Thames, Oxon, SU616796 (CMTR).
This species of gall-mite produces round, slightly
downy, red growths on the upper side of the
leaves of Wayfaring Tree (*Viburnum lantana*).

Arachnida – Araneae

Salticidae

Marpissa muscosa (a jumping spider)
20/05/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-
Thames, Oxon, SU616796 (CMTR) (Photo p30)



Vole and
Shrew Tick
*Ixodes
trianguliceps*

Insecta

Coleoptera

Carabidae

Cicindela campestris Green Tiger Beetle
11/04/07, Common Wood WHS, SU587801,
several beetles flying and crawling on sandy
patch, (MWS)

Cerambycidae

Aromia moschata Musk
Beetle
04/08/07, Withymead, South
Stoke, Oxon, SU600829,
(CMTR)

Chrysomelidae

Epitrix atropae Belladonna
Flea Beetle
06/05/07, Hartslock Nature
Reserve, Goring-on-Thames,
Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

Cryptocephalus aureolus (a
leaf-beetle)
05/05/07, Hartslock Nature
Reserve, Goring-on-Thames,
Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

Coccinellidae

Harmonia axyridis Harlequin
ladybird or "Haxy"
19/08/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, in
corner of plastic tool-shed (MWS)
14/10/07, 30+ individuals of different sizes and
colour types seen gathering on fence posts at the
top of the hill. Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-
on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)
14/10/07, 15+ seen gathering on a neighbour's
white UPVC guttering, Tilehurst, SU663750,
(CMTR)
22/09/07, Thatcham, SU518673, Larvae and
pupae on Sycamore leaves, with adults of vars
succinea (form with 18 or 19 black spots) &
conspicua (black form with two red spots,
crescents or bull's eyes), Co-op car park, (MWS)
This Asian species is spreading rapidly across
the UK after being introduced, presumably with
cultivated plants. More information can be found
at <http://www.harlequin-survey.org/>

Dermestidae

Dermestes lardarius Bacon Beetle
20/04/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, indoors,
dead, on window sill (MWS)

Lampyridae

Lampyris noctiluca Glow Worm
20/05/07, larva, Hartslock Nature Reserve,
Goring-on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

Lucanidae

Lucanus cervus Stag Beetle
AR writes: "Another reasonable year for this local
speciality, but flights leading away from Red Cow
indicate this was not the local centre of activity.
Seen from home on 15 days from 8/06/07 to
31/08/07 with a maximum
of just 3 on 9/06/07. Males
normally seen in flight
between 20:25 and 22:00
hours. Late season
sightings nearly all females.
One centre of activity was
the nearby Wallingford
Road when up to 10
individuals seen together
with RR & CMTR on the
evening of 10/07/07. A
large male seen mid-
afternoon on 1/07/07
climbing up a tree trunk in
the garden of Causeway
House, Cholsey" (AR)



Belladonna Flea Beetle
Epitrix atropae

Scarabaeidae

Melolontha melolontha
Common Cockchafer

AR writes: "Moth trap
counts: 2 on 3/05/07; 2 on 6/05/07; 10 on
24/05/07; and 10 on 4/06/07. These low numbers
probably reflect a failure to trap moths at the
peak flight period for these chafer." Red Cow,
Cholsey, (AR)

Diptera

Asilidae

Asilus crabroniformis Hornet Robber Fly
AR writes: "The warming climate may have
affected the flight period for this fly in 07. Both
first (11/08/07) and last (11/10/07) dates were
noticeably late, as was their peak on 16/09/07
when 18 flies were seen. All of these dates
proved to be the latest ever by an appreciable
amount. The flies were seen in all areas of the
meadow, and once in the garden. Several mating
pairs were observed.", Red Cow, Cholsey,(AR)

Leptarthrus brevirostris (a robber fly)
05/05/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-
Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

Bombyliidae

Bombylius major (a bee-fly)

29/04/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

A common species but in this case I observed many adult females 'dusting' – a practice where the fly locates patches of dry, chalky soil and collects balls of the substrate on the tip of the abdomen. Bee-flies are parasitoids of solitary, burrow-nesting bees and females can often be seen hovering and flicking eggs into dark patches of ground. They lay many 100's of eggs in the hope that occasionally one goes down a solitary bee's burrow. The females mix their eggs with the soil to add extra weight and make the eggs fly further.

Platyezidae

Agathomyia wankowiczii (a big-footed fly)

11/12/07, Harpsden Woods, Oxon, on Beech, galls on underside of bracket fungus *Ganoderma applanatum* (PC)

Syrphidae

Xanthogramma citrofasciatum (a hoverfly)

25/04/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)

Tachinidae

Macquartia praefica (a parasitic fly)

09/06/07, Moor Copse Nature Reserve, Tidmarsh, Berks. SU634738. (CMTR)

Tipulidae

Tipula alpium (a crane fly)

22/05/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, Female, resting on side of house in early evening (MWS)

Tipula maxima (a crane fly)

26/04/07, Moor Copse Nature Reserve, Tidmarsh, Berks. SU634738. (CMTR)

Britain's largest crane fly. The size, combined with the brown striped wings make it almost unmistakable (there is one other similar species). The larvae are semi-aquatic and live in the margins of streams with shallow, muddy edges.

Tipula marmorata (a crane fly)

18/09/07, pair in cop. Bucklebury Common Cemetery, SU546688, mating pair on west-facing vertical face of gravestone in late afternoon (MWS)

Hymenoptera

Apidae

Bombus pascuorum Common Carder Bee

AR writes: "Although commonly seen, it was unusual to find this bee nesting under a snake sheet and to be found there for a prolonged period in association with a Wood Mouse. Bees were seen here from 19/08/07 to 17/10/07", Red Cow, Cholsey, (AR)

Vespidae

Vespa crabro Hornet

I again saw this species on numerous occasions in our area and it is my impression that it is

getting commoner every year. I draw your attention to the article by Alan & Winifred Muir Wood as an example of how this species is becoming far more catholic in its choice of nesting sites. (CMTR)

Gasteruptionidae

Gasteruption assectator (a parasitic wasp)

16/07/07, 1 female seen nectaring, Tilehurst, SU663750, (CMTR)

Gasteruption jaculator (a parasitic wasp)

28/07/07, a few females seen nectaring on umbellifers, Moor Copse Nature Reserve, Tidmarsh, Berks. SU634738. (CMTR)

Andrenidae

Andrena cineraria Grey Mining Bee

11/04/07, Common Wood WHS, SU58718012, numerous bees flying around holes in sand patch, (MWS)

Cynipidae

Diplolepis rosae Bedeguar or Robin's Pincushion Gall

07/07/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, Robin's Pincushion gall on cultivated *Rosa glauca* in garden, (MWS)

Argiidae

Arge nigripes (a sawfly)

19/04/07, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU635740, Female, visiting Alexanders umbel, Hogmoor Copse (MWS)



Agathomyia wankowiczii galls on underside of bracket fungus *Ganoderma applanatum*
© Paul Cook

Tenthredinidae

Caliroa cerasi Pear And Cherry Slug Sawfly
07/07/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683, larva, on upperside of windowed leaf of ornamental almond, (MWS).

Slug-like larva feeds from the upper surface of the leaf, leaving "windows" of the lower epidermis.

Platycampus luridiventris (a sawfly)
27/09/07, larva, Paices Wood, SU587639, strongly flattened larva on underside of Alder leaf, lake margin by carpark. Coll: MWS, Id: MCH, Strongly flattened larva surrounded by yellow dust of Alder Rust, *Melampsoridium hiratsukanum*. By 16/10/07 it had spun cocoon and pupated between two leaves.

Homoptera

Aphididae

Callaphis juglandis (a walnut aphid)
05/10/07, Bucklebury, SU551708, Nymphs, apterae and alates, feeding on underside of fading Walnut leaves, Coll: MWS, Id: AJH

Pemphigus spirothecae Spiral Gall
02/08/07, Stroud Green, Newbury, SU479663, Spiral galls on petioles of Lombardy Poplar, near road junction at entrance to Newbury Race Course, (MWS) Petiole spirally swollen with 1 twist (ie single crack opens up slightly when very gently uncoiled) with thickened surface inside gall. Galls filled with white waxy globules and small grey aphids with dense tuft of wax filaments from end of abdomen, plus a few alates.

Pulvinaria regalis Horse-chestnut Scale
17/05/07, Thatcham, SU516673, on Sycamore trunk, Co-op Car Park, (MWS)
17/05/07, Thatcham, SU518673, on Lime trunk, Waitrose Car park, (MWS)

Raphidioptera

Atlantoraphidia maculicollis (a snake fly)
05/05/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796, (CMTR)



Atlantoraphidia maculicollis

© Chris Raper

Odonata

Coenagrionidae

Pyrrhosoma nymphula Large Red Damselfly
17/04/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829, (AR)

Ischnura elegans Blue-tailed Damselfly
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829, (AR)

Libellulidae

Libellula depressa Broad-bodied Chaser
Seen on 18 days from 23/05/07 to 26/08/07, Red Cow, Cholsey, Id: AR

Sympetrum striolatum Common Darter
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829, (AR)



Callaphis juglandis

Calopterygidae

Calopteryx splendens Banded Demoiselle
A few individuals presumed to have originated from the Thames about a mile away – seen on six days from 11/06/07 to 10/08/07, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829 (AR)

Calopteryx virgo Beautiful Demoiselle
30/04/07, Moor Copse Nature Reserve, Tidmarsh, Berks. SU634738. (CMTR)
This species is the commoner of the two on this site – *C.splendens* prefers to frequent the sections of the Pang where the water runs faster and the river bed is a little more stony.
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829 (AR)

Gomphiidae

Gomphus vulgatissimus Club-tailed Dragonfly
05/05/07, Hartslock Nature Reserve, Goring-on-Thames, Oxon, SU616796. Many individuals were seen through May sitting on bushes and sunning themselves (CMTR) See photo p 30

Aeshnidae

Aeshna cyanea Blue Hawker – formerly Southern Hawker
Seen on 14 days from 28/06/07 to 10/10/07, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)

Aeshna mixta Migrant Hawker
Seen on 11 days from 27/07/07-6/11/07 (4 on 4/09/07, 3 on 9/09/07) Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829 (AR)
05/08/07, 1 male in garden, Tilehurst, SU663750 (CMTR)

Aeshna grandis Brown Hawker
Seen on 18 days from 11/07/07 to 6/09/07 and observed laying eggs on several occasions, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)
04/08/07, Withymead, South Stoke, Oxon, SU600829 (AR)

Anax imperator Emperor Dragonfly
Seen on 11 days from 13/06/07 to 11/08/07 and frequently observed laying eggs. Maximum count of 3 on 14/07/07, Red Cow, Cholsey (AR)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

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RECORDER'S REPORT FOR VERTEBRATES 2007

Tony Rayner

My grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to this report.

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

FISH

Gasterosteus aculeatus 3-spined Stickleback
16/04/07 Abundant at Sutton Courtenay Env Educ Centre SU501391 (Rd'A)

AMPHIBIANS

Bufo bufo Common Toad
18/04/07 A few tadpoles, Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)
20/04/07 1, Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
16/07/07 1, Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
23/08/07 2, Twyford Loddon reserve SU785757 (JL)
15/09/07 1, Cholsey meadow during hay cut (TR)
16/09/07 2, Cholsey orchard, fleeing hay cut (TR)
2/10/07 1, crossing road, Lower Basildon SU612786 (TR)

Orthoptera – Tettigoniidae

Metrioptera roeselii Roesel's bush cricket
Female imago 28/06/07, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve extension, SU637735, Hundreds, in species-rich grassland (MWS)
Also heard and seen many times in Cholsey (AR)



Roesel's bush cricket (female)
Metrioptera roeselii

Nematoda

Nematoda (roundworms)
30/04/07, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, Buff-tailed Bumble Bee (*Bombus terrestris*) queen found dying on roadside pavement (MWS). *Post mortem* examination revealed abdomen full of nematodes and their eggs.

Triturus cristatus cristatus Great Crested Newt
 12/03/07 2 tadpoles, Decoy Heath SU610635 (JL)
 04/07 Found in bottle traps at Little Wittenham Woods SU573929 (SG)
 16/04/07 20 adults & eggs, Sutton Courtenay Env Educ Centre SU501918 (Rd'A)
 13/09/07 Lots, Kintbury Newt Ponds SU386664 (JL)

Triturus helveticus Palmate Newt
 12/03/07 30 in Woodcote garden pond SU642822 (KW)
 23/04/07 Neal farm, Wyfold SU684828 (Rd'A)
 06/07 Found in Lower Pond, Greenmore at night SU646813 (KW)

Rana temporaria Common Frog
 10/02/07 2 – first sighting of the year in a Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)
 24/02/07 c.100 frogs present when first spawn noticed in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)
 15/06/07 Large adult in Cholsey meadow. (TR)
 30/08/07 1 in small garden pond at Cholsey SU592868 (AS)

REPTILES

Lacerta vivipara Common Lizard
 24/02/07 to 19/10/07 Seen on 118 days on a total of 305 occasions.
 On days when lizards were seen, they were averaging nearly three locations. This was by far the best year for lizards on this site. There was limited evidence of breeding success and an increase in the number of mini-colonies. Numbers peaked at 26 on 3/10/07 (new site record.) (TR/RR)
 4/05/07 1 at Snelsmoor SU462712 (JL)
 24/05/07 1, Nettlebed Common SU700872 (JW/JeW)
 28/07/07 3 at Wildmoor SU845632 (JL)
 2/08/07 1, Padworth Common SU616646 (DM)
 5/08/07 1, Great Cookley Green SU709888 (JW/JeW)
 21/08/07 1, Peppard Common SU704815 (JW/JeW)
 14/10/07 3, California Country Park SU782651 (GC/JC)



Common Lizard, *Lacerta vivipara*
 © Tony Rayner

Anguis fragilis Slow-worm
 24/02/07 to 19/10/07 Seen on 143 days on a total of 1103 occasions.
 On days when Slow-worms were seen, they were averaging over 7 locations with a peak of 45 on 19/8/07. Sobering to think that the colony began with 7 introduced lizards in 2000. (TR/RR)
 20/04/07 Adult male, Decoy Heath SU610634 (JL)
 26/06/07 Adult male in Tilehurst garden SU635742 (JL)
 6/07/07 3 ?females, Decoy Heath SU610634 (JL)
 13/07/07 6 adults at Snelsmoor SU462712 (JL)
 28/07/07 1 at Wildmoor SU845632 (JL)
 2/08/07 11, Padworth Common SU616646 (DM)
 4/08/07 1 at Withymead SU601828 (TR)
 11/10/07 Young individual in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)

Natrix natrix Grass Snake
 13/03/07 to 23/10/07 Seen on 100 days on a total of 160 occasions, making 2007 the best year since 2001. After that year the population declined sharply, but now it seems that an alternative food source has been found. Previously Frogs had been abundant and were the preferred prey. (TR/RR)
 17/4/07 3 at Withymead SU601828 (TR)
 25/04/07 3 in Hosehill meadow SU653697 (BU)
 29/04/07 1 adult in Little Wittenham Wood SU573927 (DR)
 6/07 1 in Henley garden SU747815 (AP)
 10/06/07 1 by Pang in Hogmoor Copse SU635743 (JH)
 28/07/07 2 young in Hosehill meadow SU653697 (JL)
 4/09/07 3 adults in Hosehill meadow SU653697 (JL)
 11/09/07 1 at Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)
 1/11/07 1 basking near the Thames by the Oracle Park, Reading. (FT) A very late record but the temperature was 16/17° centigrade.



Grass Snake and Slow Worm
 © Tony Rayner

Vipera berus Adder

1/04/06 1 young in Burghfield Common allotment SU6566 (BU)
20/04/07 1 at Wokefield Common SU657662 (AW)
26/06/07 2 at Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)
5/07/07 4 at Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)
19/07/07 1 adult at Broadmoor Bottom SU856629 (JL)
2/08/07 4 at Padworth Common SU616646 (DM)

BATS

Pipistrellus pipistrellus Pipistrelle

28/03/07 First sighting of the year at Sonning Common SU697800 (JW/JeW)
8/04/07 2 adults over Didcot garden SU521895 (Rd'A)
11/11/07 Final sighting of the year at Sonning Common SU697800 (JW/JeW)
Not monitored in detail, but impression is of constant numbers that are now frequenting more of the site than previously. A couple of notes from the Cholsey garden diary:-
7/06/07 Unusually large numbers (TR)
8/06/07 Still plenty flying at dusk (TR)

Nyctalus noctula Noctule

8/06/07 1 flying in straight line travelling east over Cholsey at 21.35 (TR/RR)

INSECTIVORES

Erinaceus europaeus Hedgehog

9/02/07 1 dead in Withy Copse, Calcot (JL)
25/03/07 1 at Sonning Common SU697800 (JW/JeW)
04/07 1 feeding regularly in a Didcot garden SU521895 (Rd'A)
17/14/07 1 at Pingewood SU690699 (GC/JC)
06/07 1 discovered at Cholsey in an upstairs bedroom wardrobe. It must have entered via the patio doors prior to climbing the stairs! (SD)
5/09/07 1 at South Moreton (RR)
1/08/07 1 youngster dead in a Dark Lane garden (JL)
6/08/07 A road kill on A4 near Aldermaston (JL)
08/07 1 dead in a Tilehurst garden pond. (JL)
7/08/07 1 in a fox trap at Bradfield (JL)
12/08/07 A road kill by Moor Copse (JL)
All summer 1 seen in an Upper Bucklebury garden (JL)
14/09/07 Adult and 4 young at Englefield (JL)
15/10/07 1 in Didcot garden - fed to help its survival SU521895 (Rd'A)
9/12/07 1 found dead in Tilehurst garden SU666742 (JH)

Sorex araneus Common Shrew

7/03/07-17/10/07 64 sightings, usually singles. (TR/RR)
15/04/07 1 under a tin at Aldermaston Gravel Pits (JL)

Sorex minutes Pigmy Shrew

25/02/07-20/10/07 Seen on 16 occasions, usually singles. (TR/RR)
8/07/07 1 in a trap at Hosehill (JL)
3/08/07 Shrew, probably a Pigmy, at Pingewood SU691708 (GC/JC)

Talpa europaea Mole

In all the usual places around Cholsey, molehills seemed to be more numerous than ever. This was the situation in the early damp months of the year, and through to the winter months. Also there was a noticeable increase in those asking how to eradicate them from gardens. (TR)
22/03/07 Lots of molehills at Hungerford Marsh (JL)
12/06/07 1 invaded a Cholsey garden, and was still active in December. (TR)

CARNIVORES

Meles meles Badger

14/01/07 Tracks in arable field near Roman amphitheatre at Silchester SU645626 (CB)
25/01/07 Tracks between Kintbury and Hampstead Marshall as follows (CB):-
(a) on path from Skew-Whiff to Milkhouse Copse SU400647
(b) on path from Watermans Copse leading into Briffs Copse SU407648
(c) on path out of Briffs Copse to Plumb Farm SU413653
26/01/07 A road kill at Streatley (JL)
15/02/07 Attempt at tunnelling under meadow fence (TR)
03/07 Badgers seen regularly in Beverley Road, Tilehurst.(JL)
5/04/07 A road kill in North Street, Theale. (JL)
29/05/07 A road kill in Englefield Road (JL)
5/08/07 2 in garden, Rodway Road, Tilehurst (JL)
2/09/07 A road kill at Yattendon (JL)
21/10/07 Tunnel dug under garden fence (TR)

Mustela nivalis Weasel

19/03/07 1 by A4074 near Ipsden SU627862 (GC/JC)
8/05/07 1 crossing Wallingford Road, Cholsey (TR)
7/10/07 1 under snake-sheet with vole prey (TR)

Mustela erminea Stoat
26/03/07 1 at Kintbury SU402664 (GC/JC)
18/09/07 2 at Burnt House Lane, Pingewood (JL)

Mustela putorius Polecat
12/08/07 A road kill at Clifton Heath SU554970 (Rd'A)

Mustela vison Mink
26/02/07 One seen from footpath beside Hithercroft Brook, Cholsey (GE)
15/04/07 1 trapped at Aldermaston Mill (JL)
15/08/07 A road kill near Burghfield Gravel Pits (JL)

Vulpes vulpes Fox
13/01/07 1 at Bere Court (JL)
19/01/07 Prolonged screaming at the back of the house. (AA)
30/01/07 1 in garden, Downshire Square, Reading (CB)
6/05/07 1 crossing road at 4am at Calcot (JL)
11/05/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
17/05/07 3 young at Emmer Green SU705768 (GC/JC)
13/06/07 1 at Pingewood SU688698 (GC/JC)
7/07/07 1 at 5pm on Pierces Hill (JL)
3/08/07 1 at Pingewood SU693702 (GC/JC)
29/08/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
2/11/07 Foxes calling at night at Cholsey (TR)
19/11/07 1 at Moor Copse by M4 (JL)
20/11/07 1 at Chalgrove Common SU642991 (GC/JC)
19/12/07 1 at Shinfield Park, Reading SU728695 (JH)

Rattus norvegicus Brown Rat
13/11/07 A road kill at Purley (JL)
14/11/07 1 at Caversham Court (JL)

DEER

Muntiacus reevesi Muntjac
12/05/07 1 at Decoy Heath (JL)
29/05/07 1 at Cholsey. Seen regularly up to this date, thereafter absence following total clearance of neighbour's garden. (TR)
31/05/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
25/07/07 1 at Kingswood Common SU699822 (GC/JC)
9/10/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
24/10/07 1 at Emmer Green SU705768 (GC/JC)
4/11/07 1 at Emmer Green SU714772 (GC/JC)
15/11/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
17/11/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
20/12/07 1 at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC/JC)
23/12/07 2 in Caversham garden (MS)

Capreolus capreolus Roe Deer
14/01/07 5 at Stratfield Mortimer SU645626 (CB)
1/03/07 4 at Barn Elms, Bradfield (JL)
9/03/07 14 at Englefield (JL)
11/03/07 4 at Wineburgers Parkland, Purley (JL)
12/03/07 5 at Decoy Heath (JL)
1/07/07 Doe and fawn, Heron's Nest, Theale Lake (JL)
17/07/07 2 at Farley Hill SU745655 (JH)
30/07/07 Doe and fawn at Bere Court (JL)
31/08/07 1 at Shinfield SU739682 (JH)
26/10/07 3 at Warburg Reserve, Bix SU720875 (GC/JC)
4/11/07 4 at Cholsey (TR)
7/11/07 1 at Riseley SU718636 (JH)
14/12/07 4 at Cholsey (TR)

Dama dama Fallow Deer
13/06/07 1 at Silchester SU649623 (GC/JC)
26/06/07 1 by A4074 at Chazey Heath SU690785 (GC/JC)
2/10/07 At least 20 between Turville and Hambledon (TR)

Deer sp.
10/08/07 Two at Ipsden SU622853 (GC/JC)

RABBITS & HARES

Lepus europaeus Brown Hare
2 & 13/01/07 1 at Cholsey (TR)
9 & 23/02/07 1 at Cholsey (TR)
9/03/07 9 at Englefield (JL)
21 & 22/03/07 1 at Cholsey (TR)
8/04/07 1 at Cholsey (TR), 23 at Englefield (JL)
25/04/07 1 at Beenham SU611692 (GC/JC)
30/04/07 2 at Ashampstead (JL)
3/05/07 3 at Great Shefford (JL)
29/08/07 1 at Swyncombe (JW/JeW)
20 & 31/10/07 3 at Cholsey (TR)
1 & 11 & 13 & 19/11/07 3 at Cholsey (TR)
23 & 24/11/07 2 at Cholsey (TR)

Oryctolagus cuniculus Rabbit
Jan to March Commonly seen at Cholsey. Absent from Mid-July onwards. (TR)
28/03/07 1 dead in orchard (TR/RR)
12/05/07 3 including 2 juveniles in Forbury Gardens, Reading (JL)
15/07/07 1 in advanced stage of myxomatosis (TR/RR)

RODENTS

Sciurus carolinensis Grey Squirrel
Seen most days in the year – possibly more than any previous year. All bird feeders now squirrel proof, but hazelnuts, walnuts and apples the main attractions. (TR/RR)
28/01/07 Very pale grey/white individual at Moor Green Lakes (JL)

Apodemus sylvaticus Wood Mouse
16/06/07 Female and 3 young at Hosehill (JL)
6/09/07 3 young at Blackwater Reach (JL)
15/10/07 2 young in Didcot garden SU521895 (Rd'A)
26/2/07 to 23/10/07 30 sightings in total. The vast majority were of one individual beneath a snake sheet. This mouse was seen from 29/9/07 to 23/10/07. Most of the other sightings were as normal of young broods reared from nests built under snake sheets. On those occasions the mice are normally only seen for a day or two. The long-staying mouse had also chosen a sheet beneath which bumblebees were nesting. (TR/RR)

Microtus agrestis Field Vole
25/03/07 1 vole and nest under a tin at Aldermaston Gravel Pit.(JL)
29/09/07 3 under a tin at Hosehill (JL)
24/02/07 to 21/10/07 244 sightings in total. See separate article on this species. (TR)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

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FIELD VOLES

Tony & Ro Rayner

Our recording of small mammals, at Red Cow in Cholsey, is almost entirely done by noting what lies beneath about 30 metal sheets. These are inspected once a day if and when time permits.

The Field or Short-tailed Vole has for years been our most often recorded small mammal. Then in 2004 the Bank Vole that had always been lagging behind in second place, overtook our long time leader. This was attributed at the time to habitat change. Recently planted hedges and trees were growing taller, resulting in a small reduction in open space and a little more shade.

The following year, we noted that while Bank Vole sightings had remained remarkably constant, the Field Vole had further declined. By April 2006 we realised that our Field Vole population was in free fall. We recalled reading about vole population crashes somewhere – so reference books were quickly consulted. There it was – Field Vole populations were subject to periodic crashes. Also it seems the reasons for these three to five year fluctuations are not really understood

Annual statistics (24th March-26th October)

	No of Days seen	No of occasions when >1 seen (mainly with young)
2004	160	38
2005	107	19
2006 to 9 June	24	0
2006 after 9 June	0	0
2007	201	35

Clethrionomys glareolus Bank Vole
21/04/07 1 under a tin in Hogmoor, Moor Copse (JL)
23/10/07 1 at Rushall Copse (JL)
29/10/07 3 under a tin at Hosehill (JL)
24/02/07 to 17/10/07 613 sightings in total. Voles were seen under all but one of 34 snake sheets in the year – these were mostly Bank Voles. Nests with young were commonplace.(TR/RR)

Arvicola terrestris Water Vole
18/02/07 Adult at Causeway, Steventon (SR)
28/10/07 Adult at Sutton Courtenay Env Educ Centre SU501918 (Rd'A)

A couple of months later we were reading in wildlife magazines and newspapers that 2006 was indeed experiencing a sharp decline in vole numbers. So feeling a bit smug that we had detected a change several months before reading about it, we decided to delve into our records to see what they told us.

As we delved, that smug feeling began to evaporate. The reason being, that the warning signs had been there long before we realised anything was afoot. Way back in early June 2005 was the last time we had seen more than one Field Vole together. Prior to that it was not unusual to discover two together, or nests full of youngsters. So it seemed that for well over a year, the evidence suggested a failure to breed on the site. No surprise therefore that in 2006 no Field Vole sighting had been made after 9th June.

The area was still regularly patrolled by both Kestrels and Tawny Owls, so it seemed that they were not dependant upon Field Vole snacks. Perhaps our Grass Snakes were to blame, yet further examination of our records suggested otherwise. Surely when we had last discovered nests full of young Field Voles, it might be expected that a day or two later a snake with a full tummy would sometimes be found nearby but this was not the case. So no explanation was apparent, and we waited to see if and when *Microtus agrestis* returned.

2007 monitoring of our sheets began on 24th February. One was seen on that first day, and in the subsequent weeks it soon became apparent that they were back. April saw several nests full of young with no hint of problems. Such was the recovery that the number of sightings suggest that 2007 was their best year since at least 2003. All this despite the continued presence of predators such as Kestrels, Tawny Owls, Weasels and Grass Snakes. Based upon even earlier records it would appear that there is still some way to go before the Field Vole recovers to its peak numbers. It will be interesting to see what 2008 brings.

A brief statistical summary of our sightings appears in the Vertebrates Recorder's Report.

THE WEATHER AT READING DURING 2007

Ken Spiers

Department of Meteorology, University of Reading

Annual The first seven months were thoroughly miserable, with only April standing alone, being the driest month of the year as well as the sunniest. It was not until August that weather conditions began to improve and we enjoyed a reasonable late summer and autumn. Five of the first seven months had above average rainfall, with July the wettest month of the year. Overall, the year was the wettest since 2002 and the fifth wettest since 1971. However, temperatures remained above average throughout, with only July and August below, and December equal to their long-term averages. This also affected the number of air frosts, and with the wet and warm conditions prevailing through the winter months of January and February, the number was the lowest since 2002. Surprisingly, sunshine totals remained high throughout the year, with the annual total the highest since 2003. This was helped by the high monthly totals of March and April, with January and December the least sunny; however, both were above their long-term average, which helped the annual total. The reason for the very wet first half of the year was the lack of any high pressure systems acting as a block and it was not until August that high pressure began to dominate our weather. However, the year 2007 recorded the wettest summer since 1941 and the third wettest since 1921. The last four months all recorded mean monthly pressures over 1020 millibars; this was unprecedented, and has not happened in the last fifty years.

January Frequent low pressure systems and fronts from the Atlantic, brought mild, wet conditions to the British Isles during the first three weeks of the month. There were varying amounts of rainfall every day, with occasional sunny periods. It became very stormy at times; especially on the 18th when a cold front crossed our region accompanied by very strong winds. A wind gust of 73 mph was recorded during this storm; the highest wind gust since February 1990. Temperatures during this period were very mild day and night, with the warmest days of the month on the 19th and 20th, 14.1° Celsius. By the 22nd it

had turned decidedly colder with northerly winds blowing. The first snow of the season fell on the 24th as a small depression moved southwards. After that it became dry and sunny, with temperatures rising, with clear skies at night producing ground frosts.

February A dry, very sunny and mild start to the month, with high pressure centred over the country. However, by the 5th, a short cold spell followed, bringing with it a very heavy fall of snow on the 8th, as a front approached southern England, coming up against the cold air. It was the heaviest snowfall our region has witnessed for nearly seventeen years. By the middle of the second week, conditions became unsettled, windy, with rain, heavy at times. Apart from a brief respite, from the 17th to 19th inclusive, the weather remained unsettled to the end of the month; with rain every day, sunny intervals and mild day and night-time.

March A very unsettled start, with depressions and fronts bringing varying amounts of rain to our region. The 4th and 5th were especially wet, with over 11 millimetres of rain both days, however, between the rain there were long periods of sunshine; making it very pleasant at times in the near normal temperatures. The middle of the month became dry, sunny and mild, clear skies helped to produce frosts, as a high pressure began to build over northern France, to dominate our weather. This was followed by a short cold spell, with winds northerly in direction and snow showers on the 19th, 20th and 22nd. After that, high pressure established itself over Scandinavia and brought warmer winds blowing from the continent. Temperatures began to rise; however it became changeable by the end of the month, with some rain.

April This was arguably the best month of the year. Very sunny: the sunniest April since records began in 1956, very warm: the warmest since before 1958 and the driest since before 1921. The first half of the month did witness clear skies at night and this brought on ground frosts. Temperatures peaked on the 15th with a reading of 23.7° Celsius. The first real rain was on the 23rd, when a warm front crossed our region, producing 0.7 millimetres of rain, which turned out to be the wettest day of the month. The next couple of days saw one or two weak fronts cross the country but produced little or no rain. By the 26th high pressure had established itself again, with temperature rising into the low twenties, the 30th recording the sunniest day of the month, 13.6 hours.

May A dry, very warm and sunny start to the month, as high pressure to the north of the British Isles brought a light easterly airflow over the southern part of the country. As high pressure moved away, during the start of the second week, this allowed fronts to move in from the west, bringing with them the first real rainfall for nearly five weeks. It became more unsettled as the month progressed, with over half an inch of rain recorded on the 13th. Daily amounts of sunshine were below average during this period; nevertheless temperatures remained above average. However, conditions improved as high pressure replaced the unsettled weather, becoming drier and sunnier, with temperatures rising. The 26th witnessed a vigorous depression move up from northern France, producing nearly 40 millimetres of rainfall on the 26th and 27th; in fact the 27th was the wettest day for nearly three years recording 31.6 millimetres. Also during this period, temperatures dropped well below average, very cool for May. The weather improved during the last few days of the month, with light rain at times but a little sunnier and with temperatures returning to near normal.

June With high pressure centred over or near the British Isles, the first half of the month was mostly dry, very sunny at times, with temperatures near or a little above average. The 2nd and the 5th both recorded the highest daily sunshine totals of the month, 14.1 hours. However, all was to change in the second half of the month, with the lack of any high pressures acting as a block, low pressures and fronts tracked their way across the country at regular intervals, with rainfall amounts light to medium. There was a brief interlude, when a ridge of high pressure developed to the south of the country, which helped to produce the warmest day of the month on the 19th, 25.0° Celsius, but the day ended in a thunderstorm, when 19.3 millimetres of rain fell, making it the wettest day of the month. The rest of the month remained unsettled, with further heavy falls on the 24th, 25th and 30th.

July Weather conditions were changeable at the start of July, with most days recording rain, although in the form of light showers. In between the showers there were reasonable amounts of sunshine; however, temperatures were a bit below average during the daytime. The warmest part of the month was between the 14th and the 19th, when temperatures hovered around normal for July. The main

feature of the month happened on the morning of the 20th, when a vigorous low pressure moved northwards over us, producing very heavy rainfall accompanied by thunder, with localised flooding to the west of our region. 26.5 millimetres fell on the 20th and 42.5 on the 21st, which was the highest daily total since August 2004. The rest of the month remained changeable.

August The first part of the month was dominated by high pressures, which produced warm, dry and very sunny weather conditions. This period was only punctuated on the 2nd when a cold front moved southward over the country but as it reached our region rainfall was light. On the 5th the temperature reached 27.6° Celsius, the highest of the month; it was also the sunniest day of the month, with 13.7 hours recorded. From the 12th onwards, it became unsettled, as high pressure moved away and was replaced by low pressure systems and fronts. Rain was moderate to heavy at times and with temperature dropping below average, it felt very autumnal. However, high pressure re-established its dominance by the 23rd and remained stationary for the rest of the month, becoming dry, with temperatures rising and very sunny at times.

September A fine and settled start to the month, dry, with temperatures above average and with nearly every day enjoying long sunny spells. The warmest day was the 6th, 23.1° and the sunniest was the 11th, 11.3 hours. The first ground frost of the season was recorded during the early morning of the 15th. However, by the 19th, high pressure had moved away and a warm front tracked its way across our region, producing light rain. From then on the weather became more unsettled, with very wet days on the 23rd and 25th, the latter being the wettest day of the month with 15.5 millimetres recorded; it was also accompanied by thunder. Temperatures had dropped below average by the 26th, as high pressure to the west of the British Isles brought northerly winds across the country. It became dry and sunny for a time but this was short lived, as a low pressure moved northwards, bringing with it cloudy and wet conditions by the end of the month.

October This was a month when short periods of unsettled weather were interposed by much calmer ones, dominated by high pressures. The wettest day of the month happened during one of these periods, with 16.6 millimetres during the morning of the 9th. Between 18th and the 25th it became cool and dry, as high pressure established to the west of the British Isles, directing light northerly winds over the country. It was during this time that the first air frost was recorded, during the early hours of the 21st. The 20th recorded the highest daily pressure, 1038.1 millibars; it was also the sunniest day of the month, with 9.0 hours. However, most of the time temperatures were near or a little above normal for October, with the warmest day on the 13th, when 19.1° was recorded. By the end of the month, temperatures were near normal and it was fairly dry and very sunny at times.

November A dry, fairly sunny start, with temperatures rather mild for the month of November. There were a couple of cold fronts that crossed our region on the 5th and 8th but they produced only light rain. The middle of the month was showery, with sunny intervals inbetween but this was quickly replaced by high pressure on the 15th. This was the start of a short cold spell, with temperatures below average and air frosts at night. The lowest temperature of the month was recorded on the 16th, -3.9°. From then on it became rather unsettled, with heavy falls of rain on the 18th, 19th and also the 21st, which was the wettest day of the month with 17.5 millimetres. By the 23rd, high pressure had built and a calm period followed with dry, near normal temperatures but it remained fairly cloudy. The month finished with light showers and near normal temperatures.

December The first part of the month was very stormy, with rain at times, occasionally heavy, and strong winds. Temperatures during this period were well above average, but it was fairly dull, with four of the days sunless. However, by the 9th there was a change to much cooler conditions, with air frosts at night, becoming dry as high pressure became dominant. Temperatures remained well below average for the next couple of weeks, with a minimum temperature of -5° recorded during the early hours of the 20th. By the 22nd high pressure began to move away eastwards and this allowed fronts to move in from the Atlantic. Rainfall was light to moderate and it became very dull; with temperatures rising to near, or a little above average. The last two days of the month saw high pressure once again establish itself over our region, becoming dry but still remaining dull.

DAILY WEATHER RECORDS: 2007 – UNIVERSITY OF READING (WHITEKNIGHTS)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Daily Temperatures °C													
Mean	7.6	6.5	7.8	12.2	13.1	16.1	16.3	16.3	14.5	11.2	7.7	5.4	11.2
Mean Maximum	10.2	9.5	11.9	17.7	17.2	20.2	20.2	21.0	18.8	15.0	11.4	8.6	15.1
Mean Minimum	4.9	3.5	3.7	6.6	8.9	12.0	12.2	11.6	10.2	7.4	4.0	2.2	7.3
Mean Daily Range	5.3	6.0	8.2	11.1	8.3	8.0	8.0	9.4	10.0	7.6	7.4	6.4	8.0
Extreme Maximum	14.1	12.5	16.4	23.7	24.5	25.0	23.1	27.6	23.1	19.1	16.9	14.6	27.6
Date	18,19th	27th	11th	15th	24th	19th	15,19th	5th	5th	13th	1st	6th	5th August
Extreme Minimum	-2.1	-6.3	-1.9	0.9	3.7	6.6	7.2	7.9	5.9	-0.2	-3.9	-5.0	-6.3
Date	26th	7th	22nd	5th	29th	28th	31st	1st	27th	21st	16th	20th	7th February
Extreme Grass Minimum	-9.1	-8.1	-7.0	-6.0	-1.7	0.1	1.6	1.9	-0.6	-6.0	-6.0	-10.4	-10.4
Date	27th	7th	22nd	5th	15,20th	28th	31st	7,10th	15th	21st	17th	20th	20th December
Days with													
air frost	2	7	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	6	11	29
ground frost	14	13	18	15	7	0	0	0	1	10	14	16	108
Hrs at/below 0°C	-	-	-	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	-	-	-	-
Sunshine Hours													
monthly total	64.5	67.1	178.7	232.5	176.5	164.8	197.0	206.7	139.2	99.3	80.8	60.4	1667.5
% of Possible	24.4	23.9	48.7	56.0	36.8	33.4	39.6	45.9	36.7	29.8	30.0	24.3	37.1
Daily mean	2.08	2.40	5.77	7.75	5.70	5.49	6.34	6.67	4.64	3.20	2.69	1.95	4.56
Precipitation													
amount in mm	68.2	81.1	44.7	0.9	100.8	99.3	115.6	40.5	40.1	35.1	68.8	45.6	740.6
Rain days	19	18	12	2	19	17	20	10	7	8	16	12	160
Max rain in one day													
(mm)	13.9	14.0	11.5	0.7	31.6	19.3	42.5	12.4	15.5	16.6	17.5	8.2	27.6
Date	6th	14th	5th	24th	27th	19th	20th	16th	26th	9th	22nd	8th	20th July
Mean wind speed													
(mph)	6.0	3.8	4.4	3.3	4.2	3.4	3.9	3.1	3.1	2.0	2.7	4.3	3.7
Days with													
Sleet or snow	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Snow lying	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	4
Fog at 0900 GMT	0	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	1	1	7
Thunder	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	2	0	4
Hail	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Pressure													
Mean (mbs)	1017.6	1008.3	1018.2	1024.0	1012.8	1013.0	1012.2	1017.9	1021.4	1024.9	1022.1	1022.1	1017.9
Highest	1033.0	1041.0	1038.2	1030.2	1025.0	1026.4	1022.2	1033.6	1033.5	1038.1	1036.3	1041.6	1041.6
Date	27th	3rd	10th	2nd	23rd	5th	30th	26th	7th	20th	2nd	13,14th	13,14th December
Lowest	989.9	979.4	994.8	1013.6	999.7	997.8	1000.7	996.9	1007.0	1013.0	999.9	984.6	979.4
Date	18th	12th	1st	25th	27th	25th	23rd	15th	24th	29th	19th	9th	12th February
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year