

The Reading Naturalist

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THE READING NATURALIST

No 61 for the year 2008

The Journal of the
Reading and District Natural History Society

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OBITUARIES

Colin Grayer

Colin died, after a long battle with cancer, on the 6th March, 2008. He worked at the Statistical Services Centre, within the School of Biological Sciences at the University of Reading, where many students and staff received the benefit of his considerable skills. Music was another of his passions and he played as principal clarinettist with the Henley Symphony Orchestra. Society members will remember him as a frequent visitor, both to our evening meetings, and especially to the summer outings.

He and Renée regularly sent in plant records, and we will all miss his quiet good nature, sense of humour and companionship. Our sympathies are extended to Renée, who, we understand, wishes to increase her involvement with the Society, where she will always remain most welcome.

Theo Homer

Theo died on the 17th January, 2008. He was a member of the Society from the late 1950s until the year before his death, and audited our accounts for 12 years from 1976-89. He had wide interests including history (he had a large collection of models of British warships that he had made), hockey which he played for Berkshire and later umpired, gardening and travel.

Moths were his natural history interest and he made many notable finds such as re-finding (jointly with Michael Tweedie and Tony Harman) Olive Crescent (*Trisateles emortualis*) at Gussetts Wood, Bucks, in July 1962. He moth-trapped widely in Berks, often with his great friend, Brian Baker. He frequently trapped the classic sites of Padworth, Burghfield and Woolhampton and contributed many records to Brian's *The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire*, published in 1994, which Theo helped to finance. Brian presented him with a copy inscribed: "To Theo, in memory of many trips together – your valued help made this book possible. Brian 11.x.94"

(Thanks to Tony Harman for background information)

John Ward

John Ward, who died on 25 March 08, was a member of the Society for 35 years, having joined as a family, with wife Sheila and children John and Sandra, in 1972/3. They were active members for many years, enjoying walks as a family and attending lectures. Son John grew to be much taller than his father, but they continued to be known respectively and affectionately as "Little John" and "Big John". John and Sandra now have families of their own, John still living locally in Tilehurst, and Sandra having an academic career in America.

John, M.Phil., C.Eng. & M.I.Mech.Eng. worked at WRE, Aldermaston, at the same time as one of our past presidents, Alan Brickstock. Although continuing to be loyal members, John and Sheila have not been able to be active in the Society recently, because of ill health. The church and their religious beliefs have always been very important to them, and have given comfort to John in recent years. He is remembered as a very kind and thoughtful man.

ANNOUNCEMENT

We regret to report the death of Hugh Carter, for many years a stalwart of the society, who passed away in February 09. A full obituary will appear in next year's issue.

PRESIDENT'S RAMBLINGS

Jan Haseler

One of the great strengths of *Reading and District Natural History Society* (RDNHS) is its expert team of Honorary Recorders. Their annual reports give a detailed picture of the current state of the natural history of the area and highlight significant sightings or worrying declines. They also publish observations from members. The Society publishes records for an area which lies within 20 miles of Reading. (Investigations with a piece of string and a collection of Ordnance Survey maps on the lounge floor indicate that this area stretches from just short of Wantage, almost to Kintbury, to Beacon Hill and Overton, to about 5 miles south of Basingstoke, to Lasham, Bentley and Farnham, to 2 miles beyond Aldershot and into the outskirts of Guildford, to Worplesdon and Woking, Virginia Water and Wraysbury, to Gerrards Cross and Beaconsfield, almost to Great Missendon, to Princes Risborough and the outskirts of Thame, to Great Milton and the outskirts of Abingdon.)

I have dipped into a Reading Naturalist from each of the last 5 decades to see what was of interest to the Honorary Recorders of the time. In 1958, the Honorary Recorder for Botany was Miss K.I. Butler. She reported that Musk Orchid (*Herminium monorchis*) had been lost to the plough and that Man Orchid (*Aceras anthropophorum*) at a site near Ipsden was in danger of being exterminated by pigs. Brian Baker was the Honorary Recorder for Entomology. His report included records of Heart Moth (*Dicycla oo*) and Waved Black (*Parascotia fuliginaria*) at Woolhampton. Dr. E. V. Watson was the Honorary Recorder for Ornithology. He reported that Northcourt Avenue in Reading was a stronghold for Hawfinches (*Coccothraustes coccothraustes*). He wrote about Tree Sparrows (*Passer montanus*) near Hardwick House and Cirl Buntings (*Emberiza cirlus*) at Cleeve.

In 1968, the Honorary Recorder for Botany was Mrs. Betty Newman. Lesser Meadow-rue (*Thalictrum minus*) at South Stoke was a new record for Oxfordshire and Venus's Looking Glass (*Legousia hybrida*) was reported from Mongewell Woods and Sulham. In his Entomology report, Brian Baker lamented the failure of the Coley Recreation Ground colony of Hornet Clearwing (*Sesia apiformis*) moths due to the removal of their host Black Poplar (*Populus nigra*) trees. He described a RDNHS mothing night at Pamber Forest, where Miss Cobb was kept very busy logging the names of Lepidoptera which visited 2 portable mercury-vapour lamps. Hugh Carter was the Honorary Recorder for Vertebrates. He reported that several colonies of Yellow-necked Mouse (*Apodemus flavicollis*) were known to exist in the Newbury area. They had been recorded in Berkshire for the first time in 1967. 2 Otters (*Lutra lutra*) were recorded at Caversham Lock. The Society no longer had an Honorary Recorder for Ornithology, but there was a report on the invasion of Nutcrackers (*Nucifraga caryocatactes*), the first since 1911. A Gannet (*Sula bassana*) collided with a house in Earley and died 5 days later.

In 1978, Betty Newman reported that Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) had been found at Frilford Golf Course, the first record for many years. About 500 plants of Field Fleawort (*Senecio integrifolius*) were seen on a RDNHS excursion to Whitehorse Hill. Hugh Carter reported that Brook Lamprey (*Lampetra planeri*) were present in the Pang near Pangbourne. He described the eviction, with the help of a shrimping net, of a Long-eared Bat (*Plecotus auritus*) from the living room of a cottage at Peppard Common. A colony of Dormice (*Muscardinus avellanarius*) was found at Upper Basildon. Brian Baker reported that Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) butterflies had been seen at South Ascot. They had been recorded for the first time in Berkshire in 1977. Norman Hall's report of Varied Coronet (*Hadena compta*) at Earley was another first record for the county.

In 1988, Betty Newman reported that Prickly Poppy (*Papaver argemone*) had been seen on the new Vastern Road roundabout in Reading and Meadow Clary (*Salvia pratensis*) had been found at Lodge Hill. Brian Baker hoped that 2 sightings of White-letter Hairstreak (*Satyrrium w-album*) at Ashford Hill indicated that the species might be making a slight recovery, following the devastation caused by Dutch Elm Disease. He reported that a Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*) butterfly in Knowle Close was an unusual record for a Caversham garden. Dr. Alan Brickstock was the Honorary Recorder for Fungi. He wrote that *Bulgaria inquinans*, a rubbery black Ascomycete, was found in unusually great abundance in a large log pile at Virginia Water, a legacy of the October 1987 gale. Hugh Carter reported that 2 Badgers (*Meles meles*) ran close to Brian Baker while he was setting up the moth trap for the annual RDNHS mothing night at Wasing Wood.

In 1998, Betty Newman reported that Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*) and Green-winged Orchid (*Orchis morio*) had been found at Beenham Hatch. Alan Brickstock wrote that the fungus foray at Boze Down Vineyard, Whitchurch had been particularly enjoyable. Following a lunch with wine tasting, an outstanding number of wax-cap species were found, including *Hygrocybe coccinea*, *H. strangulata*, *H. intermedia*, *H. pratensis*, *H. psittacina*, *H. conica* and *H. nivea*. David Notton was the Honorary Recorder for Entomology. He reported that the Purple-bordered Gold moth (*Idaea muricata*) which was found at Wildmoor Heath was the first Berkshire record since 1951. Hugh Carter wrote that there had been no Chub (*Leuciscus cephalus*) in the Holy Brook next to Reading Central Library because road works had at times reduced water levels to a few centimetres in depth.

Members are encouraged to keep records of their sightings in 2009 and send them to the appropriate recorders. A record consists of the name of the species, a count or estimate of the number seen, the grid reference, location and date of the sighting and any interesting comments. All records are valuable. The plight of the Water Vole (*Arvicola terrestris*) and the Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) butterfly illustrate that formerly common species may become rarities in a relatively short period of time. Species can also change their behaviour. On a recent field trip to Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve, Dr Michael Keith-Lucas pointed out how Rabbit (*Oryctolagus cuniculus*) lifestyles were changing in the Chilterns. Before myxomatosis, most Rabbits lived communally in underground warrens. Since then, solitary rabbits that live above ground have become more common. Rabbits used to be regularly seen in daylight – but there are now so many Red Kites (*Milvus milvus*) in the Chilterns that the Rabbits have become nocturnal. There are still plenty of Rabbit droppings, but no sign of the Rabbits themselves during daylight hours. In his talk to the Society in November, Rod d'Ayala suggested that amphibians and reptiles were probably the best indicator species for the health of the environment. Please send us your amphibian and reptile records.

In 2008, we welcome a new addition to the recording team. Dr James Wearn is our new Honorary Recorder for Lichens. Following a degree in biology at the University of London, James went on to study Microbial Ecology for his doctoral research project. He examined and manipulated the interactions between grasses and their symbiotic mycorrhizal fungal partners and other soil micro-organisms. From 2006-8, James had a postdoctoral research post at Royal Holloway University of London, where he investigated the diversity of plant-inhabiting (endophytic) fungi in several herbaceous plants in UK grasslands. He is now Research Assistant to the Keeper of the Herbarium, Library, Art and Archives at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. His main research activity is the preparation of a revision of the genus *Clerodendrum* with Professor David Mabberley and international collaborators for *Flora Malesiana*. He is also a member of the HLAA Strategic Planning Committee and Secretary of the international Vascular Plant Classification Committee. We hope that James will be able to show us something of the world of lichens on some of our future field trips.



Watch Group members busily constructing wooden hedgehog houses

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THE FISHLOCK PRIZE

Walter Charles Fishlock (1875-1959) was the Honorary Secretary of the Society for 21 years and the President for 4 years. He was born in Bathford, Somerset and attended the village school until he was 12 years old. He started his career as a gardener's boy, earning 15 shillings per week. At the same time, he attended classes at the newly opened Technical School in Bath, where he became fascinated by the scientific aspect of botany. At the age of 23, he became a student-assistant in the Palm House at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. In 1902 he took up a position with the Imperial Department of Agriculture in the West Indies, where he worked on the cultivation of sugar cane, bananas and cotton. From 1920 to 1932, he worked for the Department of Tropical Agriculture in West Africa.

After his death, the Society was asked to administer a fund, set up in his memory, to encourage the study and enjoyment of natural history by children under 12 years of age.

In 2008, the Fishlock Prize was awarded to Sutton Courtenay Watch Group. They were delighted to receive a cheque for £50.

MEMBERSHIP

Norman Hall

22 new members were welcomed to the Society in calendar year 2008:

Sylvia Atkinson, Woodcote
 David Booth, Woodcote
 Christine Brewster, Earley
 Anne Deacon, Goring Heath
 Howard Dingwall, Pangbourne
 Jane Dolton, Whitchurch-on-Thames
 Tom & Francesca Evans, Caversham
 Pauline Fisher, Caversham
 Helen Green, Maidenhead
 Jenny & George Greenham, Hampstead Norreys

Howard Jones, Farley Hill
 Edward Jukes, Caversham Park
 Lesley Kidaka, Padworth Common
 Jane Langridge, Woodley
 Vera Parham, Whitchurch-on-Thames
 Vanessa Payne, Padworth
 Margaret Stone, Henley-on-Thames
 Alan & Jenny Wilcockson, Newbury
 Dr Christine Williams, Earley

THE OPAL PROJECT

Jan Haseler

The Society has recently been sent a questionnaire as part of the Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) project. OPAL is a Big Lottery funded project which is led by Imperial College London, with 14 other partners, including the Natural History Museum in London. An overview of the project can be seen on the OPAL website:

<http://www.opalexplorenature.org/>

The OPAL project is trying to draw in new people to participate in environmental science, and to support the existing tradition of "amateur experts" in this country.

The Natural History Museum is running a programme to promote and enhance the role that natural history societies play in developing the understanding and conservation of UK biodiversity. They aim to help natural history societies to develop and attract new members. This will be done by publicising existing societies, researching current society activities and constraints, and providing funds for development projects. The Natural History Museum maintains a register of local natural history societies and this already points to the RDNHS website:

<http://www.nhm.ac.uk/jdsml/research-curation/library/digital-library/nature-societies-online/>

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.

- 7th Jan 08 Jan Haseler has seen Primroses in flower at Shinfield Park.
Martin Sell had seen an immature Caspian Gull and a Black-necked Grebe at Searles Farm and Scaup and Ferruginous Duck at Wigmore Lane.
- 15th Jan 08 Dr Michael Keith-Lucas reported that, on the Society's excursion to Watlington Hill on 13th January, a plant of the Chiltern speciality, Wild Candytuft, was found in flower.
Fred Taylor reported that he had seen a Peregrine Falcon on 12th January at 08.30 hours flying east to west along the river Thames besides Oracle Park, Shepherds Hill between Sonning and Reading.
Colin Dibb reported that his *Mahonia japonica* 'Charity' bush in RG31 had been visited by worker and queen bumblebees whilst in flower throughout November, December and January to date.
- 5th Feb 08 Tony Rayner observed a Harlequin Ladybird in his house at Cholsey.
Colin Dibb saw a Red Admiral Butterfly on *Mahonia japonica* flowers in his garden (RG31).
Chris Bucke observed a Cornelian Cherry (*Cornus mas*) in full bloom on the left hand roadside as one leaves Caversham Heights shortly before the entrance to Abbey Rugby

Club. He also observed that frogs were mating in the ornamental ponds at Florida Court, Bath Road, Reading.

Graham Saunders reported that there were Egyptian Goose goslings at Maiden Earley and the newts were active in his pond.

Roger Frankum saw Lesser Scaup in the gravel pits at Woolhampton.

Fred Taylor found a Fallow Deer antler at Crazies Hill in mid-January. It was partially covered in leaves and dry grass in a low, fairly dense cover 12-15 year old deciduous plantation of Beech and oak. This antler had probably been knocked off by low branches in spring 2007. The antler had teeth marks where it had been gnawed by voles/mice!

Norman Hall brought in a complete skeleton of a female Roe Deer and the bones from 2 fetuses, a complete skeleton of a Roe Deer and the bones of two fetuses found within it. One of the deer's horns was normal, the other deformed, due to hormonal imbalance. They were found in Wiltshire in 1980s. Norman asked if anyone would like the skeleton and Stuart Hine took them for use at the Natural History Museum.

General observation that there are many huge bumblebees around. The Great Crested Grebes are doing their courtship display at Sandford Lake. There are many Snowdrops and Aconites at Swallowfield Churchyard.

Tony Rayner had an incident to report. He went into his green-house that morning and found a Blue Tit there with no obvious means of entry. Then he remembered that the previous night had been windy, and in the dark he had found something on the ground which he had placed in the greenhouse. The Bluet Tit had been in a bat box and had fallen 15ft to the ground below and survived!

19th Feb 08 Jan Haseler saw a March Moth on the wall at Shinfield Park and a Comma and a Red Admiral.

Tony Rayner observed the first Common Lizard of the year basking in the sun at 3.00pm one Sunday afternoon. This is a week earlier than any previous record. He also saw a flock of Bramblings.

Roger Frankum observed a Woodlark in Upper Woolhampton and recorded 55 Robins in 1 hour. He sighted a Little Egret on the Pang in Bucklebury, his first ever sighting there, and has seen Snipe in Bucklebury on occasion.

Chris Bucke recorded the observation of a Brimstone butterfly in his garden 2 weeks ago and Marsh Marigolds in Wellford Park today. He also saw an egret in a tree at Great Shefford, near Lambourne.

Martin Sell observed a boar Badger, which ran, in front of his car at the bottom of Path Hill, Pangbourne and a Barn Owl in a tree at the King Charles Head, Goring Heath.

Ken Palmer saw a herd of 17 Roe Deer and a Buff-tailed Bumblebee in his house in Reading.

4th Mar 08 Jan Haseler reported that she saw frogspawn for the first time in her pond last Friday (February 29th).

Meryl Beek reported that she had her first sighting of frogspawn on the previous day.

Tony Rayner asked if anyone with a large amount of frogspawn could tell him and he would go to count the number of balls of spawn present.

Martin Sell saw both Honey Bees and bumblebees in his garden, together with a cock Pheasant and 2 Muntjac eating plants and 2 Bullfinches on the nut feeders.

Chris Bucke reported seeing Grey Squirrel for sale in the Farmers market. On 24th February, he saw a Weasel as road kill in Sonning Common-Rotherfield Peppard on B4812 very close to the Rotherfield Peppard road sign. On 2nd March at Purley-on-Thames on grass verge of A329 to east of post office he saw about 30 larvae of the Scarlet Tiger moth (*Callimorpha dominula*) on comfrey.

- 18th Mar 08 Colin Dibb saw Sand Martins while walking around the lakes.
Dot saw a Red Admiral at Dinton Pastures on a very windy day. She saw a Brambling, a Siskin and a Blackcap in her garden.
Michael Keith-Lucas saw a Brimstone butterfly 2 days ago. All of the tadpoles in his garden pond have hatched and are swimming well.
Martin Sell had seen a Brimstone butterfly the previous day.
On March 9th at Padworth Lane a Common Sandpiper was seen; this is a very early record.
Catherine Side has a Blackcap, possibly nesting in her garden.
6 Bramblings were seen at Hungerford Marsh.
Green Hellebores have been seen on the Ridgeway, where their numbers are increasing.
- 7th Oct 08 Susan Twitchett had counted 117 Large White caterpillars on cabbage plants at Coromandel, Bethesda Street, Upper Basildon. A large number of these butterflies have been seen this summer.
Martin Sell had seen Hornets with a nest nearby at Caversham Heath Golf Course.
Graham Arnott had seen two Hornets in his garden at 36, Upper Warren Avenue.
- 21st Oct 08 Colin Dibb saw a flock of Ring-necked Parakeets at Cookham village on 7/10/08. Apparently these birds are also in Palmer Park and Maidenhead village but have not been seen there by Colin. The parakeets travel from the Maidenhead area along the A4 to Reading $\frac{3}{4}$ hour after sunrise and return $\frac{3}{4}$ hour before sunset.
Jan Haseler reported seeing a flock of Siskins at Moor Copse and also a Weasel's-snout (a rare arable flower).
Earlier in the day, at Cholsey (SU592868), Tony Rayner had seen: 1 Slow-worm; 1 Common Lizard; 4 groups of Bank Voles; 4 groups of Field Voles; 1 Wood Mouse and a Common Toad. He also saw these butterflies: 1 Large White; 2 Red Admirals; 3 Commas and at least 3 Small Coppers. He reported that he had seen a record number of both Common Lizards and Slow-worms in 2008. Grass Snakes have fared well but other reptile species have mushroomed in numbers.
- 4th Nov 08 Fred Taylor saw 3 bats, possibly small Pipistrelles, at Crowsley Park, Sonning Common.
- 18th Nov 08 Jan Haseler brought in a fungus for identification, which she collected from Shinfield Park. Tony Rayner said that Radley Lakes are under threat. Abingdon Naturalists are spear-heading the opposition.
Jan Haseler observed a Red Admiral on Ivy Blossom at Shinfield Park this lunchtime.
Chris Raper saw an Earth-star.
Graham Saunders saw a bumblebee in his garden on heather, which is most unusual.
- 2nd Dec 08 There was one exhibit, a fungus brought in by Jan Haseler, *Leucopaxillus (Clitocybe) giganteus* and Tony Rayner showed us his moth records. The speaker, Stephen Jury, had brought 2 tables of Moroccan memorabilia.
Jan Haseler reported seeing Winter Moths in pools and wet ditches.
Chris Bucke saw a pair of Black Swans on the Thames at Kings Meadow.
Roger Frankum saw an American Wigeon at the Racecourse Gravel Pit (from Nov 22nd) and now at Lower Farm Gravel Pit in Thatcham, and 6 Little Egrets at Hungerford Marsh.
Martin Sell mentioned a Cotton Pygmy Goose from India, an escapee from Beale Park, and a Green Woodpecker.
June Housden reported 2 bumblebees on Winter Jasmine in her garden in Caversham.
Alice Ayers had seen 1 bumblebee today in her garden in Earley.
Julia Cooper had seen a Red Admiral.

EXCURSIONS 2008

Meryl Beek

They say variety is the spice of life – certainly excursions this year have had plenty of variety of habitat – and plenty of goodies as well! Numbers attending have been well maintained. My thanks are especially due to Jan Haseler, who has regularly sent in paragraphs to the local newspapers about the Society's excursions and who also gave a wonderful digital presentation at the Christmas party in December. Reports from January to October are based on her observations.

On Sunday 13th January, Michael Keith-Lucas led a field trip to Watlington Hill. A very unusual record for January was a Wild Candytuft plant which was in flower in a hollow. Deep in one of the dark yew woods, members found the twisted and aromatic dead wood of ancient junipers. Watlington Hill was originally a sheep-grazed hillside with Juniper bushes. Yew trees grew up in the protection of the Junipers, then eventually shaded them out and killed them. There are only 2 Juniper bushes which still survive there. (10 people attended)

On Saturday 26th January, Martin Sell led a joint field trip with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to Pagham Harbour in West Sussex. The sun shone brightly, although the wind was cold. A Glaucous Gull was seen and there were about 14 Mediterranean Gulls on the lake. Brent Geese, Red-breasted Mergansers, Pintail, Goldeneye, Dabchicks, Black-tailed Godwits, Grey and Golden Plovers, Knots, Dunlins and Turnstones were all observed during the day. (14 people attended)

On Saturday 8th March, Meryl Beek led a walk along the Ridgeway, starting from Nuffield. Early Dog Violets, Wood Anemones and Lesser Celandines were in flower. Highlight of the trip was the rediscovery of a big bank of Green Hellebore plants, a local Chiltern speciality. The site was last visited by the Society in 2003, and it was thought that the number of plants has increased significantly since then. (14 people attended)

On Saturday 12th April, Jan Haseler led a field trip to BBOWT's Moor Copse nature reserve near Tidmarsh. In Corner Field, one of the SSSI meadows in the reserve extension, Cowslips and Barren Strawberries were in flower on the drier gravel ridges. In the wetter parts of this field, members found Marsh Marigolds, Lady's Smock and Water Avens in flower and they were able to identify the leaves of Great Burnet and Betony. Primroses, Wood Anemones, Wood Spurge and violets were in flower in the woodland and the Early Purple Orchids were just coming into flower. A large flock of Linnets flew across the arable field and a whirligig beetle whizzed across a stream in the woods. (28 people attended)

On Saturday 26th April, John Lerpiniere led a field trip at Paice's Wood near Aldermaston. The walk started in the woodland area, where the Bluebells, Primroses and violets were looking superb. Also identified were Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage and Wood Speedwell. Orange-tip, Peacock and Brimstone butterflies were on the wing in the more open coppice plots. A bank with pollarded Field Maples marks the course of an old roadway. A Garden Warbler was singing at the top of the wood. The tiny blue flowers of Early Forget-me-not and Common Whitlow-grass were seen in the gravel area near the entrance to the site. (19 people attended)

On Wednesday 7th May, Martin Sell led an evening walk in the Berkshire Downs near Aldworth. People were hoping to see or hear Stone-curlews, but on this occasion they were disappointed. Yellowhammers and Whitethroats were singing in the bushes next to the track and a Brown Hare was spotted in a distant field. As dusk fell, a Green Carpet moth was netted for closer inspection and then released. (11 people attended)

On Saturday 10th May, Malcolm Storey led a walk round Inkpen Common. Pale Dog Violet is a special plant of the reserve, and its white flowers could be seen in the short heathland turf. Yellow Tormentil, pink Lousewort and inky-blue Heath Milkwort were all in flower. Mining bees were seen going in and out of their holes on a sandy bank. Male Fern, Lady Fern and Broad-buckler Fern were all found near the stream. Common Heath moths were disturbed from the Heather. (13 people attended)

On Saturday 24th May, Alice and Eric Ayres led a walk to the Hurley Chalk Pit, which proved to be an oasis of biodiversity. About 20 plants of Bee Orchid were noted inside and outside the reserve, also several plants of Twayblade. A colony of about 30 White Helleborines was found in the Beech wood above the chalk pit. Plants coming into bloom in the chalk pit were Mignonette, Clustered Bell-flower,

Rockrose, Salad Burnet, White Campion, Common Milkwort and Field Forget-me-not. Agrimony, Hemp Agrimony, Hemlock, Marjoram and Carline Thistle were also noted. Peacock, Orange-tip, Speckled Wood and Holly Blue butterflies were seen, also a single Cinnabar moth and many specimens of an attractive crimson and gold *Pyrausta* moth. There was abundant evidence of Badger activity in the green lanes around the chalk pit. (9 members attended)

On Tuesday 3rd June, Chris Bucke led an evening walk in the Farley Hill area. The plan was to walk along the footpath next to the River Blackwater, but following a day of heavy rain, the river was in flood and the footpath was deep under water. So an alternative route was found, higher up the side of the valley. In the still, damp air, scents were very intense, in particular for the Honeysuckle and the Elder flowers. A Cuckoo was heard, and Song Thrushes and Blackbirds were singing. (3 people attended)

On Saturday 14th June, there was a recording day at Withymead Reserve, which lies on the Oxfordshire bank of the Thames between Goring and South Stoke. In the afternoon, Malcolm Storey and Chris Raper led the trip, concentrating on fungi and insects. Harlequin Ladybirds were observed. Some people returned in the evening to run moth traps on the board walk at the edge of the marsh. As it was getting dark, a Serotine bat was seen hunting over the reserve. This is a large and relatively uncommon species. 38 species of moth were identified, including some unusual reedbed specialists. Last to arrive was a spectacular Eyed Hawkmoth. An Oblique Carpet was quite a rare species for this area. (9 people attended)

On Saturday 21st June, Martin Sell led a field trip to the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's Noar Hill reserve near Selborne. The reserve is at the site of extensive medieval chalk pits and has wonderful wild flowers. Eight species of orchid were seen, including Musk, Frog and Bee and the unusual Dragon's Teeth was found, with large pale yellow pea-like flowers. The reserve is also very good for butterflies, but regrettably it was a damp, cloudy day, so none were seen. (9 people attended)

The annual coach outing on Saturday 28th June was to the RSPB's Arne Reserve on the southern side of Poole Harbour in Dorset. Most people stopped for lunch at a small sandy beach looking out over the harbour, where they could watch Shelducks, Curlews and Little Egrets. The mud-flats were covered with purple sea-lavender, Sea Spurrey and other interesting salt-marsh plants which Renée Grayer helped to identify. Then the party walked round to a sheltered part of the heath where they saw Silver-studded Blue butterflies and, in the wetter areas, several species of dragonfly. Star of the day was a Sand Lizard which posed on a fence rail for everyone to see. Sika deer were quite common on the reserve. (27 people attended)

In the evening of Thursday 3rd July, Chris Bucke led a walk in the Lewknor area. The group walked along little-visited lanes which became dead ends when the M40 was built. A spring was found which had formerly been a watercress bed. There were lots of Swifts near a church and, of course, many Red Kites. (6 people attended)

The annual mothing event was at BBOWT's Hartslock reserve on Saturday 5th July. A gale was blowing from the south-east. At 5pm, Norman rang from Salisbury, where it was pouring with rain, to ask whether it was worth returning. But it wasn't raining in Reading, so Norman drove back, and it turned out that the north-west facing field at the entrance to the Hartslock reserve was probably the most sheltered place in the Thames Valley. Four traps were run and 88 species of moth were identified, including the very rare Kent Black Arches and other unusual moths such as Wood Carpet and Royal Mantle. Most people packed up about at 1am, but Norman stayed overnight. A few members came along next morning to view the catch – but they had to wait until Norman woke up at 9:50! (5 attended at night and 4 attended next morning)

On Saturday 19th July, members had a second visit to Moor Copse and were given a very responsible job (a first for the society?) of doing the weekend stock-watch. Volunteers check the cattle regularly. The party had to check that there were 15 and that they were all in good health. They are assumed to be well if they are capable of standing and there is nothing too unpleasant coming out of either end. In the wetter parts of the meadows, dark red flowers of Great Burnet and spikes of Purple Loosestrife contrasted with the white drifts of Meadowsweet. In the drier parts, yellow Lady's Bedstraw and purple knapweed and Betony were in flower. A Pepper-saxifrage plant was found in Cottage Meadow. Meadow Brown and Essex Skipper butterflies were abundant. The main ride through Park Wood was widened last winter and this is where people saw 2 graceful Silver-washed Fritillary butterflies. (15 people attended)

On Saturday 26th July, Sally Rankin led a walk at Kingwood Common, near Stoke Row. It was a hot afternoon, but the woodland was pleasantly shady and cool. Clearings where Heather and heathland flowers are flourishing have been opened up on the common. A clump of about 40 Broad-leaved Helleborines were in flower under the trees. The group walked into Broad Platt Common, where a wide ride through the pine trees had many flowers, including Dyer's Greenweed. A single Wild Service tree was found – one of the rarest native trees in our area. Afterwards, Janet and Jerry Welsh invited everyone back to their Sonning Common garden for cold drinks and delicious home-made cake. (17 people attended)

On Saturday 2nd August, Graham Saunders led a field trip to the gardens of The Vyne, a National Trust property at Sherborne St John. The aim of the outing was to look at bumblebees. There had been rain in the morning, but it was sunny and warm in the afternoon during the bee survey. Five different species were found, nectaring on *Monardia*, burdock, runner beans and verbena. Also identified were 2 kinds of cuckoo bumblebees, which do not collect pollen, but lay their eggs in the nests of other bumblebee species. (18 people attended)

On Friday 29th August, Tony Rayner led a field trip to North Moreton, a new venue for the society. The focus, on a very hot and humid day, was on the wildlife of the fields and field margins. Three different species of wagtail were spotted on the grain stores – Pied, Grey and Yellow. A Hobby was seen flying high overhead. Highlight of the day was a Grass Snake. (26 people attended)

On Saturday 13th September, Sean O'Leary led a field trip in pleasant sunshine to Olddean Common near Sandhurst. Three different kinds of heather were in flower, together with Dwarf Gorse. Target species was the rare Crested Buckler Fern, which was located in a particularly wet part of the heathland. It is a Red Data Book species of base-poor fens which requires full sun and is intolerant of shading by species such as birch. Four Woodlarks were foraging on the path, apparently unaware that they were being watched. Their eye-stripes seemed almost to meet at the back of their heads. Fungi found included bright red wax-caps. (8 people attended)

On Sunday 28th September, Michael Keith-Lucas led a well-attended field trip to BBOWT's Decoy Heath reserve. Reptiles were very much in evidence, with sightings of an Adder, 3 Slow-worms and a good number of Common Lizards. A Poplar Hawk-moth caterpillar was a surprise discovery on the hinge of a gate. Flowers included Blue Fleabane, Grass Vetchling and Trailing St John's-wort, and a Broad-leaved Helleborine plant which appeared to have been partly eaten, perhaps by deer. (19 people attended)

On Saturday 25th October, Gordon Crutchfield led a fungus foray at Lackmore Wood near Woodcote. The leaves on the Beech trees were beginning to show glorious autumn colours. Growing on a pine stump was the grey Jelly Tooth fungus, which has white teeth instead of gills on the underside. A sharp-eyed member of the group spotted an earth star next to the path. The Gingerbread fungus, growing on a branch of rotting wood, stained bright purple when tested with the caustic soda which Gordon carries as part of the fungus-identifier's tool-kit. (15 people attended)

On Thursday 13th November, the annual combined coach trip between the Society and Reading Gardeners went to Sir Harold Hillier's gardens at Ampfield near Romsey, Hants. Unfortunately the day was dull and wet, but the atmosphere of the party was good and the winter garden was particularly enjoyed. (38 people attended)

On Saturday 6th December, Colin Dibb led a walk in his favourite Stanford Dingley area of the Pang Valley. About 50 Lapwings were seen in a field and Nuthatches, a Kite and a Kestrel were spotted. A large fungus, *Leucopaxillus giganteus*, was identified and also, later, a red fungus *Peniophera quercina*. This bright and clear morning made a fitting end to a good year of recording and interest. (10 people attended)

As the Society goes forward into 2009, all walk leaders are thanked for their help. As most will realise, this does not just involve being there on the day. There is quite a lot of forward planning of finding a suitable route, noting possible hazards and, positively, seeking out plenty of natural history interest on the way. Every walk leader has achieved this admirably. On a personal note, I would like to thank the whole society for all the help I have received as the Excursions Secretary over the last 10 years. This task has been very enjoyable, but the time has come (*anno domini* perhaps!) to hand over to another person who will be elected at the March 2009 AGM. I wish my successor every success and as much sense of fulfilment as I have had – so on we go!

WEDNESDAY WALKS

Meryl Beek

Once again the monthly Wednesday walks have been popular and have included lots of natural history interest at all seasons of the year. Ken Thomas, indefatigably, has led 5 of them this year, and the other 7 have been led by regular members of the group. They are all thanked for their work.

On 16th January, David and Meryl Beek led a group of 19 to the Peppard Common / Satwell area. Redwings and Fieldfares were seen and a Greater-spotted Woodpecker and Coal Tits were in the woods. On a roadside patch, the Stinking Hellebore was in flower, and the Snowdrops were just ready to burst into flower. Bluebell leaves were coming through and a first Lesser Celandine was seen.

On 20th February, the venue was a walk from the Bell at Aldworth on the Downs, covering Westridge Green, Warren Farm and part of the Ridgeway. A misty morning made the Downs look mysterious, but the sun came out just after lunchtime. dog-violets, Lesser Celandines, Snowdrops and Primroses were all now in flower. Flocks of Lapwings, Long-tailed Tits and Goldfinches on a tree were all of interest. Chris Bucke is thanked for leading this party of 19 people.

On 19th March, Ken Thomas led 19 people around Snelsmore Common and Winterbourne on a bright and spring-like day. The season was ahead of itself, as Bluebells were seen in flower in a south-facing wood. Water Dock was growing in a stream in Winterbourne village and Moschatel was seen in a hedgerow nearby. A grassy bank was bright with spring flowers including Lesser Celandines, Primroses and violets (both white and purple). It was a very happy walk to remember.

On 16th April, the Wednesday walk started at Skirmett in the Hambleden valley. Ken Thomas led a party of 22 people. It was a pleasant morning with good distant views – which made up for some of the steep hills! Spring was advancing fast and the party was rewarded with a nice meal at The Frog afterwards, even if nothing unusual was seen that day!

The 21st May Wednesday walk was a morning with a difference. In fact it was more of a “look” than a walk. Rod d’Ayala introduced the party of 25 to the ponds on Nettlebed Common. The first was Sea Pond, which was shallow and clear. Roman pottery has been found here, and, of course, the old brick kiln is nearby. The second was Jack’s Pond, which has muddy ground around it. The pond supported several Frogs and Toad tadpoles, which were all black. Frog tadpoles (paler in colour) were also seen. In the nearby undergrowth there was a Common Lizard. Heath Woodrush was present, also Hairy Woodrush and Toad-rush. There is just one SSSI on the common, which is Priest Hill with Bell Heather on top, but none lower down. The deposits are examples of varying geological layers which have been overgrown with scrub on the damp heathy ground. Someone asked the definition of a pond. The answer is “any size of water which is filled for at least 4 months of the year” – so now we know!

18th June found the party of 15 in Pangbourne to visit the confluence of the River Thames with the River Pang. This is a bit hidden away near the doctors’ surgery. The River Sul in Sulham Lane also proved interesting, as did the Pangbourne churchyard with white Herb Robert growing. The water meadows nearby were full of Meadowsweet and Valerian. Thank you Ken for leading this interesting local walk.

On 16th July, a party of 20 walked in one of Chris Bucke’s favourite areas – Boxford Common, beyond Newbury. This was a real botanical paradise as, among other things, there was Many-seeded Goosefoot on a path side, Corn Marigolds in a field nearby and Lesser Bugloss and Marsh Willowherb on the actual common. There were lots of Pyramidal Orchids and many stands of Centaury around. Earlier in the walk, a Large Emerald moth had just emerged, and, after drying its wings, flew alongside the party, following a field edge for some distance. A pure magic morning!

On 20th August, about 20 people met outside the Seven Stars public house, Knowl Hill for a walk with Ken Thomas, which started up the knoll to admire the view over to Windsor Castle. Then the party went over the fields to Littlewick Green. Dwarf Willow was seen in two places in the village and 24 different fungi were listed by Gordon Crutchfield including The Miller, Yellow Stainer and Red-cracked Boletus. Also grasses were carefully observed by one or two members of the party.

On 17th September, David and Meryl Beek led a party of 28 people around Hailey and Mongewell woods. Field edge plants were the things to look for and Field Madder, Pale Toadflax, Chicory and

Purging Buckthorn were noted. A Raven and many Red Kites were also around on this clear and sunny day.

On 15th October, Ken was unfortunately not well, and David Beek led a party of 11 from the Rising Sun at Witheridge Hill. The walk was not the one that Ken would have done (that has been left for him to lead next year!), but instead the party went near Neal's Farm and Stoke Row. Observations included Spurge Laurel and a Western Hemlock seedling. A list of fungi was compiled and included *Tricholoma sulphurea* (Sulphur Knight), which is a little less common than the others seen.

On 19th November, Mick Cross led his first walk for the Society and took 15 members on a route from Cowleaze Wood north of Christmas Common. This was an energetic walk, but much enjoyed. Tony Rayner saw a Badger, Chris Bucke pointed out the only native Box tree outside Surrey's Box Hill, and Ploughman's Spikenard, Wild Privet and Spindle in fruit on the chalk grassland slopes were observed. Thank you Mick!

On 17th December, Ken Thomas took a party of 12 into an area not often visited by the Society, which went up the hill from Moulsoford. There was a look into the early Victorian church, and birds seen included a Buzzard and Red Kites (of course!). The find of the morning was one plant of Shepherd's Needle with a single flower on it. This is a rare plant nowadays and made a nice end to 2008.

Thanks to everybody who has contributed to this excellent and diverse season.

INDOOR MEETINGS 2008

7th January – Terry Bond – Bird Watching Identification: a New Approach

This was a joint meeting with the RSPB. The speaker said he welcomed audience participation but asked that nobody actually named a bird before he led us through his identification procedure. This included the habitat as well as the bird. The first example was standing in rough, tussocky grass and was quite large and upright with a tail. The bill was strong and pointed with the head 1.5 times the length of the bill. The leg was semi-invisible in the grass but was feathered at the top. The wings ended halfway down the tail which was long. The head was red and black with the red starting at the bill and ending at the nape giving a crown stripe. The base of the bill and around the eye and moustache were black. The cheeks were pale green with barring towards the legs. The back was olive green with slate grey and black on the primaries. The tail was yellow and the head ran into the bill. At this stage the audience was allowed to name the Green Woodpecker.

The same procedure was followed for Hoopoe, Greenshank, Tufted Duck, Redshank, Spotted Redshank, Royal Tern, Laughing Gull and Wheatear and comparisons were drawn between Black-tailed Godwit and Bar-tailed Godwit including flight patterns.

A telling moment came when an Avocet was briefly shown and everybody knew what it was. But, when the image was removed, nobody was able to describe it in the detail that had been observed in the previous examples.

A number of questions were answered and it was clear that the speaker had been well received. (41 Society members and 51 from the RSPB attended)

5th February – Stuart Hine – The Natural History Museum: an Insider's View

Stuart is a member of this Society and we were very pleased to welcome him to talk to us. He is the Manager of the Insect Information Service at the Natural History Museum in London. His talk showed us some of the history of the building which was designed by Alfred Waterhouse and opened on Easter Monday, 1881. Waterhouse used terracotta, allowing great detail in his design. Externally there are gargoyles of animals emerging from the eaves of the roof, while inside all of the supporting columns are inlaid with plants and animals; even the ceilings are painted with animals and useful plants (herbs,

coffee, medicinal plants). Waterhouse lived in Reading in Foxhill House, Whiteknights Park in a house he designed; the Town Halls in Reading, Manchester and Wokingham were also designed by him. There is a similarity of style, although difference of scale, in each of these buildings.

The Natural History Museum is one of the top tourist attractions in London. In the entomology department, 75 staff and associates (PhD students) work alongside overseas visitors making 125 people in all. They have 170,000 drawers of insects and many more in spirit jars and on slides. 80% of the collection consists of Lepidoptera which total 28 million specimens. The NH museum purchased a collection of 45,000 stag beetles for £45,000 to add to its existing beetle collection: now it has the best beetle collection in the world. The library too is unrivalled; it is the best entomological library in the world. There are many historic leather-bound books and letters too. Those from Charles Darwin to Wallace tell a fascinating story.

Stuart described his job as Manager of Insect Information Services. Annually this department receives, from the public, 4,000+ “specimens” to identify. These can be actual specimens (the biggest was a 10inch long centipede), to parts of the body (legs of spiders are common) or a vague description (it was brown, as big as my hand and moved fast) or a rough drawing (a blob with 4 small blobs in the centre-what is this?). He observed that the number of insects in food has risen with the recent increased consumption of imported organic whole food; bread beetle, grain weevil, mealworm beetle, flour mites, spider beetle, rust red flour beetle – all are on the increase. (Look carefully when you open a packet!)

This was a very interesting talk, delivered in an easy engaging style. Many questions followed this informative and entertaining talk which was attended by 64 members and 2 visitors.

19th February – David Nobbs – Stop Climate Chaos!

David is Community Talks Officer for the RSPB. His talk was divided into three sections. In the first David presented the scientific evidence for climate change, in the second he outlined what would happen worldwide when climate change kicks in and lastly he predicted what would happen to the wildlife in the UK in 2020 and 2050, when climate change has happened.

The talk was full of fact with many graphs giving the evidence in support of climate change. The release of greenhouse gases at a faster rate now than ever before is raising the temperature of the Earth which already is causing the loss of polar ice caps, thereby increasing the height of sea level. Since 1900 sea level around the UK has risen by 10cm and more flooding is predicted if this temperature rise continues. Currently 50 million people world wide are affected by flooding. Many of our birds live in coastal areas, putting them at risk. An imaginative solution had been carried out at the RSPB reserve at Freiston Shore. Managed realignment has taken place with breaches being made in the old sea wall and trenches dug, thereby allowing the sea to flood inland at high tide, making a salt marsh. In the UK we have lost three-quarters of our salt marshes due to land-use change. It is good to see a new habitat created working alongside the effects of climate change for the benefit of wildlife.

The more extreme weather events that we have seen over the past few years are due to climate change; these have impacted on the wildlife in the UK. Normally Blue Tits breed in April when there is plentiful food available. Last year the weather in April was bad so they nested in May when food was scarce; this reduced the number of Blue Tit young. He predicted that, as the annual rainfall decreases and temperature increases, plants will gradually move northwards by 1km per year. In the UK, towns, roads and industry create barriers so that animals may have difficulty following their plant food source: by 2050 one third of all land-based plants and animals will face extinction. The distribution of wildlife will change with many European animals moving in to the South Coast. Already we have Cattle Egrets in Cornwall and possibly the Hoopoe will come in too.

This was a lively, well presented talk with wonderful photography of birds throughout, enjoyed by 42 members and 2 visitors.

4th March – Andy Coulson Phillips – Greenham and Crookham Commons

Andy Coulson-Phillips spoke to 53 members and 9 visitors. His talk provided a comprehensive overview of this significant wildlife site, covering the history of the common, the restoration following the closure of the airbase, and the current management programme. Evidence of human activity there dated back to Neolithic times, with Bronze Age and Roman artefacts also having been found. Following wartime use as an airfield, it reverted to common land, then in the early fifties became an American airbase, gaining notoriety in the 1980s, as a base for cruise missiles, and for the women's peace camp outside its gates. After the closure of the base, the land was bought by a developer, who, in 1997, set up an industrial estate, but gifted most of the site to Newbury District Council.

Restoration began with the removal of the 3.5 km long runways, a quarter of a million cubic metres of asphalt, and a million cubic meters of concrete, which provided hardcore for the Newbury bypass. 23 underground fuel and lubricant tanks had to be dug out, with the excavations providing wetlands and pools. Missile silos and the control tower remained as a reminder of the site's history. The fence around the base was replaced by stock fencing, and public access was restored in 2000. Initially the site comprised 45ha of lowland heath, 125ha of grassland, 135ha of woods, 3ha of pools and wetlands, and also 100ha of gravel, previously under buildings and runways, which would be encouraged to revert to lowland heath, the rarest habitat. Islands of heath outside the base area were part-cleared of scrub: heath within the base, having been regularly mown, was in better condition. Cattle grazing resumed and a small group of Exmoor ponies was acquired.

The mixture of bare ground for nesting and woodland edge provides habitat for 11 pairs of Woodlark, and 6 pairs of Nightjar. Dartford Warbler first bred in 2000, and there are now 11 territories. Migrants caught in mist nets include Redpoll, Firecrest and Snipe. Lapwing, Ringed Plover, Little Ringed Plover and Redshank are seen on the open areas of the common. Reptiles include Adder, Grass Snake and Common Lizard, with all three species of newt in the ponds. 35 species of butterfly have been recorded, including Silver-washed Fritillary and the occasional Purple Emperor. White Admirals are seen where rides in the ancient woodland have been opened up. A particular habitat renewal project is targeted at the reintroduction of the Silver-studded Blue. Bell Heather, Cross-leaved Heath and Ling are common on the acid heath, while the grassland is locally much less acid, and supports Adder's Tongue, broomrape, Cowslips and Green-winged Orchid. In one pond Starfruit has been introduced, a rarity which attracted much interest when it flowered in 2007. Its large area and mixture of habitats make Greenham an extremely important wildlife site.

21st October – Rod D'Ayala – Toad, Mole and Ratty

56 Members and 10 visitors attended this talk which examined the key questions for nature conservation in the UK by looking at a range of species and habitats – some valued and others not. What do we do? How do we decide what is important? Do we get it right? These apparently simple questions are not as easy to answer as they would seem. Many nature conservation decisions are based as much on whim (seems like a good idea), tradition (doing things because it has always been done the same way, even though after critical examination it may not achieve what we want now) and sentiment (remember the halcyon days when squirrels were all red and the countryside was a haven for all species of wildlife).

We have a divisive system of looking at our environment, based on areas being set aside for specific reasons – a system in part at least derived from post WW2 decisions driven by political, economic and social need, to create different functions and organisations e.g. forestry, farming and nature conservation – rather than embracing a holistic view espoused by some at the time that these cannot operate in isolation.

The slow progress to true landscape-scale conservation is hampered by all this historic baggage, which still means few can break free from dividing our world into ever-smaller units of the so-called "semi-natural" habitats – producing acceptable, traditional and recognisable landscapes which are ecologically flawed and ultimately not self sustaining. There will always be a place for these kinds of managed habitats, but will we ever achieve any truly wild landscapes in the UK unless we can stop being scared of what might happen if we actually learn to live with it, and in some cases leave it to get on with it and look after itself.

Rod gave a well-illustrated talk to a large audience: he challenged our ideas and made us think. Unfortunately, his slide projector was not working well but this detracted only slightly from his excellent content.

4th November – Alan Parfitt – Otmoor a new RSPB Reserve

Located a few miles northeast of Oxford, Otmoor was a diverse and extensive wetland some 200 years ago. Drainage and river "engineering" have since reduced the wetland to a few fragments. In 1997 the RSPB purchased about 200 hectares of arable land with the aim of converting it back into wet grassland and 22 hectares of reedbed. This conversion, in partnership with the Environment Agency, has now been completed. In the mean time, the area of the Reserve has been almost doubled through further land purchases. The Reserve now supports a significant proportion of the Upper Thames breeding waders, together with large numbers of wintering wildfowl and several less common species of birds. Many plants, mammals, reptiles, amphibians and insects are now also returning.

The talk was enjoyed by 55 members and 3 visitors.

18th November – Peter Worsley – Aspects of the Natural History of the Arctic

The speaker on 18th November 2008 was Peter Worsley, Emeritus Professor of Quaternary Geology at Reading University talking on 'Aspects of the Natural History of the Arctic' to 61 members and 11 visitors. The first location he discussed was Banks Island in northern Canada which has permafrost to depth but with an active layer in summer of unfrozen ground. Global warming is leading to instability and building collapse, and oil and gas exploration has to be suspended when the air temperature is above freezing to avoid surface damage. Features discussed included periglacial mud slides, erosion and ice melting from wave action when the sea is unfrozen for three to four months in summer, triangular ice wedges which grow from snow deposition, polygon shaped surface areas with raised banks and lakes in the centre and oxbow and braided (multi-channel) rivers. The formation of pingos, dome shaped structures, was discussed, including some from his second location in eastern Greenland. The village of Sachs with seventy Inuit inhabitants was shown, supplied by an airstrip and, once a year, a barge manoeuvred by a tug. Various birds, animals and plants were shown but not discussed in detail.

2nd December – Stephen Jury – the Flora of Morocco

This fascinating talk was attended by 45 members and 3 visitors. Stephen started by explaining how he first got involved, in the days when Professor Heywood was Head of the Department of Botany at Reading University, trying, along with David Bramwell and Ian Richardson, to sort out some of the taxonomic problems which existed between the plants of southern Spain and those of Morocco. Many plants had migrated between the two continents at times in the past when the Straits of Gibraltar had become closed and the Mediterranean Sea had largely evaporated. A student, Mohamed Rejdali, who came from Morocco to undertake research for a PhD under Stephen's supervision went home to start writing a new flora of Morocco, so Stephen became involved with this from its inception. Stephen took us from the Rif Mountains and their spectacular gorges in the north, with rare conifers such as *Abies marocana* and *Tetraclinis articulata*, to the Anti Atlas in the south, with many plants shared with the Canary Islands, such as *Dracaena draco* and *Aeonium arboreum*. He brought a fine display of Moroccan artefacts and books about Morocco and its flora, to add to the ambience of the evening.

17th Dec – Christmas Party

There was a strong turn-out for the Christmas party. 52 members enjoyed good company and an amazing spread of food, while puzzling over the quizzes and voting for their favourite entries in our annual Photographic Competition (see below).

Thank you to all the members and speakers who volunteered to write the above accounts of the meetings.

PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2008

Chris Raper – competition coordinator

Once again, the competition was well-supported – and the quality continues to improve year on year.

Lepidoptera Common Blue butterfly	Graham Mulrooney
Other Invertebrates Hibernating Garden Snails	Chris Bucke
Botany Daisies	Malcolm Storey
Fungi Fly Agaric	Malcolm Storey
Birds Robin	Graham Mulrooney
Other Vertebrates Common Lizards	Tony Rayner
Open Wildlife green lizards in Bulgaria	Tony Rayner
Best overall picture Common Blue butterfly	Graham Mulrooney

Graham Mulrooney was awarded a shield and a book token for winning “Best Overall Picture”.

Our thanks to Chris Raper for running the competition and counting the votes.

Some of the winning entries are shown on pages 17 and 18.

SU76 – FINDING THE BUTTERFLIES IN A 10K SQUARE

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS – by Jan Haseler

The Upper Thames Branch of Butterfly Conservation coordinates records from Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire for the current national butterfly atlas, which runs from 2005 to 2009. In order to achieve good recording coverage across all parts of the three counties, ‘10K Champions’ have been recruited. It is their job to ensure that all the 2x2 km² squares (or ‘tetrads’) in their 10km x10km square (or ‘10K square’) get visited at least once in each season during the 5 year atlas period. In August 2006, I became the 10K Champion for SU76, a 10K square in mid-Berkshire. This article describes how I have gone about finding the butterflies in the 10K square. It describes habitats, both good and bad, and some of the problems which have been encountered. It also describes some of the other wildlife of the area.

A number of butterfly atlases have been published in recent years. The first local atlas was produced by David and Caroline Steel. It was at 10 km resolution (so a ‘dot’ in the atlas indicated that a butterfly species had been found in a 10x10 km² square) and covered records for the period 1975-1984. The National Recorder for Butterfly Conservation, Dr Jim Asher, is also the Recorder for the local Upper Thames Region. He coordinated the production of an Upper Thames butterfly atlas at 2 km resolution for the years 1987-1992. This was published as *The Butterflies of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire*. Building on his experience from the local area, Jim and his team from Butterfly Conservation rolled out the scheme nationally to produce the award winning *Millennium Atlas of Butterflies in Britain and Ireland*, which covered the period 1995-1999. Both these atlases were

repeated for a second period and now it became possible to see how butterfly populations were changing. The national atlas is currently being repeated for a third 5 year period.

The sensitivity of butterflies to environmental conditions makes them ideal indicators of the health of the environment. Butterflies occupy a wide range of habitats; with one or two generations a year, they can respond rapidly to changes in the environment; they are easy to identify and record and there are extensive long-term datasets available. As a result, they have been adopted by the government as part of an index for measuring biodiversity and habitat quality. The local wildlife trust also uses butterfly data as a tool to monitor the effectiveness of their habitat management.

Butterfly monitoring is done mostly by volunteers. The observers, not surprisingly, have a tendency to visit the sites where they are likely to see the less common species. The County Butterfly Recorder, on the other hand, wishes to achieve good coverage across the whole region, for the boring farmland and the housing estates as well as the honey-pot sites. Towards the end of some of the previous atlas periods, emergency surveying has been needed for under-recorded areas. The 10K Champion scheme is an attempt to ensure consistent recording coverage throughout the 5 year atlas period.

SU76 is the name assigned by the Ordnance Survey's National Grid to the 10K square which lies to the south of a line from South Reading to Wokingham. Only the Berkshire part of SU76 is included in the butterfly survey area. Its south-west corner is at Stanford End, where the River Loddon leaves Hampshire and flows into Berkshire. The western boundary runs through the villages of Beech Hill and Grazeley, crosses the M4 and reaches into Green Park, Reading. The northern edge lies mostly to the north of the M4 and runs across to Wokingham. The eastern boundary runs south through Finchampstead to the Hampshire border. The southern boundary follows the county border, first along the River Blackwater and then along the Roman Road called the Devil's Highway. Within SU76 are the villages of Riseley, Swallowfield, Spencers Wood, Three Mile Cross, Shinfield, Arborfield, Farley Hill, Eversley, Barkham and Sindlesham.

The greater part of SU76 lies on London Clay, while in the east and south are regions of the more acid Bagshot Beds. The River Loddon flows north-eastwards across the 10K square. It is joined at Swallowfield by the River Blackwater, then flows between Shinfield and Arborfield, before being joined by two streams which come in from Arborfield and Barkham. Over on the eastern boundary, the Emmbrook in Wokingham just comes into the 10K square. The Foudry Brook in the far west is the easternmost tributary of the River Kennet.

Butterflies need food (nectar from flowers or aphid honeydew or sugars from ripe fruit), shelter from the wind and weather and the correct food plants for their caterpillars. Finding the butterflies in the 10K square is mostly a quest for the flowers, plants and shelter which they require. The following sections describe good and bad sites for a series of habitats, starting with grassland.

Next to the River Loddon at Stanford End is an unimproved hay meadow which has a stunning display of Fritillaries (*Fritillaria meleagris*) in mid-April. (See photograph, page 18.) It is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, or SSSI. While the fritillaries are in flower, a regular trickle of botanists visits the meadow. But it is private land and there are no public footpaths nearby, so I asked the Stratfield Saye Estate for permission to monitor the butterflies there. Regrettably they refused, so my butterfly species list for the meadow remains at a miserable two – a few Peacocks (*Inachis io*) and a Speckled Wood (*Pararge aegeria*).

In contrast to the response from the Stratfield Saye Estate, I would like to express my appreciation of the generous response from the manager of the University of Reading Farms. The University owns a large area of land lower down the Loddon Valley. The farm manager gave me a detailed map of the area, put no restrictions on where I went and asked me to send him records of interesting sightings. Close to his office are the fields of improved grassland at the University's Hall Farm, Arborfield. These are large open fields



Improved grassland at Hall Farm, Arborfield

Photographic Competition – winning photographs



Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*) – Best Overall Photo & Best Lepidoptera
© Graham Mulrooney



Common Lizard (*Lacerta vivipara*)
Best Vertebrate © Tony Rayner



green lizards in Bulgaria
Open Wildlife - winner © Tony Rayner

Photographic Competition – a winning photograph



Fly Agaric (*Amanita muscaria*)
Best Fungus © Malcolm Storey

Fritillary Meadow at Stanford End



see the presidential address: SU76 – Finding the Butterflies in a 10K Square
© Jan Haseler

with no flowers and no hedges to provide shelter – a butterfly desert. For a proper scientific survey, they should have been checked regularly to confirm that there were indeed no butterflies. Instead, on a single visit in good weather in July, one distant and unidentified white butterfly was seen. By contrast, on the walk in along farmland tracks with hedges and hedgerow trees, also on University land, there were eleven different species of butterfly.

Next to the Village Green in Shinfield is an area of rough grass and bushes. It too is on University of Reading land and is the site of a former gravel pit. Along the northern boundary is a tall elm hedge with a big bramble bank in front. The grass is long with a scattering of flowers, including Common Knapweed (*Centaurea nigra*), Lady's Bedstraw (*Galium verum*) and Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*). Bramble bushes are dotted across the site, providing plenty of shelter. It is one of the better places in the area for the long grass butterflies. Two families of butterfly are particularly associated with grassland – the Browns and the Skippers. Of the Brown family, the Meadow Brown (*Maniola jurtina*), Ringlet (*Aphantopus hyperantus*) and Gatekeeper (*Pyronia tithonus*) are common in every tetrad, often occurring in high numbers. The Marbled White* (*Melanargia galathea*) also from the Brown family and the Large Skipper (*Ochlodes venata*), Small Skipper (*Thymelicus sylvestris*) and Essex Skipper (*Thymelicus lineola*) are much more restricted in their distribution.

The three orange skippers need grass which is left long over winter. They perch in a characteristic position, with the hindwings flat, and the forewings held up and sloping back at an angle. The Large Skippers are small butterflies, while the Small and Essex Skippers are tiny. The Large Skippers are the first to emerge – they can be seen from early June until mid-July. A few weeks later the Small Skippers appear – they are mostly on the wing from late June into August. Then a few weeks later again, the Essex Skippers start to emerge. The Essex Skippers have over-wintered as eggs, while the Large and Small Skippers have over-wintered as caterpillars in the long grass.

The former gravel pit area is also good for birds. All year round, there are House Sparrows, Yellowhammers and Linnets. In summer, there are Whitethroats and Blackcaps and in winter there are Stonechats and the occasional Reed Bunting. Some of the surrounding arable fields are not ploughed until quite late in the winter and they attract big flocks of Redwings, Fieldfares, Skylarks and Meadow Pipits.

To the south-east of M4 Junction 11 is a group of small fields with good hedges, which make wonderful sheltered grassland habitat. A public footpath runs through the fields, so access is not a problem – but there is little disturbance because few people choose to walk so close to the motorway. Lady's-smock (*Cardamine pratensis*) plants are plentiful in the unimproved, damp pasture and their flower heads can be searched in late spring for the bright orange eggs of the Orange-tip butterfly (*Anthocharis cardamines*). The adult butterflies can still be found in poor weather conditions, since they often roost on the flower heads with their wings together, showing the cryptic patterning on the undersides. The little micro-moth *Adela rufimitrella* can also be found on the flower heads of the Lady's-smock plants. It is a bronzy green, with long, curved, black antennae with white tips.

On another visit on a sunny July day, more than 20 Peacock butterflies were flying along the hedges and in an isolated hedgerow oak was a Purple Hairstreak (*Neozephyrus quercus*). The Purple Hairstreak overwinters as an egg, which is laid singly at the base of an oak bud. The caterpillars feed in the oak tree and then pupate on the ground. The adult butterflies are mostly found high up in the oak trees, feeding on aphid honeydew, which makes them quite hard to spot. So far, Purple Hairstreaks have been found in 6 tetrads of SU76, with 4 of these in isolated hedgerow oaks.

Warren Wood is a Local Nature Reserve on the acid soils at Finchampstead. It contains the largest example of a bell barrow in Berkshire, dating back to between 2000 and 1300 BC. There are two grassy fields and an area of secondary birch and oak woodland. The largest field is very sheltered, with a bank of Gorse (*Ulex europaeus*) next to the woodland. In early February, a Comma (*Polygona c-album*) was basking in the sunshine and bumblebees were visiting the gorse flowers. In early autumn, the field is dotted with enormous Parasol Mushrooms (*Lepiota procera*).

Common Stork's-bill (*Erodium cicutarium*) grows in the field at Warren Wood. It is one of the caterpillar food plants of the Brown Argus (*Aricia agestis*). In the previous two atlas periods, Brown Argus was

* colour photographs of some of the butterflies can be seen on page 25



Common Stork's-bill

Whereas the former gravel pit site in Shinfield is mostly grass with some flowers, this site is mostly flowers with some grass. Cut off on all sides by busy roads, it is now a Wildlife Heritage Site where nature can flourish undisturbed. A wide range of butterfly species are found here in good numbers. The Grove has proved to be the best place in the 10K square for Marbled White, with about 25 seen here in early July, compared with a maximum of 10 anywhere else. Marbled White is a large butterfly, with a single generation on the wing in June and July. It needs medium to long unimproved grassland with abundant nectar flowers.

mainly recorded from the chalk, with Common Rock-rose (*Helianthemum nummularium*) as the larval food plant. It is gradually expanding its range away from the chalk, with the eggs being laid on various crane's-bills and stork's-bills. It has been found in six tetrads so far, with two specimens at Warren Wood.

One of the best grassland sites is a triangle of land called The Grove, which lies between the M4 and the former Shire Hall at Shinfield Park.



The Grove, Shinfield Park

Michael Crawley's *Flora of Berkshire* reports the status of each species, as recorded in the Botanical Society of the British Isles' *Atlas 2000*. Interestingly, neither Pyramidal Orchid (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) nor Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) was recorded in the SU76 10K square in the BSBI survey. In June, there must have been at least 100 Pyramidal Orchids in flower at The Grove, with as many again on the adjacent south-facing motorway embankment. Grass Vetchling too was quite common here in early June. It is described as a plant of disturbed soil – and the site probably had a lot of disturbance during the construction of the M4.

At The Marshes, a Local Nature Reserve at Riseley, young broadleaved trees have been planted in a grassy field. While the trees are still small, the grassland is good for butterflies. There are abundant nectar plants, including thistles, Common Fleabane (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) and ragwort, which is the larval foodplant of the Cinnabar moth (*Tyria jacobaeae*). Seventeen species of butterfly have been recorded here, including Marbled White, Small Copper (*Lycaena phlaeas*), Common Blue (*Polyommatus icarus*), Purple Hairstreak and Large, Small and Essex Skippers.



Arable farmland at Spencers Wood

The next habitat to be considered is arable farmland. A particularly bad example for butterflies is the prairie-like landscape to the south of Spencers Wood. There are enormous fields with no hedges and no unploughed field margins. On a visit in good weather in late July, two Small Whites (*Pieris rapae*) were the only butterflies to be found along a half-mile length of track which had a broad bean crop on one side and a wheat crop on the other.

In contrast, the footpath which runs for about a mile through the Farley Farms land in the Loddon Valley near Arborfield is the second

best site which I have found in SU76, with 20 different species of butterfly. The farms are in a countryside stewardship scheme. All the fields have broad uncultivated margins which are wide enough to support the long grass species, there are good hedges with scattered hedgerow trees and conservation strips on both sides, there are scattered copses, and young broadleaved trees have been planted in one of the fields. On a warm sunny but windy day in early May, the sheltered side of a little copse was alive with Peacocks, Orange-tips, Holly Blues (*Celastrina argiolus*) and Speckled Woods. Further along, the sheltered side of a hedge added Brimstone (*Gonepteryx rhamni*) and Small Tortoiseshell (*Aglais urticae*) to the list.



Farley Farms at Arborfield

The Small Tortoiseshell is a formerly common butterfly which is doing desperately badly in our area at the moment. In the whole 10K square, I have seen just 5 Small Tortoiseshells in 2008. Three were on arable farmland – one on the Farley Farms land and two on the University Farms at Shinfield and Arborfield. One theory is that the decline is caused by the recently arrived parasitic fly, *Sturmia bella*, which is attacking the caterpillars.

Another good arable farmland site is the field which runs down to Thatcher's Ford in the Blackwater Valley, between Farley Hill and Swallowfield. A particularly good hedge runs down the western edge of the field. It is tall and wide, with a good mix of hedgerow trees, shrubs and climbing plants which provide a rich supply of nectar. Blackthorn blossom early in the season, bramble flowers in mid-summer and ivy blossom in the autumn are particularly good for butterflies. The hedge is not flailed regularly, so the blossom and berries can flourish. On the other side is a quiet lane, which is effectively a dead-end, because the ford at the bottom is too deep for ordinary vehicles. The orientation of the hedge is important. Butterflies like to be in the sunshine and out of the wind. This hedge runs north-south, so the field side is protected from the prevailing westerly wind direction. Commas, Red Admirals (*Vanessa atalanta*) and Peacocks are regular here, White butterflies patrol up and down and the uncultivated strip at the edge of the field is good for Skippers and Browns. In a pasture field, stock would graze right up to the hedge line. In an arable field like this, flowers can flourish undisturbed at the edge of the field.

Woodland is the next habitat which will be investigated. The White Admiral (*Limenitis camilla*) is probably the rarest butterfly which I have found in SU76. It is a UK Biodiversity Action Plan priority species. Its long term British population trend, for the years 1976-2004, is a decrease of 62%. It is a large butterfly with a distinctive flight, with short periods of wing beats followed by long glides. It has bold white markings on a rich dark brown background and the wing markings show clearly in flight. The margins of the wings are decorated with scalloped white fringes. The undersides of the wings have a distinctive combination of white, orange-brown and pale blue markings. The adult butterfly is on the wing



The Coombes, Arborfield

from late June to mid-August. Usually it is single brooded, but occasionally there is a second generation in September, as happened in 2006. White Admirals can be found in relatively mature or neglected woodland, as long as there are sunny nectar sources nearby. The eggs are laid singly on the edge of Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*) leaves, usually in a shady position and at a height of 1 – 2 metres. It over-winters as a caterpillar.

The Coombes is a large area of woodland which lies between Arborfield, Bearwood and Barkham. The upper parts of the woods are on the sandy Bagshot Beds, while the lower parts are on clay. It is the only place in the 10K square where I have seen Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Apart from

brambles, there are few flowers at the top of the wood, but half way down there are carpets of Bluebells, and this is where there is abundant Honeysuckle. Lower down there is a rich ground flora with Primroses (*Primula vulgaris*), violets, Wood Sorrel (*Oxalis acetosella*) and Wood Anemones (*Anemone nemorosa*). Single White Admirals have been seen nectaring on bramble blossom at the top of the woods and at the woodland edge in the field below the woods. There were also two Silver-washed Fritillaries (*Argynnis paphia*) here at the end of July, flying in the field below the wood and nectaring on knapweed flowers.

The Silver-washed Fritillary is a species of large mature woodlands with a good structure of large clearings and wide rides. The adults need sunny nectar sources such as bramble flowers, but they prefer the caterpillar food plant, Common Dog-violet (*Viola riviniana*), to be in the shade. The adult butterflies emerge in late June and can be seen flying well into August.



Farley Hill woods

The woods at Farley Hill also have populations of both White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary. Like The Coombes, the woods here are on Bagshot Beds at the top of the hill and on clay at the bottom. Farley Hill woods are a good place for spring butterflies too, with Orange-tips, Green-veined Whites (*Pieris napi*), Peacocks and Brimstones. There are many water-filled pits in the woodland, and I was surprised to find a pair of Mandarin ducks there at the end of March. During the winter, the woodland pools are a good place to find floating moths – Scarce Umbers (*Agriopsis aurantiaria*) in November, Mottled Umbers (*Erannis defoliaria*) and Winter Moths (*Operophtera brumata*) in December, Spring Ushers (*Agriopsis leucophaearia*) and Pale Brindled Beauties (*Phigalia pilosaria*) in January,

Dotted Borders (*Agriopsis marginaria*) in February and Small Quakers (*Orthosia cruda*) in March.

The Butterflies and Moths of Berkshire, written by former President Brian Baker, gives two further locations for White Admiral in SU76. Limmerhill Woods, to the south-west of Wokingham, failed to provide any interesting sightings but Beech Hill Coverts turned out to be another good site. A quiet lane leads from the village of Beech Hill to the Coverts. It became a dead-end when the A33 Swallowfield bypass was built and is now traffic-free. Silver-washed Fritillaries, White Admiral and Purple Hairstreak have all been seen nectaring on bramble at the side of the lane – once again, major road building leaves a little space for butterflies.

Woodland edge is a valuable butterfly habitat. One of the best locations is Shinfield Park. On the sloping north and west sides of the park is ancient, formerly-coppiced broadleaved woodland with a rich ground flora. In front of the woodland edge is a big bank of brambles, which provides a wonderful nectar supply in high summer. In front of the brambles is flowery grassland, with Lady's-smock for the Orange-tips and Green-veined Whites in spring and plentiful Bird's-foot-trefoil and Common Knapweed in summer. Scattered amongst the grassland are veteran oaks which are home to a colony of Stock Doves. Shinfield Park used to be an RAF Station, then it became the Met. Office College. In late 2002, after the Met. Office had moved from Bracknell to Exeter, the College site was sold to



Shinfield Park

developers. They erected fences around the veteran trees to protect them from the construction work and then built 300 houses. I was keen to find out if Silver-washed Fritillaries had colonised the site in the 5 years when there was no access, since they have been expanding their range in Berkshire in recent years. I was fairly sure that they were not there in 2002, when I was watching the site intensively. On 2 visits in July 2008, I failed to see Silver-washed Fritillaries. What I did see was lots of Small Skippers and Meadow Browns in the grassland, Holly Blues and Whites patrolling along the woodland edge and Commas and Peacocks on the brambles. The 19 species recorded here makes this the third best site for butterflies in SU76.

The best heathland site is Longmoor Bog at California Country Park near Finchampstead. This is the other SSSI in the 10K square. The drier parts are covered with heather, while the wetter parts have cotton-grass and long moor grass. Dragonflies are plentiful, but there have been no sightings of heathland specialist butterflies such as Grayling (*Hipparchia semele*) or Silver-studded Blue (*Plebeius argus*). Behind the paddling pool is a small damp meadow which was full of Common Spotted-orchids (*Dactylorhiza fuchsii*) in June and had many Small Skippers in late July. A walkway leads through an area of swampy woodland, with Alders (*Alnus glutinosa*) and Alder Buckthorn (*Frangula alnus*). Brimstones, which use Alder Buckthorn as the larval foodplant, are common here, as are Peacocks, which can be seen nectaring on the willow catkins in spring. The best butterfly sighting here was a White Admiral at the edge of the woods in late July.

Churchyards can be good places to find butterflies – much depends on the mowing regime. The best churchyard, with 18 species of butterfly, is All Saints, Swallowfield. It stands on slightly higher ground, above the River Blackwater where it enters Swallowfield Park. In February, the churchyard is full of snowdrops. These are followed in early spring by Yellow Aconites, Primroses and violets. In front of the church is a spring meadow, which is dotted with Lady's-smock plants. Swallowfield Churchyard is the best place in the 10K square for seeing Orange-tips. There are areas of longer grass where Large and Small Skippers, Meadow Browns, Ringlets and Gatekeepers are found in mid-summer. Pellitory-of-the-wall (*Parietaria judaica*) grows around the base of the church, and Star-of-Bethlehem (*Ornithogalum angustifolium*) and Nettle-leaved Bellflower (*Campanula trachelium*) grow in the churchyard. In the entrance porch is a management plan, which was drawn up by the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) as part of the 'Living Churchyards' project.



All Saints, Swallowfield



Shinfield Cemetery, Spencers Wood

Shinfield Cemetery, in Spencers Wood, was given to the village in the 1920s by a local farmer and is looked after by Wokingham District Council. Green-winged Orchids (*Orchis morio*) grow here (see the photograph on page 26) – but most years they get cut down by the grass-cutters. The council contracts out its grass-cutting services, which makes it hard to communicate with the people who are doing the work. One day I actually met the grass-cutters and was able to show them where the orchids were. I tried to persuade them to leave the flowers on the old graves which nobody visits. For a while, things

improved, but in spring 2008, the orchids were cut again and the old flowery graves were scalped again. When the flowers are allowed to bloom, the old graves are covered in Field Scabious (*Knautia arvensis*), Common Knapweed, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil and many other species. An area of the cemetery, described as the conservation area, is left with long grass. Unfortunately it is not the part with the orchids, but it does have Common Blues (which are not at all common in SU76), Small Coppers, Skippers and Marbled Whites. So far, 17 species of butterfly have been recorded here.



St Catherine's, Bearwood

The churchyard of St Catherine's, Bearwood is described in Michael Crawley's *The Flora of Berkshire* as one of the best graveyards in the county for heathland plants. In March and April, the graves are covered with Barren Strawberry (*Potentilla sterilis*) and Good-Friday Grass (*Luzula campestris*). Primroses and violets are widespread and then the tiny-flowered Early Forget-me-not (*Myosotis ramosissima*), Bugle (*Ajuga reptans*) and Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*) appear. In early June, parts of the churchyard are a blue haze with Heath Speedwell (*Veronica officinalis*), mixed with Heath Bedstraw (*Galium saxatile*) and this is when Small Copper, Common Blue and Brown

Argus can be seen together. In late summer, Small Copper and Painted Lady (*Vanessa cardui*) have both been observed nectaring on the Devil's-bit Scabious (*Succisa pratensis*) at the back of the churchyard.

Gardens are an important butterfly habitat. The 23 species which have been recorded in the garden of The Old School House in Riseley make it the best place for butterflies in SU76. The list includes relatively unusual sightings such as Purple Hairstreak and Silver-washed Fritillary and it is the only site in the 10K square where Grayling has been reported. Grayling is a heathland species which is seen regularly in Bramshill Forest, just over the border in Hampshire, to the south of Riseley. In spring 2007, the first Berkshire Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth (*Hemaris fuciformis*) for over 60 years was seen as it nectared on Honesty on the rockery. The owner has a picture taken in 1997 of about 15 Small Tortoiseshells feeding on the Thyme which grows between the paving stones. Sadly, in 2008 no Small Tortoiseshells were recorded here. Other good butterfly plants in the garden include Buddleia, *Verbena bonariensis* and Lavender.

The Bearwood College mansion was built in the 1860s by the Walter family who owned The Times newspaper. In front of the college is a flowery meadow which slopes down to the lake. Around the lake is woodland, part broadleaved but also some conifer plantations. The day-flying Speckled Yellow (*Pseudopanthera macularia*) moths, whose caterpillar food-plant is Wood Sage (*Teucrium scorodonia*), can be found in the woods in early summer. It is possible that the College is home to the rarest butterfly of the 10K square. One day when I was walking round, I obviously aroused the suspicions of the Bursar, who enquired what I was up to. He said that the previous summer, the Headmaster's wife had found a Purple Emperor (*Apatura iris*) in their house in the College grounds. The eggs of the Purple Emperor are laid on willow leaves – and there are plenty of willows by the lake. Unfortunately, this sighting remains unconfirmed. The previous butterfly atlases have Purple Emperor sightings from Windsor Great Park and the Greenham Common area, but no records from mid-Berkshire.

The greatest challenge has been finding any butterflies at all in the tetrad which contains Arborfield Garrison. There is no access to the main garrison site. Army housing occupies another large section of the tetrad. The gardens have closely mown lawns and no hedges, and there are discouraging signs



Small Skipper



Purple Hairstreak (© Martin Mitchell)



Marbled White



Small Tortoiseshell



White Admiral (© Martin Mitchell)



Silver-washed Fritillary (© Martin Mitchell)



Orange-tip



Clouded Yellow

Some of the Butterflies to be found in SU76



Shelled Slug © John Notton – see Entomology Report



Green-winged Orchid at Shinfield Cemetery © Jan Haseler



Shaggy Inkcaps (*Coprinus comatus*) at Paices Wood, © John Lerpiniere



Caloplaca at Henley © James Wearn – see Lichens Report



Trentepohlia © James Wearn – see Lichens & Algae Report

everywhere, asking unauthorised people to keep out. At the end of the first half year, this was the only tetrad where I had failed to find any butterflies at all. Then the next spring, while driving along the road which runs through the garrison site, I saw a Brimstone. There are only 2 butterflies which I can identify with confidence from the car – male Brimstone and male Orange-tip. Surprisingly, the roadside bank at the far end of the site is covered with Betony (*Stachys officinalis*) flowers in late summer. Also in the tetrad is Hogwood Park, the training ground of Reading Football Club – there is no access there either. I have finally managed to find



Arborfield Garrison

butterflies in the tetrad because there is an abandoned field next to the Arborfield By-pass with flowers and butterflies. Once again, road-building leaves space for butterflies.



Brownfield plot at Bearwood

The final habitat category is brownfield sites. There is a plot at Bearwood which is the site of former buildings. The ground is littered with piles of concrete, cables and broken glass – but it is very sheltered and there are plentiful flowers, including Gorse, Common Bird's-foot-trefoil, sheets of Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Bramble, Buddleia, Great Mullein (*Verbascum thapsus*) and Common Centaury (*Centaureum erythraea*). Butterflies found here include Peacocks, Brimstone, Common Blue and Small

Skipper, while day-flying moths include Lesser Treble-bar (*Aplocera efformata*) and Small Yellow Underwing (*Panemeria tenebrata*).

Hardcore was laid down in one of the end plots at Green Park some years ago. Since then, it has been colonised by a wonderful collection of wind-blown plants, with many flowers but very little grass. Green Park is the best site in the 10K square for both Common Blue and Brown Argus. Common Bird's-foot-trefoil (the main caterpillar food plant of the Common Blue), Wild Teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), Kidney Vetch (*Anthyllis vulneraria*) and Buddleia (*Buddleja davidii*) are all abundant here. Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow (*Colias croceus*), both migrant butterflies, were recorded at Green Park in August 2006.

Another Clouded Yellow was seen flying at Green Park on 2nd November 2006. This is a very late date for this species. A network of shallow drainage channels runs through the plot, and in winter, there would often be up to half a dozen Snipe there.



Regrettably, the diggers moved onto the best plot in

spring 2008 and a new building is being constructed. A great shame, as there are still many empty office blocks on Green Park, but further round the lake is another unoccupied plot with Common Blues and Brown Argus. In Berkshire, brownfield sites are unlikely to be left undeveloped for long.

Results obtained so far are summarised below. Table 1 shows the number of tetrads in which each butterfly species has been found. Eight species have been recorded in all 20 Berkshire tetrads of the 10K square. Another 6 species have been found in 19-17 tetrads. All these may well be present in every tetrad – they just have not been found there yet. The habitat specialist species, such as White Admiral and Silver-washed Fritillary (4 tetrads) and Grayling (1 tetrad), will never be found in many more tetrads, because suitable habitat is not available. The numbers for the migrant butterfly species (Painted Lady and Clouded Yellow) could change dramatically if weather conditions were more favourable. Records only come from areas with public access, or where permission for recording has been obtained. Sizeable sections of the region are on private land and are so far unvisited.

Species	Number of tetrads
Large White, Green-veined White, Red Admiral, Comma, Speckled Wood, Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown, Ringlet	20
Small Skipper, Brimstone	19
Small White, Orange-tip, Peacock	18
Large Skipper	17
Holly Blue	15
Common Blue	14
Small Copper	11
Essex Skipper, Small Tortoiseshell, Marbled White	9
Purple Hairstreak, Brown Argus, Painted Lady	6
White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary	4
Clouded Yellow	2
Grayling	1

Table 1: The number of tetrads in which each species of butterfly has been recorded

Table 2 shows the maximum number of Common Blue butterflies recorded at a time in each tetrad. Each cell of the table represents a tetrad, with the top left hand cell representing the north-west corner of the 10K square and the bottom right hand cell representing the south-east corner. The maximum count is generally three or less, but at Green Park (in the top left hand corner of the table), the maximum count is 41 and in the field next to the Arborfield By-pass (towards the bottom right of the table), the maximum is 14. This indicates that the Common Blue is hanging on at low density, but given suitable habitat, its numbers would be considerably higher.

41	3		1	2
2	3	1		3
			14	2
	2	1	1	1

Table 2: The maximum number of Common Blue butterflies recorded in each tetrad

Table 3 records how butterfly populations are changing. It shows the number of tetrads in which selected species have been recorded for the 3 atlas periods 1987-1992, 1995-2000 and 2005-2008. The latest atlas period still has another year to run, so there may be some adjustments to the final figures. Pearl-bordered Fritillary (*Boloria euphrosyne*) and the Wall (*Lasiommata megera*) butterfly were recorded in the first atlas period but have not been recorded since and are almost certainly extinct in the area. Small Heath (*Coenonympha pamphilus*) was recorded from 7 tetrads in the first atlas and 3 in the second but has yet to be found in the current atlas period. Small Tortoiseshell has declined rapidly from being a common butterfly in all tetrads to being a rare butterfly occurring in less than half. Purple Hairstreak appears to be doing badly, but what this is probably showing is that I have not been very good at finding it. The remaining species in the table are doing well. Ringlets thrive in cool damp summers, so conditions have certainly been good for them in the last 2 years. Large Skipper and Marbled White appear to have benefited from set-aside and wide field margins in arable fields under countryside stewardship schemes. The Red Admirals did exceptionally well in the warm summer, autumn and winter of 2006-2007. Finally, Brown Argus and Silver-washed Fritillary are expanding their range in this part of Berkshire.

	1987-1992	1995-2000	2005-2008
Pearl-bordered Fritillary	1	0	0
Wall	2	0	0
Small Heath	7	3	0
Small Tortoiseshell	20	15	9
Purple Hairstreak	11	13	6
Ringlet	17	9	20
Large Skipper	14	5	17
Marbled White	5	2	9
Red Admiral	13	14	20
Brown Argus	1	0	6
Silver-washed Fritillary	0	0	4

Table 3: The number of tetrads in which selected butterfly species have been recorded in 3 different atlas periods

SU76 is a very ordinary 10K square of farmland, woodland and villages. It contains no honey-pot sites, such as Wildlife Trust or National Trust reserves. Despite this, 27 species of butterfly have been recorded here, with the majority being present in at least three-quarters of the tetrads. Many species appear to be able to take advantage of relatively small fragments of suitable habitat. Some of the best sites in the 10K square have been created by major road-building schemes. Wide field margins, sensitively managed hedges, flowery churchyards, broadleaved tree-planting schemes and local nature reserves all benefit butterflies in the area.

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RUSHALL MANOR FARM

GR: SU 583723 – between Bradfield and Stanford Dingley

Colin Dibb

This is an excellent place to start exploring the natural history, history, farming and countryside of this part of the Pang Valley. It is at the hub of many footpaths and has car parking and toilet facilities. The John Simonds Trust, with its own educational staff, is located here and the set of old farm buildings has been adapted to cater for visitors. Each year, eight thousand school children of all ages come, with their teachers, to learn about the countryside and farming. Church and other groups regularly camp here and there are bluebell and lambing days in the spring. The 18th Century 'Black Barn' is in demand for social functions such as dances and weddings and the old stable block has meeting rooms. The site is part of the modern Rushall Farm, whose buildings can be seen to the east, which is run organically to produce beef and lamb.



The 18th Century 'Black Barn' © Malcolm Storey

There has been a farm here since the 13th Century when the population and, hence, demand for land was increasing prior to the decimation of the population from the Black Death in the following century. The land lies on a sheltered southerly slope with free draining soils, suitable for arable crop production on the Chalk and River Terrace Gravel, below the buildings. The woods on the higher ground are not there by accident; they lie on the mainly heavier, poorly structured and wetter soils of the Lambeth Formation which are only suitable for trees and undisturbed grassland. Woodland was a vital resource in medieval times supplying large timber for constructional work, smaller wood for tools and hurdles and firewood for heating and charcoal making. The pond, which taps into the underlying water table, was a necessity for cattle, including the plough oxen and, later, the cart horses. It is a good place for dragonflies and pond dipping.

One walk to explore the diverse local habitats starts along the track to the east passing the commercial charcoal burners and timber framed construction works on the right with all materials being supplied from the local woods. Before the road, an area on the right demonstrates the re-growth after coppicing – cutting down to ground level – from stools of Hazel growing under standards – mature trees – of oak. Buzzards, Red Kites and Kestrels may be seen. Across the road, a path leads through ancient secondary woodland of oak, Ash and Wild Cherry with indicators of age such as Solomon's-seal and Wood Melick. A narrow access across a junction of two fields may allow a close encounter with the resident cattle which, originally, were red Salers from France but now with some of them crossed with black native Aberdeen-Angus for high quality meat. The sheep are Hartline which is a breed developed

locally for producing twins with plenty of milk for them. These are crossed with Suffolk and Southdown rams for meaty lambs.

The next wood is largely of Beech, widely planted for fine-grained timber for furniture. The understorey is typically thin and the onward path is clearly seen rising steeply to the left before bearing right through dense bracken which is an indicator of free-draining soil. Beyond is an interesting stepped stile with the grassy path leading uphill along a field boundary and then crossing a narrow strip of woodland into a field. This has now ceased to be used for agriculture but its reversion to woodland is being prevented by topping annually. It holds a wide range of grasses and broadleaved plants, including a Bugle with creamy-white flowers, and Roe and Muntjac deer can be seen.



Owl Pit Quarry © Malcolm Storey

By retracing the path and going right over the stile and then steeply down to the left, it is possible to arrive at the face of Owl Pit quarry. The white chalk is almost entirely made of shells of coccoliths living and dying in warm, shallow seas near the equator between 150 and 80 million years ago. The top of the chalk represents 30 million years of erosion, fissures and infills and is known as an unconformity. The raised level of iridium in this boundary supports the idea of a collision with a large meteorite, spreading its iridium over all the Earth's surface from the force of the impact. The dust and gases released contributed directly and indirectly to the demise of the dinosaurs. The tertiary formations above the chalk were laid down in marine and then estuarine conditions from 50 million years ago and are quite acid as shown by the presence of Foxgloves. This is remedied by the application of lime; in the old days the chalk was dug out from the lower layers – hence chalk pits – and spread on the surface in order to grow wheat and barley, but rye and oats would grow on acid soils. Modern farmers use ground chalk or limestone, sometimes containing magnesium as well as calcium, dug and applied by machinery with no manual effort.

The field can be exited by the entrance to the modern farm; across the road is the entrance to a path which goes to the left through fields. These are in an organic rotation of a three year Rye-grass/White Clover ley for grazing followed by winter-sown wheat, then a different cereal such as winter oats, then field beans followed again by wheat and finally spring barley with the ley undersown in the growing barley for better establishment. Fields further from the farmstead may have Red Clover in the ley, primarily used for silage and finishing of the lambs in the autumn. The clover and beans have bacteria living in nodules on the roots which are able to convert inert gaseous nitrogen into nitrate which the host plant can use and which becomes available to surrounding grasses or subsequent crops with large increases in yield.

On reaching the road, a right turn will lead on to the gravel entrance to Rushall Manor Farm passing some large entrances to Badger setts in the bank with the excavated earth spilling down to the road. A few metres on the left is a footpath leading down to the river Pang which is crossed by a footbridge and a ford for horses. A short distance on the right, looking upstream, is the confluence of the river and the stream from the spring-fed Blue Pool joining from the left having flowed through what were commercial watercress beds. Brown Trout rise under the overhanging Alder branches and Kingfishers and Herons are frequent visitors. The artesian springs never fail, even in years when the river goes dry, and the issuing water has a constant temperature of about 9°C. To see the only spring now open to public view, continue to the main valley path, turn right and then right again through a gate to find the spring slightly off the path to the right. The rising water is marked by sand volcanoes and the blue colour is, in part,

derived from suspended particles of glauconite which is an iron silicate in the mica group found naturally in chalk, gault and greensand.

Leaving the spring on the right, continue across the flat, alluvial, valley floor with Soft and Jointed Rushes indicating impeded drainage. The river bridge allows a view of the wide range of aquatic and riverside plants in this clean environment. A grassy path leads onwards and makes a sharp right turn to run alongside a mixed hedge either side of the entrance to Kimberhead Farm. This stretch has a wide variety of species indicating considerable age and is a favoured place for butterflies. A gate opens to the road and, directly opposite, is another gate into a field with the Black Barn directly ahead. If the field is in an arable crop, this is a good place to see poppies, mayweeds, Field Pansies, Charlock and Wild Oats. Within a circular walk of four miles, it is possible to see many contrasting habitats and many more birds, plants, animals and invertebrates than can be mentioned here.



NATIONAL LOTTERY GRANT

Jan Haseler

In June 2008, *Reading and District Natural History Society* were delighted to learn that they had been awarded a National Lottery 'Awards for All' grant of £5475. The money has been used to buy a digital projector and spare lamp, a laptop with suitable software, a stand for the projector and laptop, display boards, and an electrically-operated wall screen which has been installed in Pangbourne Village Hall. Those speakers who have brought digital presentations have been able to project large, bright images which can be seen well from the back of the hall. Speakers who still use slides have been able to take advantage of the large screen, but have had to cope with the somewhat unpredictable behaviour of the Society's ageing slide projector. Those of us who help to prepare the hall for winter meetings have been particularly pleased that we need only turn a key to lower the screen, instead of balancing the small folding screen precariously on top of a table. We have been able to share our good fortune by making the screen available for other hall users.



Left: the new digital projector and laptop; right: the new screen
© Susan Twitchett

DRAGONFLY RECORDING IN BERKSHIRE

Mike Turton, Berkshire County Dragonfly Recorder

2008 marked the start of fieldwork on the *National Dragonfly Atlas*. The aim of this project is to update the known distribution of British dragonfly and damselfly species over the next 5 years, culminating in the publication of a new national atlas in 2013. More details of the project can be found on the British Dragonfly Society website (<http://www.dragonflysoc.org.uk/dragonfliesinfocus.html>).

Prompted by the launch of the Atlas, during 2008 I took on the role of Dragonfly Recorder for Vice-County 22 (the 'old' Berkshire, encompassing the area of Oxfordshire to the south-west of Oxford/south of the Thames.) I would appreciate any help that people can give in recording the species we have in the vice-county.

By the end of January 2009, I had received just over 1700 records for 2008. This is very encouraging but represents the work of just 9 observers! Most of the work has been concentrated on specific sites in West Berkshire and the heaths around Bracknell and is a continuation of monitoring that was in progress prior to 2008. A number of records have also been received from the Berkshire Downs, the Loddon Valley (mainly north of the M4) and the area of VC22 in Oxfordshire (mainly concentrated around the River Thames).

Berkshire has a good range of species with a total of 35 having been recorded. 29 species were recorded in 2008, which was pretty good considering the dreadful summer. A few highlights and lowlights of the season (apart from the weather) were:

Small Red-eyed Damselfly (*Erythromma viridulum*) was first recorded in the UK in 1999 and in the east of the county in 2005. This year it was recorded further west than in previous years with records from around Reading.

Records of Variable Damselfly (*Coenagrion pulchellum*) from the Burghfield area are the first from this area since the early 1980s.

Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*) was reported from 25 sites across the county.

Lack of records of Common Clubtail (*Gomphus vulgatissimus*) with only 2 records from the north of the area and none from the known population in the Goring area. [See the Recorder's Report for Entomology and Other Invertebrates – ed]

Just one record of Common Hawker (*Aeshna juncea*) from West Berkshire, none from the Bracknell area.

The weather over the past couple of years may well have had an effect on populations, but a number of the gaps may equally be down to lack of observer cover in certain areas or records not being submitted. If you already record dragonflies and damselflies in the county, I would be very grateful if you could get in touch with me. Records from regular monitoring of sites as well as any casual records that you pick up whilst out looking at other wildlife (or whilst on holiday) are very welcome. All water bodies are worth looking at – Small Red-eyed Damselfly was recorded on a small ornamental lily pond this year and I have had records from town centres with no water in sight.

For further information on what needs to be recorded and how to submit records either electronically or on paper, please contact me. All records for VC22 should be sent to me at the email address above. For other vice-counties, please see the website for contact details for the appropriate vice-county recorder.

PAICES WOOD – NOT JUST A WOODLAND

John Lerpiniere

Since Paices Wood was opened as a Country Park the Society has visited twice. In 2006 a long list of springtime flora was compiled and this was added to in 2008 during a July visit to see the butterflies. The more interesting plants included Narrow-leaved Bird's-foot Trefoil, *Lotus glaber* (= *L. tenuis*), an uncommon species of dry grassland and the Large Bittercress, *Cardamine amara*, which is uncommon nationally but nevertheless quite common beside streams in western parts of the Reading area.

Thirty species of butterfly have now been recorded, six of them Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) species. But it is the range of habitats I find fascinating.

During gravel extraction the gully running from south to north was dammed to form seven small lakes to provide water for washing the gravel.

At the lower north end, lake six is now the car park. Below this is the last lake with open surroundings with bramble attracting butterflies. The extensive car park now has some less intensively managed patches to encourage flowering plants and invertebrates and in summer can explode with Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus corniculatus*).

Beyond this is Bull Pate, a classic wet Alder woodland and a rare habitat by international standards. Climbing gently south is mixed broadleaf woodland, predominantly Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) with a thin Hazel (*Corylus avellana*) understorey. Then comes a substantial area of Sweet Chestnut (*Castanea sativa*), now overgrown and not as common as Hazel for choice of coppice in this part of the country. This is bordered by a medieval road from Aldermaston to Brimpton Common with old hedge banks supporting a few old coppiced Field Maples (*Acer campestre*). Still heading S/SW, the edge of open structure broadleaf oak woodland of Wasing Estate is encountered.

Next to this, the southern area is recent habitat on gravel. It has been invaded by tallows with some Alder (*Alnus glutinosus*) and bramble, with an open 'Butterfly Field', 'Wildlife Pond' and undulating 'Amphibian Area'. Then 'The Heath' is at the top where invading birch (*Betula*) is kept under control.

But my favourite is the Lapwing Field with its gravel areas, to the east of the lakes leading back to the industrial estate. This has hosted a great variety of butterflies including good populations of the BAP species Grizzled (*Pyrgus malvae*) and Dingy (*Erynnis tages*) Skippers. Lapwings chose to nest in this open area in the first year, hence the name, so the area was fenced to provide some privacy for birds. This was done with a grant obtained by the Pang, Kennet and Lambourn Project Group from Berkshire Ornithological Club. The Project shares the management with West Berkshire and Youngs, the owners of the industrial estate. Invasive Alder has to be controlled here and this year a large amount was pulled out by the roots.

Even if the Lapwings do not return the much rarer Woodlarks are present in summer and other species may find it to their liking. Indeed a fine male Ring Ouzel made an appearance here in the spring of 2007, and Snipe and Woodcock have found the wetter areas to their liking. We are trying to keep the whole of this area open with a mix of herb and scrub in order to sustain the excellent butterfly populations. Exact plans are on hold, however, as a new road entrance to the park is planned here.

Other species of the park include a good list of dragonflies including White-legged Damselfly (*Platycnemis pennipes*) and Downy Emerald (*Cordulia aenea*).

The coppiced area in the wood is a sure place to watch Silver-washed Fritillaries (*Argynnis paphia*) in July, and the rarer White Admiral (*Limenitis camilla*) is always about at this time and can be watched up close with a bit of luck. The fritillaries can now be found in many spots.

Moths can be found during the day with Common Wave (*Cabera exanthemata*) and Snout (*Hypena proboscidalis*) in the woods and Six-spot Burnet (*Zygaena filipendulae*), Burnet Companion (*Euclidia glyphica*) and Lesser Treble-bar (*Aplocera efformata*) common on the gravels. Bee Hawkmoth (*Hemaris* sp.) may be present as one was seen three years ago but which of the two species is unclear. But the crowning moment was the discovery last year of Drab Loopers (*Minoa murinata*) flying in

sunshine in the small Butterfly Field in the woods. This is only the sixth site for this BAP species in the county. Its larvae feed on the ancient woodland indicator Wood Spurge (*Euphorbia amygdaloides*).

Typical woodland birds are sometimes seen with ever-present Marsh Tit and very occasional Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Siskins pass through in winter, Buzzards fly overhead and Garden Warbler and Bullfinch like to nest in the scrubby places.

A single Broad-leaved Helleborine (*Epipactis helleborine*) spike was discovered by the coppice plot but it failed to flower. The following year the plant was covered with a generous layer of woodchip, in the name of path improvement. It eventually reappeared and two more leaves were found nearby plus what seemed to be a spotted orchid and a Twayblade (*Listera ovata*). The original helleborine then produced a good spike which again disappeared, probably eaten by deer. Pyramidal (*Anacamptis pyramidalis*) and Bee (*Ophrys apifera*) Orchids have been found in the Lapwing Field.

There is a good range of plants around the coppice such as Wild Strawberry (*Fragaria vesca*), Wood Sorrel (*Rumex acetosella*), Yellow Pimpernel (*Lysimachia nemorum*) and Wood Anemone (*Anemone nemorosa*). The successional coppice we have reintroduced produced different things in different spots such as Primrose (*Primula vulgaris*) initially, then Tutsan (*Hypericum androsaemum*) and a flush of Marsh Thistle (*Cirsium palustre*). The thistles dominated and were so tall as to restrict the view but were enjoyed by the insects. We wait to see what happens here this year but the thistles probably helped protect any uncovered coppice stools from deer damage. The third compartment was more open and should show good Foxgloves (*Digitalis purpurea*) this year and plenty of bramble flowers peaking in late June for the butterflies and other insects. This compartment has a woven fence to keep out deer although there is little Hazel to protect just here. The coppicing has all been done by the Project in conjunction with CROW (Conserve Reading on Wednesdays). Such work revives old woodland practice carried out for centuries but sadly all but disappeared over the last seventy years. The conservation value is to let in the light encouraging a great range of flora and fauna much of which rely on such successional habitat. Some work has recently started to open a ride hopefully producing similar results.

Continuing through the wood I enjoy the figworts and Honeysuckle (*Lonicera periclymenum*), the latter being the foodplant for the White Admirals, but I wonder where are all the violets essential to the fritillaries? They may be under the small stands of Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*) where they can thrive but these stands seem too dense for them.

As with the butterflies it is the Lapwing Area that has the greatest range of plant species with Sneezewort (*Achillea ptarmica*), Common (*Pulicaria dysenterica*) and Blue (*Erigeron acer*) Fleabanes and Centaury (*Centaurium erythraea*) being typical. The range includes many accidentals such as Lady's Mantle (*Alchemilla* sp.) and a few Buddleia enjoyed by the coloured butterflies.

Bull Pate, the Alder wood to the north, has not been properly explored but Solomon's Seal (*Polygonatum multiflorum*), for instance, is present.

The woodchip which covered the helleborine produced a wonderful display of fungi in the following autumn but that was a good year for fungi. Subsequent organised fungus forays produced a range of standard species but the periods were rather dry. A striking display of Shaggy Inkcaps (*Coprinus comatus*) - see photo on page 24 - appears across the car park in October however.

On a summer day four years ago, an open day was held with many attractions in the car park and activities around the wood. It was widely advertised and hundreds of people attended, many of them from the Tadley area. BBC South was there with a camera. The park has always attracted a few fishermen and is slowly being discovered by more walkers but so far it is a quiet place.

For those of you who have yet to visit, the park is entered through Youngs Industrial Estate at the top of Paices Hill, south out of Aldermaston village. As a consequence access is restricted to business hours and so out of reach on Sundays except via a footpath 1km to the south. A separate entrance is planned via a roundabout from the main road in the near future. So do not visit on a Sunday unless you want a long walk and be prepared to leave early on a Saturday afternoon, but watch this space for access via the new road.

BUTTERFLIES AT PAICES WOOD SU5863

John Lerpiniere

The full records have been sent to Butterfly Conservation Upper Thames Branch and, from 2008, to TVERC.

Key:	A - single sighting	B - 2 or 3 sightings	C - few	D - frequent
Small Skipper	05 C			
Essex Skipper	05 C			
Large Skipper	05 C			
Dingy Skipper		06 A	07 B	08 C
Grizzled Skipper		06 A	07 C	08 B
Clouded Yellow		06 B		
Brimstone		06 B		
Large White	05 D			
Small White	05 C			
Green-veined White	05 C			
Purple Hairstreak	05 B			
Small Copper	05 B			
Brown Argus		06 B		
Common Blue	05 D			
Chalkhill Blue	05 A			
White Admiral	05 B		07 B	
Red Admiral	05 C			
Painted Lady		06 B		
Small Tortoiseshell	05 A		07 A	
Peacock	05 B			
Comma	05 C			
Purple Emperor				08 (Wasing Wood)
Silver-washed Fritillary	05 C		07 D	
Speckled Wood	05 D			
Marbled White	05 B		07 C	
Grayling	06 B		07 abs	
Gatekeeper	05 D			
Meadow Brown	05 D			
Ringlet	05 C			
Small Heath	05 C		07 C	
Drab Looper (moth)				08 C

2005

There is a healthy population of Silver-washed Fritillaries; about ten were counted on two occasions in July. This species is currently doing quite well nationally. Equally pleasing were at least two White Admirals on July 10th. Purple Hairstreak was also found, on oak as usual – widespread but hard to observe.

On the gravel area single Chalkhill Blues were found in July and September, but this does not constitute a colony. There is a small colony of Marbled Whites using the longer grass, widespread but nice to find.

Total 20 species.

2006

Silver-washed Fritillary generally had a very good year but numbers here were exceptional with sightings likely to be well into double figures on a single visit throughout July. A very late, worn individual was even seen at the end of August. Pleasingly some were using the newly coppiced area (one of the reasons for doing the work) where the only two White Admirals were also seen on one date. Most

fritillaries were found on the bramble by the south lake, from the car park down to the sunny area in the corner. Comma, with which it can be confused, was also regular here.

On the gravel, Brown Argus was present – a species which has spread in recent years; it is surprising it wasn't noticed last year. The immigrant Painted Lady was not difficult to find around the small Buddleias on the bare gravel. At this spot one or two Grayling were found, a species which has declined seriously and is now almost restricted to heathland. The other sought after immigrant, Clouded Yellow, appeared on two occasions. Single sightings of Grizzled and Dingy Skipper were very pleasing but chances are they were just passing through. A strong presence of Small Heath in its second brood was good news as it has declined nationally.

Amazingly there was no sighting of Small Tortoiseshell this year, worrying as this was once a common butterfly.

Running total 29 species.

2007

Small Heath has been added to the BAP list due to its decline; the healthy population continued. Silver-washed Fritillary increased and good numbers could be seen in the coppice compartments. Grizzled Skipper was out early, in mid April, and several could be found.

2008

Purple Emperor was found by Karen Davies in Wasing Wood but very nearby as the grid reference was still SU5863. Grizzled Skipper down slightly but one seen in the car park on new rough grass patch – result of new management. Dingy Skipper in good numbers on careful search, 11 found with Dave Wilton of Upper Thames Butterfly Conservation. Also a notable moth, Drab Looper was found in Butterfly Field in wood by the author with Grahame Hawker. This is the third new site in the county this year and only the sixth in the county. Extraordinary number of 11 Peacocks seen early in the year and 8 Commas late in the year. Good year for Silver-washed Fritillary, easily into double figures and the White Admirals showed well.

SWINGS AND ROUNDABOUTS

Tony Rayner

Global warming and/or human activity are usually blamed for population changes in the natural world. My experience of closely monitoring various species first hand, suggests there is far more fluctuation afoot than most realise.

We sit up and take notice when changes affect us directly. Swarms of wasps, flying ants or greenfly send us scurrying for some lethal spray. Moles attacking our immaculate lawns; rats in the garden or shed; Urban Foxes raiding our dustbins. In short anything that increasingly invades our personal space. Badgers are on the increase, so a further opportunity to campaign for culls. Even Red Kites annoy some on account of being too numerous and some sort of threat.

On the other hand there are a few much-loved creatures whose loss we notice and mourn, such as the Small Tortoiseshell or the Cuckoo. Other losses are constantly publicised – the Water Vole for example. But how many folk have ever seen Ratty, or would know it if seen?

So much for the obvious, but what other changes occur that might be going unnoticed?

Over three years ago our meadow teemed with Six-spot Burnets. This day-flying moth was almost too numerous to count. Reasonable to estimate at least 1,000 on most days in their flight period. Their larval cases were everywhere. Fast forward to the following year, not even possible to get to double figures.

Another year the place was awash with huge orange Slugs. It was difficult to follow a straight path without treading on them. Action taken – none. The following year, hard to find any and they have not returned since.

The gorgeous Holly Blue, two broods each year as regular as clockwork, then none at all for two years. After that they are back as if they had simply been away for a holiday.

The House Sparrow was a familiar feature. Their repetitive chirps around the eaves greeting you each morning. Gradually you cotton on to the fact that they have gone completely. Years later some reappear, but these are different. They frequent hedges and not the house. They are much less confiding and never stay for long. Yet all the time a near neighbour continues to host resident birds.

Something similar occurs with Starlings. It is many years since this bird showed much inclination to come close to the house or bird feeders. Now they sweep in briefly in flocks, settle briefly in the trees or on the lawn, and the next time you look they are gone.

There was a time when we could regularly see the male Ghost Moths dancing over the meadow at dusk. This no longer happens although they still appear in the moth trap.

Mention has already been made of Red Kites. Today it is almost a banker to see at least a pair at close quarters without leaving the house. Now we have moved from a time when there were scarcely any birds of prey to be seen locally, to the incredible situation where birds of prey are nowhere more noticeable than at home. Buzzard; Sparrowhawk; Kestrel and Tawny Owl are common. The Hobby is reliably seen each year, and even the Peregrine visits us at least every two years.

Orchids seem to obey rules they alone fully understand. One year there is a profusion of Pyramidals on one local site, the next very few. Also it is hard to understand why Early Marsh Orchids suddenly appeared in our garden, and even more difficult to understand why they continue to expand when the conditions seem less suitable. Once Bee Orchids thrived where they had no right to be, now they have all but gone, but will they return as suddenly as they first appeared?

Much time has been spent over recent years monitoring our population of Robber Flies *Asilus crabroniformis*. Their numbers always seem excessive for something considered to be rare. But why was it that one year when Reading University students set out to study them on site, they hardly put in an appearance in our meadow as normal. Instead the students readily found them in the adjacent paddocks. A good reminder of the danger of generalising. Whilst a species may be rare and declining on your patch, just around the corner somebody might be enjoying a glut of the same.

Amphibians seem to be having a hard time, but look at my Vertebrates Report for the staggering exceptions. The heavy concentration in one area is perhaps a cause for concern, but what an amazing effort by John Sumpter and his team. My home experience of Frogs and Toads is of steep declines, through to total disappearance with just a hint of a recovery in the last two years.

Contrast this with monitoring results for reptiles. In both 2007 and 2008 our population of Slow-worms and Common Lizards have simply escalated, and must surely now have reached some sort of ceiling. It is hard to understand why this should be, particularly at a time when my Vertebrates Report for the Reading area indicates a general scarcity. Compare for example the Common Lizards at the Cholsey site with those at the vast Warburg Reserve.

Periodic crashes in Field Vole numbers are well documented, but on first acquaintance the sudden change is hard to believe. Recovery soon seems to follow, but in 2008 there were unusual steep declines in all but one of the small mammals on our site. The notable exception being the Mole, whose spoil heaps popped up in all manner of unexpected places.

To sum up, whilst there are long-term changes taking place due to man's activities, the whole natural world seems to be in a constant state of flux. There seems to be a continuous balancing act taking place between the species and the elements, and the only certainty is that today's situation will be different tomorrow.

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR BOTANY 2008

Michael Keith-Lucas

A mild winter, bringing about exceptionally early flowering of many plants, was followed by a warm spring, and a wet summer, and ultimately a dry autumn, with good autumn colours.

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

PTEROPSIDA (Ferns)

Aspleniaceae

Ceterach officinarum Rustyback
01/01/08 Flint wall in Stoke Row, SU684839. (JW & JDW)
Rare in our region.

Dryopteridaceae

Dryopteris cristata Crested Buckler-fern
13/09/08 Olddean Common, nr.Sandhurst, Surrey, SU879633 (RG).
A known locality where it has been hanging on in low numbers. A very rare plant in our region.

MAGNOLIIDAE (Flowering Plants)

Ranunculaceae

Helleborus viridis Green Hellebore
08/03/08 Doing well in dip on both sides of the Ridgeway Path, and back to field fence in numerous stands. Also expanded on to the rising slope at Morrell's Bottom, SU658847. One plant at side of path remote from rest. (MB)

Thalictrum flavum Common Meadow-rue
12/07/08 Tall fen vegetation on path by River Thames, North Stoke, SU607867 (JW & JDW)
Local in waterside meadows.

Berberidaceae

Berberis vulgaris Barberry
12/07/08 Mature bush in chalk scrub near North Stoke, SU615864. Infrequent in Oxfordshire.

Juglandaceae

Juglans nigra Black Walnut
02/09/08 In garden at Glen House, Inkpen, SU358645. Leaves up to 64cm long, 9-12 pairs of leaflets, but no terminal leaflet. (MWS)

Myricaceae

Myrica gale Bog Myrtle
13/09/08 Olddean Common. SU876626, (RG).
Local and decreasing; largest population in Berkshire.

Fagaceae

Quercus cerris Turkey Oak
14/09/08 Greenham Common, Blue Gate car park, SU483653. Small tree, in fruit (MWS).
Becoming a pest on acid soils in the region.

Q. petraea Sessile Oak
06/09/08 Upper Bucklebury, west end of 'Ups and Downs'. In fruit. SU541690, (MWS)
One of its known sites; rare in W.Berks.

Chenopodiaceae

Chenopodium rubrum Red Goosefoot
21/09/08 Upper Bucklebury, weed in over-grown vegetable bed, 43 Berry's Road, SU54226830. In flower (MWS).
Scattered along Kennet Valley.

Chenopodium polyspermum Many-seeded Goosefoot
16/07/08 Boxford Common. On path going up to the common from Bagnor, SU446704 (MB).
21/09/08 Upper Bucklebury, 43 Berry's Road, SU542683. In flower. (MWS)
Frequent in W.Berks.

Caryophyllaceae

Myosoton aquaticum Water Chickweed
07/05/08 In River Pang near Rushall Manor Farm, SU584717. (MB)
Locally common.

Polygonaceae

Persicaria hydropiper Water-pepper
30/08/08 Oare Common, trooping in muddy patch in woodland path beside track at top of hill, SU506732. (MWS)
19/07/08 Moor Copse. In field. SU637736 (approx.) (RG)
Locally common.

Rumex hydrolapathum Water Dock
19/03/08 In stream in Winterbourne village. SU457723 (MB)
07/05/08 In River Pang near Rushall Manor Farm, SU584717 (approx.). (MB)
Occasional in W.Berks.

Salicaceae

Populus tremula Aspen
12/06/08 Bucklebury Common, Water tower car park, SU556691. (MWS)
Occasional in W.Berks and not recorded from this site before.

Brassicaceae

Cardamine amara Large Bittercress
20/04/08 A good display by the Sulham Brook, Pangbourne, SU642756. (JW & JDW)
A known locality.

Monotropaceae

Monotropa hypopitys Yellow Bird's-nest
03/07/08 Three flowering spikes on the road bank in Harpsden Wood, SU758806
16/08/08 81 flowering spikes under mature Beech in Lambridge Wood, SU732843
17/08/08 Four flowering spikes under mature Beech on Long Toll Road, Woodcote. SU649806
All records by (JW & JDW)

Saxifragaceae

Saxifraga tridactylites Rue-leaved Saxifrage
26/03/08 Pavement weed near the Abbey gateway in Reading, SU720735 (JDW)
New locality.

Rosaceae

Potentilla anglica Trailing Tormentil
02/07/08 Near the top of the slope above Old Place, a new locality on Crowsley Park. SU729796 (JW & JDW)

Sanguisorba officinalis Great Burnet
19/07/08 Moor Copse in old pasture. SU637737 (approx.) (RG)
A new record.

Fabaceae

Lathyrus sylvestris Narrow-leaved Everlasting Pea
08/07/08 Scrambling over a roadside hedge at Mongewell, SU617877 (JW & JDW)
Scarce in Oxfordshire.

L. nissolia Grass Vetchling
10/06/08 The Grove, Shinfield Park, SU730689 (JH).
New locality.

Genista tinctoria Dyer's Greenweed
23/06/08 One plant on a rough forestry track through Burnt Platt, SU694833. (JW & JDW)

26/07/08 Kingwood Common, by path, originally hidden by bracken. Clump in flower. SU693833 (MB)
Scarce in Oxfordshire.

Euphorbiaceae

Euphorbia helioscopia Sun Spurge
21/10/08 Upper Bucklebury, 43 Berry's Road. In flower, SU542683. (MWS)
Occasional in W.Berks

E. exigua Dwarf Spurge
09/08/08 Estimated 1000 plants on a 12 metre field margin on heavy clay in Kidmore End. SU705796 (JW & JDW)
Locally common.

Linaceae

Linum catharticum Fairy Flax
19/07/08 Moor Copse, in arable field, SU637736 (approx.) (RG)
New record for Moor Copse.

Geraniaceae

Geranium pratense Meadow Crane's-Bill
19/07/08 Moor Copse, SU637736 (approx.) (RG)
Known from water meadows near Theale – probably not this site.

G. columbinum Long-stalked Crane's-Bill
08/09/08 Scrambling through long grass on roadside verge at Whitchurch, SU646778. (JW & JDW)
Rather local.

Balsaminaceae

Impatiens capensis Orange Balsam
19/07/08 By River Pang in Moor Copse, SU634739. (RG)
Not recorded from this locality.

Apiaceae

Scandix pecten-veneris Shepherd's-needle
17/12/08 Near Moulsoford, SU590839 (approx.) just one plant in flower. (MB)

Berula erecta Lesser Water-parsnip
19/07/08 Moor Copse. Known from River Pang at Pangbourne, SU637736 (approx.) (RG)
07/05/08 In River Pang near Rushall Manor Farm SU584717 (approx.) (MB)

Silaum silaus Pepper-saxifrage
19/07/08 Old pasture at Moor Copse. SU635737 (RG)
First recent record from this site.

Lamiaceae

Galeopsis bifida Bifid Hemp-nettle
30/08/08 Oare Common, beside track as it leaves the wood. In flower. (MWS)

Nepeta cataria Catmint
23/08/08 On both sides of chalky roadside verges and on field edges at Dunsden. SU739766 (JW & JDW)
Scarce and decreasing.

Thymus pulegioides Large Thyme
11/09/08 Top of slope on small area of chalk grassland at Kent's Hill, Crowsley. SU726809 (JW & JDW)
Uncommon in Oxfordshire.

Salvia verbenaca Wild Clary
08/07/08 Locally frequent on roadside verges near Dorchester. SU588933 (JW & JDW)
Scarce and decreasing.

Scrophulariaceae

Misopates orontium Weasel's-snout
12/10/08 Moor Copse, arable field. SU636737 (JH)
A rarity in our region.

Kicksia elatine Sharp-leaved Fluellen
09/11/08 Moor Copse, arable field. SU636737 (JH)
Common in W. Berks, but not recorded from here before.

Dipsacaceae

Scabiosa columbaria Small Scabious
11/09/08 Top of slope on small area of chalk grassland at Kent's Hill, Crowsley. SU726809 (JW & JDW)
Decreasing

Asteraceae

Echinops sphaerocephalus Glandular Globe-thistle
17/08/08 Dozens of plants escaped from gardens at Mapledurham. SU672768 (CB)
New record.

Centaurea cyanus Cornflower
24/07/08 Group of plants in a wheat field at Ufton Green. SU625681 (CB)
Thought to be extinct in the Kennet Valley.

Tragopogon porrifolius Salsify
In Tony Rayner's meadow in Cholsey, SU592867. First appeared 2006, disappeared 2007 and reappeared in 2008. (AR)
New record.

Filago minima Small Cudweed
13/09/08 Olddean Common. SU880634 (approx.) (RG)
Local and decreasing, last recorded from this site in 2002

Anaphalis margaritacea Pearly Everlasting
13/09/08 Olddean Common. SU880634 (approx.) (RG)
A rare garden escape, but known from this locality.

Erigeron acer Blue Fleabane
03/08/08 Several plants in Braziers Lane. SU643843 (CB)
A frequent mobile colonist.

Tanacetum vulgare Tansy
12/06/08 Bucklebury Lower Common, in rough vegetation by parking area. SU556691 (MWS)
Uncommon in W.Berks.

Chrysanthemum segetum Corn Marigold
16/07/08 Boxford Common, in field going up to the common from Bagnor. SU445704 (approx.) (MB)
New locality.

Senecio inaequidens Narrow-leaved Ragwort
Little Marlow sewage works, first seen 2007. Id JW & JDW and confirmed by John Mason. Large number of plants. SU875872 (GC)

S. erucifolius Hoary Ragwort
13/09/08 Olddean Common. SU880634 (approx.) (RG)
Uncommon but recorded here in 2002.

S. viscosus Sticky Groundsel
18/07/08 A few plants on tipped soil in the council depot, Kingwood Common. SU694822 (JW & JDW)
Expanding, and now frequent.

Galinsoga parviflora Gallant-soldier
15/08/08 Several plants by the roadside at Hambledon Mill End. SU786851 (CB)

G. quadriradiata Shaggy Soldier
01/12/08 Two plants in brickwork along the River Kennet in Reading, just east of Duke Street Bridge. SU718733 (JW & JDW)

Poaceae

Polypogon monspeliensis Annual Beard-grass
26/06/08 Corner of Malvern Court, Addington Road, Reading. Edge of new garden with ?imported soil. SU727726 (RWR)
An increasing species

Echinochloa crus-galli Cockspur
10/09/08 Cresswells Farm, beside motorway,
approach road to roundabout. SU885785
(MWS)
Locally frequent

Setaria pumila Yellow Bristle-grass
10/09/08 Cod Hill, on newly dug ground beside
footpath by orchard. In fruit. SU576679 (MWS)
New locality.

Liliaceae

Hyacinthoides non-scripta Bluebell
19/03/08 Snelsmore Common, Winterbourne
area, edge of south-facing wood. In flower – the
earliest date recorded for wild bluebells in our
region. SU459715 (MB)

Orchidaceae

Epipactis purpurata Violet Helleborine
07/09/08 32 flowering spikes on west side of
road by ditch near Wyfold crossroads. SU682814
(JW & JDW)
Uncommon

E. helleborine Broad-leaved Helleborine
26/07/08 Kingwood Common. 40+ plants in a
shaded location. SU693826 (MB)
17/08/08 Park Wood, Mapledurham. One plant
in bloom out of a population of about eight.
SU679767 (CB)
13/09/08 Olddean Common. SU880634
(approx.) (RG)

CONTRIBUTORS:

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

(AR) Tony Rayner, (CB) Chris Bucke, (GC) Gordon Crutchfield, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JW & JDW) Janet and Jerry Welsh, (MB) Meryl Beek, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (RG) Renée Grayer, and (RWR) Ronald Rutherford.

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Crawley, M.J. (2005) The Flora of Berkshire. Brambleby Books, Harpenden.
Druce, G.C. (1897) The Flora of Berkshire. Clarendon Press, Oxford.
Killick, J., Preey, R. & Woodell, S. (1998) The Flora of Oxfordshire. Information Press, Oxford.

Cephalanthera damasonium White Helleborine
23/05/08 17 plants under chalk scrub on Kent's
Hill, SU726809; protected from deer. (JW &
JDW)
12/06/08 Several plants in a beechwood on
Swyncombe Downs. SU682917 (JW & JDW)
Surviving well in the Chilterns, rare elsewhere.

Anacamptis pyramidalis Pyramidal Orchid
Over 600 flowering around a road verge nature
reserve at Cholsey. SU604866 (AR)
02/07/08 Count of 372 in flower on Kent's Hill.
SU726809 (JW & JDW).
12/07/08 Over 50 in flower in a small area of
mixed scrub. North Stoke. (JW & JDW)
24/07/08 About 100 flowering spikes at The
Grove, Shinfield Park. As many again on the
adjacent south-facing motorway embankment,
SU730689 (JH).
Frequent, but decreasing, in Oxfordshire, locally
common in Berkshire.

Coeloglossum viride Frog Orchid
24/07/08 Watlington Hill. 13 in flower, two bitten
off, in very short grassland near hawthorn scrub.
SU704935 (JW & JDW)
Rare, almost confined to chalk scarp.

Dactylorhiza incarnata Early Marsh-orchid
15 flowering spikes in Tony Rayner's garden. Not
introduced and not disturbed for over 10 years.
Increasing annually. SU592868. (AR)

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR MYCOLOGY 2008

Malcolm Storey

Another very promising wet summer, which dried out as soon as autumn hove into view. In the end the fungus season was rather disappointing. Again I am indebted to the Thames Valley Fungus Group (TVFG) and the Hampshire Fungus Group (HFG), who both regularly foray in our area, for sharing their records.

Ascomycota

Rhytismataceae

Rhytisma acerinum Sycamore tar-spot
01/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon, SU691788, on Sycamore leaves (*Acer pseudoplatanus*). (JW)

Pezizales

Helvellaceae

Helvella crispa White saddle
11/10/08, Bomb Dump BBOWT Reserve, SU508654. (Coll: JH, Id: MWS)

Pyrenomataceae

Geopora foliacea (a discomycete)
5/10/08, Harpsden woods, Oxon. (TVFG)

Otidea alutacea Tan ear
18/09/08, Holly Wood, SU527698, at roadside, under Beech, oak, Holly. (MWS)

Diaporthales

Valsaceae

Gnomonia leptostyla (a pyrenomycete)
02/09/08, Inkpen, garden, SU358645, imperfect *Marssonina* state causing black leaf-spots on Black Walnut (*Juglans nigra*). (MWS)

Hypocreales

Nectriaceae

Nectria cinnabarina Coral Spot
01/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon, SU691788, on fallen Sycamore branch. (JW)

Xylariales

Diatrypaceae

Diatrype bullata Willow Barkspot
10/10/08, Bucklebury Upper Common, SU534697, on dead branches of Grey Willow (*Salix cinerea*), beside stream. (MWS)

Diatrype disciformis Beech Barkspot
01/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon, SU691788, on dead fallen Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) branch. (JW)

Xylariaceae

Biscogniauxia nummularia Beech Tarcrust
01/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon, SU691788, on dead Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) wood. (JW)

Daldinia concentrica King Alfred's Cake, Cramp-ball
26/04/08, Highland Wood, Oxon.: SU691788, on Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). (JW)
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on large fallen Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*) trunk. (JW)

Hypoxylon fragiforme Beech Woodwart
10/05/08, Highland Wood, Oxon.: SU691788, abundant, on Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) logs. (JW)
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon.: SU691788, on dead fallen Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) branch. (JW)

Xylaria longipes Dead Moll's Fingers
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on dead, fallen Sycamore (*Acer pseudoplatanus*) branch. (JW)

Basidiomycota

Basidiomycetes

Agaricales

Cortinariaceae

Cortinarius caerulescens Mealy Bigfoot Webcap
11/10/08, Lambridge Woods, Oxon. (TVFG)

Cortinarius bolaris Dappled Webcap
18/09/08, Holly Wood, SU527699, 2 fruitbodies, near roadside, under Beech, oak, Holly. (MWS)

Cortinarius calochrous var. *calochrous* (a webcap)
24/09/08, Harpsden Wood, Oxon. SU759806, under roadside Beech. (MWS & RAF)

Cortinarius calochrous var. *parvus* (a webcap)

24/09/08, Harpsden Wood, Oxon. SU759806, under roadside Beech. (MWS & RAF)

Cortinarius pholideus Scaly Webcap
24/09/08, Kingwood Common, Oxon. SU696828, under birch, oak, beside path (MWS & RAF)

Cortinarius sanguineus Bloodred Webcap
8/11/08, under Birch (*Betula pendula*), Bramshill College, Hants. SU7559 (HFG/MH)

Cortinarius turgidus (a webcap)
24/09/08, Harpsden Wood, Oxon. SU759806, under roadside Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) (MWS & RAF)

Cortinarius violaceus Violet Webcap
18/09/08, under Aspen (*Populus tremula*), Pamber Forest, Hants. SU6160 (HFG/AC)
Red Data Book: Near Threatened.

Cortinarius xanthophyllus a webcap
5/10/08, Harpsden Woods. (TVFG)

Inocybe geophylla var. lilacina Lilac Fibrecap
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, under Beech. (JW)

Inocybe assimilata (a fibrecap)
3/05/08, Ashford Hill NNR, Hants. SU5661 (HFG/SJS)

Psathyrellaceae

Psathyrella bipellis (a brittle stem)
16/11/08, Bottom Wood (TVFG)

Pluteaceae

Pluteus pellitus Ghost Shield
8/11/08, on Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) log, Bramshill College, Hants. SU7559 (HFG/AL)
Red Data Book: Vulnerable.

Pluteus umbrosus Velvet Shield
13/09/08, The Coombes. (TVFG)
5/10/08, Harpsden Woods. (TVFG)

Tricholomataceae

Asterophora parasitica Silky Piggyback
13/09/08, The Coombes. (TVFG)
27/09/08, Finchampstead Ridges. (TVFG)

Calocybe gambosa St. George's Mushroom
14/04/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, Berry's Road. (MWS)
3/05/08, Paynesdown Road, SU508675, c.20 fruitbodies in garden lawn, Thatcham. Some of the fruitbodies in a quarter ring, among darker green grass. (MWS)

Clitocybe geotropa Trooping Funnel
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, under Ash (*Fraxinus excelsior*). (JW)

Collybia butyracea Butter Cap
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, fairly abundant, under Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*). (JW)

Hygrocybe psittacina Parrot Waxcap
7/09/08, on garden lawn, Tilehurst, SU666742 (JH)

Hygrophorus cossus (a woodwax)
24/09/08, Harpsden Wood, Oxon. SU759805, under roadside Ash, Beech (MWS)

Leucopaxillus giganteus Giant Funnel
1/12/08, Spencers Wood, SU709664, in a ring in broadleaved woodland. (Coll: JH, Id: MWS)

Lyophyllum gangraenosum Smoky Domecap
13/11/08 Greenacre Health and Leisure Club, Newbury, SU481654 (TVFG)

Macrocystidia cucumis Cucumber Cap
13/11/08 Greenacre Health and Leisure Club, Newbury, SU481654 (TVFG)

Ossicaulis lignatilis Mealy Oyster
13/09/08, The Coombes. (TVFG)

Tricholomopsis decora Prunes and Custard
15/11/08, White House Farm, SU708657. (Coll: MW, Id: MWS)

An unusual record of this normally-Scottish toadstool in the small area of southern England where it has been found before a few times. Another interpretation is that the southern records are the first records of the closely similar, but American, *Tricholomopsis sulphureoides*.

Boletales

Boletaceae

Tylopilus felleus Bitter Bolete
13/09/08, The Coombes, (TVFG)

Sclerodermataceae

Astraeus hygrometricus Barometer Earthstar
8/11/08, under Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus hippocastanum*), Bramshill College, Hants. SU7559 (HFG/JG & AS)

Dacrymycetales

Dacrymycetaceae

Dacrymyces stillatus Common Jellyspot
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on fallen Beech trunk. (JW)

Hymenochaetales

Schizoporaceae

Schizopora paradoxa Split Porecrust
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on
dead wood (probably *Fagus sylvatica*) (JW)

Polyporales

Polyporaceae

Laetiporus sulphureus Chicken of the Woods,
Sulphur Polypore
10/05/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on
fallen birch trunk. (JW)

Russulales

Hericiaceae

Hericium erinaceus Bearded Tooth
18/11/08 on oak trunk in boundary hedge, The
Mount, Crondall, Hants. SU 8048 (HFG/BS)
Rare outside the New Forest, but Gordon
Crutchfield found it last year at Bearwood, so
maybe it's spreading.

Russulaceae

Russula acrifolia (a brittle gill)
27/09/08 Finchampstead Ridges. (TVFG, conf:
GK)

Stereaceae

Stereum hirsutum Hairy Curtain Crust
1/11/08, Highland Wood, Oxon. SU691788, on
dead, fallen Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) branches
and log pile. (JW)

Thelephorales

Bankeraceae

Hydnellum conrescens Zoned Tooth
18/09/08, Bucklebury Upper Common,
SU534696. 30 small fruitbodies, in patch c.2ft
square, under Beech, and 7 fruitbodies, in patch
c.1ft square, under oak. On path up from stream,
towards Blind John's Well. (MWS)
18/09/08, Holly Wood, SU527698, c.20
fruitbodies, near roadside, under Beech, oak,
Holly. (MWS)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(AC) A. Cleave, (AL) Alan Lucas, (AS) A. Swan, (BS) B. Stanworth, (EJ) Eric Janke, (GK) Geoffrey Kibby, (HFG) Hampshire Fungus Group, (JG) J. George, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JW) James Wearn, (MH) M. Harrison, (MW) Maggie Waugh, (MWS) Malcolm Storey, (PC) Paul Cook, (RAF) Richard Fortey, (SJS) Stuart Skeates and (TVFG) Thames Valley Fungus Group

The former site has been known for some years
but the fruitbodies are always small. The latter
site is new and produced spectacular fruitbodies.
This is one of the BAP Stipitate Hydroids.

Tremellomycetidae

Tremellales

Exidiaceae

Guepinia helvelloides Salmon Salad
8/11/08, on wood mulch, Bramshill College,
Hants. SU7559 (HFG/AS & EJ)

Tremellaceae

Tremella foliacea Leafy Brain
10/10/08, Bucklebury Upper Common,
SU534697, on fallen Hazel branch, beside
stream, (MWS)

Urediniomycetes

Uredinales

Pucciniaceae

Gymnosporangium sabinae European Pear
Rust
22/08/08, Inkpen, SU358645, Aecial galls on
Pear leaf, in garden, Glen House (MWS)
10/09/08, Waltham Place, SU856770. Aecial
galls on Pear leaf, in orchard. (MWS)
24/09/08, Western Road, Henley on Thames,
Oxon. SU758820. Aecial galls on Pear leaf,
overhanging road. (MWS & RAF)
This rust has greatly increased its range this
year. The aecial stage galls Pear leaves while the
telia gall branches of *Juniperus sabina* and its
prostrate form in gardens. Galled leaves with the
bright red leaf-spots are easily recognised.
First records for Berks and Oxon.

Ustilaginomycetes

Microbotryales

Microbotryaceae

Sphacelotheca hydropiperis (a smut fungus)
30/08/08, Oare Common, SU506732, infected
flowers of Water Pepper (*Persicaria hydropiper*),
beside track at top of hill. (MWS)

LICHENS & TERRESTRIAL ALGAE

James Wearn

This new section is an attempt to bring within the reach of members, and of the public generally who are interested in the study of nature, an acquaintance with an aspect of cryptogamic botany (namely lichens, with comments on often co-occurring non-aquatic algae). It seems appropriate to incorporate a section on this extremely interesting and diverse group of organisms as part of the *The Reading Naturalist* to coincide with the 50th anniversary of the *British Lichen Society*. Lichens and algae are not too far away wherever we are, yet they are often overlooked.

Free-living terrestrial algae often colonize bare rock or tree bark. The filamentous alga *Trentepohlia* was seen in various localised areas on the trunks of trees throughout the region (see photo). It forms conspicuous orange mats (owing to its carotenoid pigments). Of particular note in May 2008 were observations on Beech (*Fagus sylvatica*) trunks in Highland Wood, between Cane End and Tinkers Green, S. Oxfordshire [SU 691788] and on trunks of oak (*Quercus robur*) either side of an unnamed road in Riseley, N. Hampshire [SU 735622], both locations being just to the north and south of Reading respectively - see the colour photo on page 26.

The commonly observed green alga forming extensive areas on trees, telegraph poles and many other surfaces are species of *Desmococcus* (often previously called *Pleurococcus*). These spherical-celled algae frequently cluster together giving rise to the large green patches, especially on shaded damp materials. The cells have heavy walls to protect against excessive water loss as they are almost constantly exposed to the air, unlike those occurring in bodies of water.

Lichens are formed from a symbiosis between one or more algae (the photosynthetic associates) and a fungus (which forms the protective 'house'). However, they are always named according to the fungus present. The aforementioned orange alga, *Trentepohlia*, is the photosynthetic partner in several lichen species, which themselves often appear orange. As they have no cuticle, lichens are susceptible (to varying degrees) to pollution by absorbing dissolved substances and therefore, have a very important role in environmental monitoring. As a general rule the more branched and leafy the lichens in an area; the better the air quality. Lichens are generally slow-growing, long-lived and present all year round. From the bright yellow circles of *Caloplaca* and *Xanthoria* on walls and roofs to the multi-branching *Ramalina* and *Usnea* hanging from trees, there are around 1,700 British species, and they are not simply organisms but mini-ecosystems.

The Elder trees (*Sambucus niger*) near Hodmore Farm in Tinkers Green [SU 686782] were covered in lichens in 2008. Species included *Amandinea punctata*, *Physcia tenella*, *Lecanora chlorotera*, and the ubiquitous *Xanthoria parietina*. The bright blue-green crustose lichen *Lepraria incana* was present on several of the oak (*Quercus robur*) stumps in the moist moss-covered wooded areas nearby. *Parmelia sulcata* was also commonly seen and is a grey-green foliose (leafy) species which is easily identifiable on many trees in Britain.

Churchyards in unpolluted areas are reservoirs of often high diversities of lichens and are of significant importance for lichen conservation. The churchyard of Saint Peter and Saint Paul in Checkendon and Saint Mary in Henley are examples (see the colour photo, on page 24, showing the distinctly yellow *Caloplaca* on the church in Henley). There were some nice examples of the leafy *Evernia prunastri* on trees in Checkendon too.

Lichens are fascinating intricate organisms and can be found almost anywhere if one looks hard enough. The grey-green patches on pavements are often not trodden gum but the 'Chewing Gum Lichen' (*Lecanora muralis*)! If anyone is interested in identifying the lichens they see, for the beginner I would recommend the quick reference booklets produced by the Field Studies Council, and for those who are a little more brave, the book *Lichens: An Illustrated Guide* by Frank Dobson is a worthwhile investment. Species information is available from my herbarium and archives by request. Records will be submitted to the national database. I am keen to receive any sightings or comments of interest (contact details in the RDNHS Programme and at the front of this issue of *The Reading Naturalist*).

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR LEPIDOPTERA 2008

Norman Hall

2008 was an even poorer year for butterflies and moths than 2007, and, in my opinion, a good candidate for the worst year ever. The cold winter may help numbers to recover in 2009 because overwintering stages consume less energy 'ticking over' at lower temperatures, and there is less predation, but a warm reasonably dry summer is what is really needed.

The report gives more data for butterflies (Bradley Nos 1526-1629). For each of species recorded, I have included the earliest record, the record with the maximum number of individuals and the latest record, which may all be from different localities. I thank contributors who responded to my request for information to help me do this.

Ordnance Survey grid references to locations are given only once, when the site is first mentioned. The initials UKBAP stand for the United Kingdom Biodiversity Action Plan (see Internet). 'Notable B' species do not fall within RDB (Red Data Book) categories but are nonetheless uncommon in Great Britain and occur in between 31 and 100 10km squares of the Ordnance Survey Grid, or for less well recorded groups, in between 8 and 20 vice-counties.

Systematic List (Bradley order)

NEPTICULIDAE

0102 *Stigmella aceris* (a micromoth)
6/11/08, Arborfield Cross, SU766672 (JH).
Rare, maybe 2nd Berks record.

COSSIDAE

0161 *Zeuzera pyrina* Leopard Moth
17/07/08, newly emerged, easy to photograph,
Moor Copse (JL)

PSYCHIDAE

0181 *Taleporia tubulosa* (a psychid moth)
7/06/08, Waltham Place, SU856772 (BMG per
NMH). A common psychid moth whose larvae
live in cases attached to tree trunks. Cases are
reported frequently but adults infrequently.

LYONETIIDAE

0260 *Leucoptera malifoliella* (a micromoth)
13 & 15/05/08, 2 raised from pupae from mines
on apple, Emmer Green (JN)

SESIIDAE

0374 *Synanthedon vespiformis* Yellow-legged
Clearwing
Between 31/05/08 & 22/07/08, 6 at pheromones,
Emmer Green (JN)

0378 *Synanthedon andreaeformis* Orange-
tailed Clearwing
Between 23/06/08 & 13/07/08, 6 at pheromones,
Emmer Green (JN)

YPONOMEUTIDAE

0409A *Argyresthia trifasciata* (a small ermine)
9/05/08 & 31/05/08, Earley, SU735709 (NMH).
A tiny moth feeding on garden cypresses, not
found in Britain before 1982 but now well
established. It is about the same size as
Cameraria ohridella Deschka & Dimic, the leaf-
miner that is devastating our Horse-chestnut
trees, and which also has three similar fasciae.

0412 *Argyresthia pygmaeella* (a small ermine)
27/06/08, Dinton Pastures, SU782717
(BMG/BENHS event per Ian Sims). Despite its
specific name, this moth is quite large for an
Argyresthia. It has very shiny wings, and needs
looking for carefully when the smaller commoner
and equally shiny *Argyresthia goedartella* L. is
present.

EPERMENIIDAE

0483 *Epermenia chaerophyllella* (a micromoth)
20/04/08, sitting on grass stem, Thatcham
Marsh, SU508662 (BMG per NMH)

OECOPHORIDAE

0667 *Semioscopis steinkellneriana* (a
micromoth)
7/05/08, Forbes Ride, Windsor Forest (Les
Finch).
Closely related to the much commoner *Diurnea
fagella* D. & S., which is also found in the spring.

GELECHIIDAE

0801A *Gelechia senticetella* (a micromoth)
15/08/08, Earley (NMH).
A gelechiid moth, not recorded in Britain before
1988. It feeds on juniper and occurs occasionally
in NMH's garden.

TORTRICIDAE

0924 *Hysterothrips maculosana* (a micromoth)
18/05/08, 2, Winterbourne, Mapleash Copse,
SU461718 (JH).
Feeds on bluebell seeds. First record on Berks
Moths database.

PYRALIDAE

1316 *Catoptria falsella* (Crambinae)
28/07/08, Earley (NMH).
29/08/08, Moor Green Lakes, Sandhurst,
SU806625 (BMG).
One of the less common grass moths, but which
could nevertheless be expected to turn up in
anyone's garden trap some time.

1336 *Eudonia pallida* (Scopariinae)
7/06/08, 4, Waltham Place (BMG).
24/06/08, Earley (NMH).
29/08/08, 2, Moor Green Lakes (BMG).
This moth has occurred much more frequently
than is usual, nationally, in 2008.

1358 *Evergestis pallidata* (Evergestinae)
4/08/08, 20, Moor Copse, Park Wood, SU636741
(JH)

1375 *Ostrinia nubilalis* European Corn Borer
(Pyraustinae)
3/07/08, Shinfield Park, The Grove, SU730689
(JH). Local.

HESPERIIDAE

1526 *Thymelicus sylvestris* Small Skipper
30/06/08, 3, Eversley, SU778629
15/07/08, 20, The Grove, Shinfield Park
10/08/08, Greensward Lane, Arborfield,
SU748669 (JH)

1527 *Thymelicus lineola* Essex Skipper
3/07/08, The Grove, Shinfield Park
11/07/08, 2, Thatcher's Ford, SU743636
7/08/08, Church Farm, Shinfield, SU724681 (JH)

1531 *Ochlodes venata* Large Skipper
22/05/08, The Grove, Shinfield Park
10/07/08, 3, Stanford End, SU713634
24/07/08, Long Moor, SU781651 (JH)

1532 *Erynnis tages* Dingy Skipper
8/05/08, 1 & 24/05/08, 12, Paices Wood,
SU588636 (JL).
5/06/08, Cottage Field, Moor Copse (JL)

1534 *Pyrgus malvae* Grizzled Skipper
8/05/08, 2, Paices Wood (JL)

PAPILIONIDAE

1546 *Gonepteryx rhamni* Brimstone
15/03/08, Hosehill LNR (JL).
15/03/08, Tilehurst, SU666742.
2/05/08, 4, Farley Hill, SU746656.
17/10/08, Dinton Pastures, SU778718 (JH)

1549 *Pieris brassicae* Large White
2/05/08, ECMWF, Shinfield Park, SU730696
16/09/08, 4, Shinfield, SU730684
18/10/08, Tilehurst (JH)

1550 *Pieris rapae* Small White
4/04/08, Theale Lake (JL).
20/09/08, 5, Moor Copse Extension, SU638736
22/10/08, The Grove, Shinfield Park (JH)

1551 *Pieris napi* Green-veined White
5/05/08, Rushy Mead, Shinfield, SU753694
4/08/08, 6, The Marshes, Riseley, SU735633
10/09/08, Finchampstead Churchyard,
SU793638 (JH)

1553 *Anthocharis cardamines* Orange-tip
4/04/08, Theale Lake (JL).
9/04/08, Upperwood Farm, Shinfield, SU747692
8/05/08, 8, Greensward Lane, Arborfield
19/05/08, 5, Three Mile Cross, SU719686 (JH)

LYCAENIDAE

1555 *Callophrys rubi* Green Hairstreak
29/05/08, Broadmoor Bottom, SU851629 (JL)

1557 *Neozephyrus quercus* Purple Hairstreak
28/07/08, University Farm, Arborfield, SU758688
7/8/08, 3, Three Mile Cross (JH)

1561 *Lycaena phlaeas* Small Copper
8/05/08, first; 10/08/08, 13; 24/10/08, last,
Cholsey (AR)

1569 *Cupido minimus* Small Blue
7/06/08, Lardon Chase, SU588809 (JH).
8/06/08, nectaring on Bird's-foot Trefoil, a
surprising visitor to a suburban garden, Emmer
Green (JN)

1571 *Plebejus argus* Silver-studded Blue
20/07/08, 8, Broadmoor Bottom (JL)

1572 *Aricia agestis* Brown Argus
23/05/08, 5, Green Park, Reading, SU701696
(JH).
28/09/08, Cholsey (AR)

1574 *Polyommatus icarus* Common Blue
13/05/08, first; 23/08/08, 43; 2/10/08, last,
Cholsey (AR)

1576 *Lysandra bellargus* Adonis Blue
7/06/08, 5, Lardon Chase (JH)

1580 *Celastrina argiolus* Holly Blue
12/04/08, Tilehurst (JH)
3/05/08, 6, Tilehurst (JH)
10/08/08, 2, Arborfield by-pass (JH)

NYMPHALIDAE

1584 *Limenitis camilla* White Admiral
22/06/08, The Coombes, Bearwood, SU772679 (JH).
1/07/08, Farley Hill (JH).
14/07/08, 2, Bradfield (JL).
24/07/08, Long Moor (JH)

1585 *Apatura ilia* Purple Emperor
1/07/08, Wasing Woods (JL)

1590 *Vanessa atalanta* Red Admiral
13/02/08, Beech Hill, SU707648 (JH).
early 03/08, "flying in a gale" at Dinton Pastures (Dot Lincoln at RDNHS meeting).
11/10/08, 7, but poor numbers until late season, Cholsey (AR).
15/11/08, Bere Court, Tidmarsh, SU625749 (JL)

1591 *Vanessa cardui* Painted Lady
08/08, singles on 3 days in Aug., Cholsey (AR).
30/09/08, Tilehurst, SU667749 (JL).
10/08, a single in Oct., Cholsey (AR)

1593 *Aglais urticae* Small Tortoiseshell
22/04/08, Lardon Chase (JH).
23/04/08, The Grove, Shinfield Park (JH).
8/05/08, Greensward Lane, Arborfield (JH).
26/06/08, Stanford End (JH).
30/06/08, Church Farm, Shinfield, SU728679 (JH).
4/07/08, Padworth Lane (JL).
20/07/08, visiting Buddleia, Upper Bucklebury, SU542683 (MWS).
23/07/08, Emmer Green (JN).
28/07/08, Carters Hill, SU765689 (JH).
15/09/08, Upper Bucklebury (MWS).
25/09/08, 3, Hungerford Marsh, SU3268 (JL)
26/09/08, Basildon Park; 3/10/08, Bradfield (JL)

1597 *Inachis io* The Peacock
23/01/08, Theale (JL).
15/03/08, Hosehill Lake (JL).
1/04/08, Bearwood, SU782689 (JH).
4/04/08, 19, Paices Wood (JL).
17/12/08, Linear Park, Calcot, SU661713 (JH)

1598 *Polygonia c-album* The Comma
8/02/08, Warren Wood, Finchampstead (JH).
30/03/08, Wokefield Common & Bradfield (JL).
30/03/08, best ever year for this species, Cholsey (AR).
15/09/08, 11, Paices Wood (JL).
27/10/08, Cholsey (AR)

1607 *Argynnis aglaja* Dark Green Fritillary
14/07/08, 1 to 3, (1 examined), Bradfield (JL)

1608 *Argynnis paphia* Silver-washed Fritillary
30/06/08, Round Oak Piece, Padworth, SU628654 (JL).
1/07/08, 3, Farley Hill (JH).
14/07/08, 2, Fleet Copse, Finchampstead, SU794626 (JH).
14/07/08, 3, & 15/07/08, 5, Bradfield (JL).
15/07/08, 2, Beech Hill (JH).
15/07/08, 2, Kings Copse, Bradfield Southend (JL).
19/07/08, 3, Hosehill LNR (JL).
19/07/08, 3, Park Wood, Moor Copse (JH&JL).
28/07/08, 14, Bradfield (JL).
1/08/08, 3, Farley Hill (JH)

1614 *Pararge aegeria* Speckled Wood
3/04/08, Fobney (JL).
9/04/08, Grazeley Churchyard, SU699669 (JH)
25/08/08, 13, Upperwood Farm, Shinfield (JH)
20/09/08, 2, Moor Copse Extension (JH)

1620 *Melanargia galathea* Marbled White
24/06/08, 8, The Grove, Shinfield Park (JH).
13/07/08, 32, well down on usual numbers, Cholsey (AR).
13/07/08, unusual for the garden, Emmer Green (JN).
24/07/08, 10, Swallowfield, SU719653 (JH)

1625 *Pyronia tithonus* The Gatekeeper
11/07/08, 5, The Marshes, Riseley (JH).
11/07/08, Cholsey (AR).
10/08/08, 40, Greensward Lane, Arborfield (JH).
23/08/08, last, another noticeably short season, Cholsey (AR).
25/08/08, Upperwood Farm, Shinfield (JH)

1626 *Maniola jurtina* Meadow Brown
6/06/08, Shinfield Cemetery, Spencers Wood, SU719668 (JH).
29/07/08, 106, Cholsey (AR).
3/09/08, 3, Warren Wood, Finchampstead (JH)

1627 *Coenonympha pamphilus* Small Heath
13/05/08, good to get any record at the site, Cholsey (AR).
22/06/08, Ufton Bridge, SU6168 (JL).
8/09/08, Burnthouse Farm, Burghfield, SU689684 (JH)

1629 *Aphantopus hyperantus* The Ringlet
22/06/08, Ufton Bridge (JL).
24/06/08, 6, The Grove, Shinfield Park
3/07/08, 100, The Grove, Shinfield Park (JH).
14/07/08, 81, Bradfield (JL), but max only 2, a
disappointing year, at Cholsey (AR).
10/08/08, Greensward Lane, Arborfield (JH)

GEOMETRIDAE

1719 *Orthonama vittata* Borkhausen Oblique
Carpet
14/06/08, 2, Withymead Nature Reserve,
SU601828, (RDNHS per JH).
Local species.

1721 *Xanthorhoe biriviata* Borkhausen Balsam
Carpet
20/04/08, seen flying, then caught and examined,
Widmead Wood, SU510662 (BMG per JH)

1726 *Xanthorhoe quadrifasiata* Clerck Large
Twin-spot Carpet
27/06/08, Dinton Pastures (BMG/BENHS).
One of the larger 'Carpet' moths (Geometridae,
Larentiinae) Local species.

1731 *Scotopteryx bipunctaria* D. & S. Chalk
Carpet
2/08/08, Hartslock Reserve, SU617795 (JH).
Notable B, UKBAP species.

1736 *Catarhoe cuculata* Hufnagel Royal Mantle
5/07/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616795
(RDNHS).
Local species.

1739 *Epirrhoe rivata* Hübner Wood Carpet
5/07/08, 2, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS
per NMH).
23/07/08, photograph provided for verification,
Cholsey (AR).
Local species, only (relatively) easy to identify
when fresh, due to possible confusion with worn
specimens of the Common Carpet.

1745 *Larentia clavaria* Haworth The Mallow
6/10/08, in garden, supposedly common but first
in 30 years, Earley (NMH)

1792 *Philereme transversata* Hufnagel Dark
Umber
5/07/08, 4, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve
(RDNHS).
Local species.

1794 *Euphyia unangulata* Haworth Sharp-
angled Carpet
29/08/08, 5, Moor Green Lakes, Blackwater
Valley (BMG). Either unusually fresh specimens
or subtly different from normal. Either way, NMH
found them very beautiful, and a joy to see.

1870 *Odezia atrata* Chimney Sweeper
15/06/08, 12, Ashford Hill NNR, ant-hill pasture,
SU563622 (JH).
Larva feeds on Pignut.

1878 *Minoa murinata* Drab Looper
18/05/08, 21, Ashampstead Common,
SU582753 (JH).
18/05/08, 14, Bradfield (JL).
Notable B species.

1884 *Abraxas grossulariata* Magpie Moth
24/07/08, first for many years, Emmer Green
(JN).
Common but declining.

1926 *Phigalia pilosaria* Pale Brindled Beauty
23/12/08, very early (normally early spring),
Emmer Green (JN)

SPHINGIDAE

1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum* Humming-bird
Hawk-moth
18/09/08, Bray Pit, SU907787 (JL)

1992 *Deilephila porcellus* Small Elephant
Hawk-moth
14/06/08, Withymead Nature Reserve (RDNHS)
Local species.

LYMANTRIIDAE

2029 *Euproctis chrysorrhoea* Brown-tail
14/07/08, Earley (NMH).
It is fortunate that this moth is quite rare in
Berkshire. On the coast, and at some places
inland, the larvae can occur in plague proportions
- and they have stinging hairs that can be carried
off in the wind, making life very unpleasant for
those living nearby.

ARCTIIDAE

2035 *Thumatha senex* Round-winged Muslin
14/06/08, 3, Withymead Nature Reserve
(RDNHS). Local species.

2043 *Eilema sororcula* Orange Footman
10/05/08, Westwood Road, Tilehurst (JH).
30/05/08, The Slade, Bucklebury (BMG).
2/6/08, Emmer Green (JN).
7/06/08, Waltham Place, White Waltham (BMG).
24/06/08, Earley (NMH).
Local species, becoming commoner.

2045 *Eilema caniola* Hoary Footman
14/07/08, in garden, first in 30 years, Earley
(NMH).
This 'Footman' occurs more frequently in western
Britain, but is beginning to occur more frequently
in the east.

2067 *Euplagia quadripunctaria* Jersey Tiger
14/08/08, at kitchen window, c. 20 ova laid overnight before release, larva now being raised on Alkanet, Westlands Road, (Shinfield Road area), Reading, SU734702 (Roy Dobson).
2nd for Reading area.

2068 *Callimorpha dominula* Scarlet Tiger
19/04/08, many larvae found, Thatcham Reedbeds, SU505665 (BMG).
06/08, singles seen flying throughout June, in garden, 6 seen at the end of the month, larvae seen earlier on Comfrey (as last year), Waverley Road, Oxford Road area, Reading (per JL)

NOLIDAE

2076 *Meganola albula* Kent Black Arches
5/07/08, 2, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS).
'Notable B' species.

NOCTUIDAE

2131 *Xestia rhomboidea* Square-spotted Clay
10/09/08, Emmer Green (JN).
'Notable B' species.

2165 *Hecatera dysodea* Small Ranunculus
24/06/08, Earley (NMH). There have been several local records of *dysodea* as adults and larvae in the last few years, but it is still uncommon.

2185 *Orthosia populeti* Lead-coloured Drab
13/03/08, Maiden Erlegh Lake Interpretation Centre, SU750709 (BMG per NMH).
populeti is one of the 'Quaker' moths, which appear in the spring, when the adults drink nectar from Sallow catkins ('Pussy Willow'). It lays eggs on poplars, including Grey Poplar, and is uncommon, though often overlooked.

2194 *Mythimna albipuncta* White-point
29/08/08, 3, Moor Green Lakes, Sandhurst (BMG).
albipuncta used to occur in Britain only as a rare migrant, but about 10 years ago it had clearly become established on the south coast. By now, it has spread well inland, and is apparently common in North Hampshire, so it is not surprising that Berkshire records are now increasing significantly.

CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(AR) Tony Rayner, (BENHS) British Entomological & Natural History Society, (BMG) Berkshire Moth Group, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (JN) John Notton, (MWS) Malcolm Storey and (RDNHS) the Society's organised mothing nights.

2204 *Leucania obsoleta* Obscure Wainscot
9/05/08, Cholsey (AR)

2227 *Asteroscopus sphinx* The Sprawler
15/10/08, new to garden, Earley (NMH)

2235 *Lithophane semibrunnea* Tawny Pinion
14/04/08, Shinfield Park (ECMWF) (JH).
A local species.

2260 *Conistra rubiginea* Dotted Chestnut
4/04/08, Winterbourne, Mapleash Copse (JH).
'Notable B' species.

2323 *Apamea sublustris* Reddish Light Arches
5/07/08, 3, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve (RDNHS). Local species.

2373 *Archanara sparganii* Webb's Wainscot
29/08/08, Moor Green Lakes, Sandhurst (BMG per NMH).

sparganii is a moth that used to have a coastal distribution, occurring in quite small reedy ponds, but is increasing inland. NMH hoped that it might be new to VC22 (old Berkshire), but it has previously turned up a few times in Appleford, Didcot.

'Notable B' species.

2397 *Panemeria tenebrata* Small Yellow Underwing
10/05/08, Emmer Green (JN).
11/05/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU640739 (JH).
12/05/08, 5, Riseley, The Marshes (JH).
4/06/08, Bearwood, brownfield (JH). Local species.

2484 *Schrankia costaestrigalis* Pinion-streaked Snout
14/06/08, Withymead Nature Reserve (RDNHS per JH).
29/08/08, 3, Moor Green Lakes, Sandhurst (BMG per NMH).
A small noctuid moth that could easily be mistaken for a 'micro'. Local species

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR ENTOMOLOGY and OTHER INVERTEBRATES 2008

Chris Raper

This was really a year of two halves. The weather in Spring was fairly normal and there were good numbers of most of the species I would expect to see. But the rest of the year, from about the end of June, was very hard going with predominantly overcast, cool or wet weather. This meant that I, for one, didn't get out as much as I might otherwise have done so this is reflected in the number of summer records.

Mollusca

Stylommatophora

Helicidae

Hygromia cinctella Girdled Snail
23/04/08, but also seen all summer in 2008. This chocolate-brown pea-sized snail with a pale ridge (or keel) has become established in the UK since its introduction in the 1950s. This was the first year that I noticed it in my garden but I believe David Notton has written about it in a previous edition of *The Reading Naturalist*. (CMTR)

Testacellidae

Testacella scutulum Golden Shelled Slug
01-02/08, Several examples found up to 15cm deep in soil during cultivation of a garden bed (SU719773). (JN)
See colour photograph page 26.

Arthropoda

Arachnida

Opiliones

Phalangiiidae

Lophopilio palpinalis (a harvestman)
10/10/08, Bucklebury Upper Common, SU534697, dead, under rotten wood beside stream, (MWS). Pedipalp: femur with long spine-bearing tubercles ventrally; femur, patella and tibia with well-developed seta-covered apophyses.

Araneae

Pisauridae

Pisauria mirabilis (a hunting spider)
Many females with egg bundles seen sunbathing on leaves in fine weather, SU719773. (JN)

Salticidae

Heliophanus cupreus (a jumping spider)
1/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796. A little black jumping spider with yellow palps. (CMTR)

Marpissa mucosa (a jumping spider)
3/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796. One of the largest and most distinctive jumping spiders, often seen on fence posts and trees. (CMTR)

Thomisidae

Misumena vatia (a jumping spider)
11/08/08, Swallowfield SU719653, On thistle flower. (JH)

Insecta

Coleoptera

Cerambycidae

Phymatodes testaceus Tanbark borer
09/03/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, Adults and larvae in oak logs taken indoors for firewood, Berry's Road. Adult newly emerged from log so still dusted in powdered wood. Larvae identified by association with c. 10 adults that emerged over several days from two log sections brought indoors for firewood. Larvae found in tunnels beneath the bark, but there are also holes, of elliptical cross-section, going directly into the heartwood. The abundant frass includes a very fine, dry, dry-wood-coloured dust, but pockets of larger fragments are present also. Larvae, extracted by careful removal of bark, are without legs and unable to walk. Can be returned by gently pushing the tail end back into holes when they slowly pull themselves backwards into the tunnel by peristalsis. If left on the surface they die. (MWS)

Strangalia quadrifasciata (a longhorn beetle)
14/06/08, Withymead, (CMTR)

Chrysomelidae

Cryptocephalus aureolus (a leaf beetle)
1/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796. A beautiful golden-green leaf-beetle commonly seen on yellow flowers. (CMTR)

Timarcha tenebricosa Bloody-nosed Beetle
20/04/08, Widmead Wood, Thatcham SU510662. (JH)
12/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796, 1 larva seen. (CMTR)

Coccinellidae

Anatis ocellata Eyed Ladybird
10/05/08, Tilehurst SU666742, at moth trap in garden. (JH)

Elateridae

Agrypnus murinus (a click beetle)
3/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve SU616796.
A large mottled click-beetle. (CMTR)

Lucanidae

Dorcus parallelipedus Lesser Stag Beetle
14/06/08, Withymead, SU600827, old boat ramp.
(MWS)

Lucanus cervus Stag Beetle
2/06/08-29/07/08. Peak numbers on 27/06/08
when 2 found on the ground in the afternoon and
between 5 and 7 flying in the evening. (AR)
5/06/08, 1 adult, Tilehurst SU666742. (JH)

Melyridae

Malachius bipustulatus Malachite Beetle
17/05/08, Tilehurst SU666742, On Meadow
Saxifrage flower in garden. (JH)

Pyrochroidae

Pyrochroa coccinea Black-headed Cardinal
Beetle
14/06/08, Withymead, on Nettle. (MWS)

Scarabaeidae

Melolontha melolontha Common Cockchafer,
May bug
30/05/08, Bucklebury Common, SU531699, at
MV light, 30-31/05/08, Upper Slade. (MWS)
Moth trap counts 4 on 4/05/08; 10 on 9/05/08; 6
on 22/05/08 and singles on 6/06/08 and 8/06/08.
These numbers suggest a steady decline in this
species at Cholsey over the past two years. (AR)

Phyllopertha horticola Bracken Chafer
1/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796
(CMTR)

Silphidae

Nicrophorus humator Black Sexton Beetle
22/04/08, Tilehurst SU666742, At moth trap in
garden. (JH)

Staphylinidae

Ocypus olens Devil's Coach-horse
10/10/08, Bucklebury Upper Common,
SU534696, On path up from stream, towards
Blind John's Well, (MWS)

Staphylinus dimidiaticornis (a rove beetle)
04/04/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, walking
along roadside pavement, Berry's Road. (MWS)

Diptera

Asilidae

Asilus crabroniformis Hornet Robber Fly
The abnormally late season for this fly witnessed
in 2007 was not repeated. The first sighting was
on 30/07/08 and the last was on 24/09/08. The
peak period was 12-21/08/08 when counts of 18-
20 flies were recorded. This peak would probably
have been extended had the hay not been cut in
late August. The flies were seen in all areas of
the meadow, and once in the garden. Several
mating pairs were observed. (AR)

Bibionidae

Bibio anglicus (a St. Marks fly)
26/04/08 & 3/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve,
SU616796. This very distinctive but local fly is a
frequent find on Hartslock in Spring. It was very
good to see it back again. (CMTR)

Chloropidae

Lipara lucens Cigar Gall
07/10/08, Thatcham Reedbeds, SU505665,
Single larva in Cigar Gall in now-dead stem of
Common Reed (*Phragmites australis*). (MWS)

Rhagionidae

Chrysopilus cristatus (a snipe fly)
14/06/08, Withymead. (CMTR)

Stratiomyidae

Stratiomys potamida (a soldier fly)
26/07/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve,
SU634738. This fly is a local species found in
sunny habitats with wet ditches and seepages,
where its larvae live. I had not seen it in this
location before but it was not unexpected,
especially after the recent wet summers. (CMTR)

Syrphidae

Mallota cimbiciformis (a hoverfly)
31/05/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve,
SU634738. One individual collected at Hogweed
flowers. This unusual bee-mimic hoverfly seems
to have had a good year, with many reported
sightings across the south of England. The larvae
live in rotting wood. (CMTR)

Volucella pellucens (a hoverfly)
14/06/08, Withymead, Oxon, SU600827, visiting
Water Dropwort. (MWS)

Xylota sylvarum (a hoverfly)
16-Jul-2008, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU634738. One seen sunning on a tree stump. (CMTR)

Tachinidae

Cistogaster globosa (a parasite fly)
26/07/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU634738. (CMTR)

Phasia hemiptera (a parasite fly)
26/07/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU634738. An exceptionally dark male was seen on hogweed flowers. (CMTR)

Prosenia siberita (a parasite fly)
10/08/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796. An interesting parasitoid of chafer beetles. Despite chafers being a common sight at Hartslock this fly is very rarely recorded there. (CMTR)

Zophomyia temula (a parasite fly)
8/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796. This highly distinctive black parasitoid fly was seen in large numbers for the first time on Hartslock and was also seen once at Moor Copse at the end of May. (CMTR)

Tephritidae

Chaetorellia jaceae (a picture-winged fly)
1/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796, seen on Ox-eye Daisy. (CMTR)

Hymenoptera

Apidae

Bombus lapidarius

Bombus pascuorum

Bombus pratorum

Bombus terrestris

Bombus lucorum

Bombus hortorum

These six species were all identified in the garden (SU719773) during June. All common species, but good to see when bees are in decline. (JN)

Cynipidae

Andricus fecundator Artichoke Gall-wasp
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, old agamic galled buds on Pedunculate Oak, roadside, (MWS)

Andricus grossulariae (a gall wasp)
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, agamic gall on Sessile Oak, roadside. Growing on end of small twig, not obvious what part of the plant was galled. (MWS)

Andricus malpighii (a gall wasp)
Sexual gall
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, sexual gall on male catkin of Pedunculate Oak, roadside, . Gall on old male catkin stalk which has survived and thickened in response. (MWS)

Andricus solitarius (a gall-wasp)
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, old agamic gall in axillary bud of Pedunculate Oak , roadside. (MWS)

Cynips disticha (a gall-wasp)
06/09/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU541690, 4 agamic galls on leaf underside of Pedunculate Oak , west end of "Ups & Downs". Group of four hard, pale green galls each with a brown, apical mark, on underside of leaf of Pedunculate Oak. Galls: 4/5.5mm diam, nearly globular (slightly elongated), apparently minutely warty but this is mostly due to pale spots within the distal half of the wall; chamber divided by thin layer into two halves, larva in proximal half. (MWS)
24/09/08, Theale Community Woodland, SU629705, agamic galls on Pedunculate Oak leaves , southern edge. Several leaves with one or two galls on each. Lower chamber contains small gall wasp. (MWS)

Diplolepis rosae Robin's Pin-cushion Gall-wasp
5/05/08, Hartslock SU616796, a few females seen ovipositing into Sweet Briar buds. (CMTR)

Neuroterus anthracinus Oyster gall-wasp
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, agamic galls on midrib on underside of Pedunculate Oak leaves, roadside. Galls, and scars left after they have fallen. Gall: globose, yellow with red spots, on midrib, on leaf underside. Scar: tiny swelling in the midrib, with a pair of flaps of brown tissue protruding through a central split. (MWS)

Neuroterus quercusbaccarum Common Spangle and Currant Gall-wasp
06/09/08, Miles's Green, SU540690, Agamic galls on underside of Pedunculate Oak leaves , roadside. (MWS)

Formicidae

Lasius fuliginosus Jet Ant
13/04/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve,
SU616796. (CMTR)

Ichneumonidae

Orthopelma mediator (an ichneumon wasp)
5/05/08, Hartslock SU616796. This tiny
ichneumon is a parasitoid of *Diplolepis rosae*
(Robin's Pincushion) galls. (CMTR)

Pompilidae

Auplopus carbonarius (a spider-hunting wasp)
12/07/08, A 'Notable B' species. A little mud cell
was built in a 24hr period on an egg tray in my
moth trap (SU719773). The 6mm long black
wasp which hatched on 12/07/2008 was
identified by the NHM and accepted for their
collection. A South Eastern species which often
builds cells in crevices, sometimes several
together. (JN)

Pteromalidae

Pteromalus bedeguaris (a parasitoid wasp)
5/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796.
(CMTR)

Vespidae

Vespa crabro Hornet
16/08/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU542684, Larva,
2cm long, lying on the pavement, Berry's Road,
(MWS)

Hemiptera

Pentatomidae

Pentatoma rufipes Forest Bug
14/06/08, final instar nymph, Withymead, Oxon,
SU600827. (MWS)

Zicrona caerulea (a shieldbug)
31/05/08, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve,
SU634738. (CMTR)

Mecoptera

Panorpidae

Panorpa germanica (a scorpion fly)
7/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796.
(CMTR)

Ephemeroptera

Caenidae

Caenis horaria (a mayfly)
7/06/08, Waltham Place, SU857770, Female, at
MV. (MWS)

Ephemeridae

Ephemera lineata (a mayfly)
5/07/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796,
a few individuals seen at Mercury Vapour moth
lights. (CMTR)

Trichoptera

Leptoceridae

Mystacides nigra (a caddis fly)
14/06/08, Withymead, Oxon. SU600827 (MWS)

Odonata

Coenagriidae

Pyrrhosoma nymphula Large Red Damsel
(formerly Large Red Damselfly)
Always the first species of the year, but only just
this time. Max of 4 from 11/05/08 to 10/06/08.
(AR)

Coenagrion puella Azure Bluet (formerly Azure
Damselfly)
Regularly seen from 12/05/08 to 2/09/08 with
over 50 on 29/05/08. (AR)

Ischnura elegans Common Bluetail (formerly
Blue-tailed Damselfly)
Recorded on 5 occasions from 8/06/08 to
23/07/08. Never numerous but easily overlooked.
(AR)

Agriidae

Calopteryx splendens Banded Demoiselle
One visited the site on 29/05/08; 3/07/08 and
12/07/08. (AR)

Gomphidae

Gomphus vulgatissimus Common Clubtail
(formerly Club-tailed Dragonfly)
A sole record on 24/05/08 - about par for the
course! (AR)
28/05/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve,
SU616796, about 5-6 individuals seen sunning
themselves on bushes around the reserve.
(CMTR)

Aeshnidae

Aeshna cyanae Blue Hawker (formerly Southern Hawker)

First appearance on 1/08/08 was later than usual. Frequently seen thereafter until 12/10/08. Two on several occasions. (AR)

Aeshna mixta Migrant Hawker

Singles only recorded from 1/08/08 to 2/10/08. (AR)

Aeshna grandis Brown Hawker

Singles seen from 23/06/08 to 13/09/08. (AR)

Anax imperator Blue Emperor (formerly Emperor Dragonfly)

Singles seen on 8 days from 9/06/08 to 30/08/08. (AR)

Libellulidae

Sympetrum striolatum Common Darter

Regularly seen from 9/06/08 to 23/10/08. (AR)

Libellula depressa Broad-bodied Chaser

A good year for this species. Frequently seen patrolling or laying, max of 5 on 10/06/08. (AR)

Libellula quadrimaculata Four-spotted Chaser

None in 2007, so the one on 7/06/08 was a welcome sight. (AR)

Orthetrum cancellatum Black-tailed Skimmer

Singles seen from 8/06/08 to 23/07/08. Gradually becoming a more frequent visitor. (AR)
7/06/08, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve, SU616796, one female. (CMTR)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(AR) Tony Rayner, (CMTR) Chris Raper, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JN) John Notton and (MWS) Malcolm Storey

Homoptera

Psyllidae

Trioza remota (a jumping plantlouse)

6/09/08, Upper Bucklebury, SU541690, gall pits on undersides of leaves of Sessile Oak, west end of "Ups & Downs". Nymphs in depressions on underside of live leaf. (MWS)

Orthoptera

Acrididae

Myrmeleotettix maculatus var 'green' Mottled

Grasshopper - green variety

14/09/08, Greenham Common, SU484650, western end, dry heath. (MWS)

Conocephalidae

Conocephalus dorsalis Short-winged Cone-head

14/09/08, Greenham Common, SU494650, Female and final instar nymphs, in rushes (*Juncus*) beside 3rd small pond west of Control Tower. (MWS)

Tettigoniidae

Metrioptera brachyptera Bog Bush-cricket

14/09/08, male and female, western end of Greenham Common, SU482650. (MWS)

Metrioptera roeselii Roesel's Bush Cricket

Once again heard and seen through the year, but less so than in 2007. (AR)

RECORDER'S REPORT FOR VERTEBRATES 2008

Tony Rayner

My grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to this report. Members should note the incredible input by both Rod D'Ayala and John Lepeniere. Also, as always, the regular mammal records kept by Gordon Crutchfield are especially valued. Do take the trouble to note the details that follow – some will amaze you.

FISH

Gasterosteus aculeatus 3-spined Stickleback
25/05/08 196 caught in bottle traps at Sutton Courtenay Env. Education Centre (Rd'A)
6/06/08 237 caught at Sutton Courtenay EEC. SU501918 (Rd'A)

Carassius carassius Crucian Carp
11/11/08 Five adults/young in Greenmoor Lower Pond, Woodcote. SU645807 (EA)

Perca fluviatilis Perch
No date Numerous in Jacks Pond, Nettlebed Common. SU700873 (AB)

AMPHIBIANS

Bufo bufo Common Toad
03&04/08 6,583 in Oaken Wood, nr Hambleden taken across road to breeding pond. 1,890 collected on one evening! SU768854 (JS)
29/03/08 One adult at Sutton Courtenay (rare record for site.) SU501918 (Rd'A)
24/04/08 One adult at Greenmoor Pond, Woodcote. SU645807 (Rd'A)
2/05/08 None at Sea Pond, Nettlebed Common (formerly abundant.) SU701871 (Rd'A)
7/07/08 Six toadlets at Didcot copse. SU510895 (Rd'A)
29/08/08 One in Cholsey garden, the first such record for many years. SU592868 (TR)
30/08/08 One in Cholsey meadow during hay cutting. SU592868 (TR)
24/09/08 One outside Cholsey kitchen door at 22.30 hrs. SU592868 (TR/RR)
12/10/08 One at Emmer Green. SU713767 (GC)
21/10/08 One under Cholsey snake sheet. SU592868 (TR)

Triturus vulgaris Smooth Newt
Plenty in Earley garden pond, predated by Blackbirds and Crows. SU7472 (AA)
13/03/08 Adult at Hagbourne Primary School. SU525882 (Rd'A)
15/03/08 Adult in Goring Heath garden. SU634792 (Rd'A)

9/04/08 60 in Tilehurst garden, sent to Rushall Farm on pond clearance. SU683740 (JL)
21/04/08 12 adults at Warburg Reserve. SU719879 & SU720878 (Rd'A)
24/04/08 Adult at Greenmore Pond Woodcote. SU645807 (Rd'A)
26/04/08 37 at Sutton Courtenay EEC SU501917/8 (Rd'A)
27/04/08 Six adults in Woodcote garden. SU642821 (Rd'A)
30/04/08 Three adults at Little Wittenham Wood. SU573928 (Rd'A)
1/05/08 56 at Sutton Courtenay EEC. SU501917/8 (Rd'A)
8/05/08 43 at Hagbourne Primary School, caught in bottle traps. SU524882 (Rd'A)
19/05/08 Adult and larvae in Cookham Dean garden. SU868842 (Rd'A)
23/05/08 Two adults at Ufton Court. SU624668 (Rd'A)
11/06/08 Two males at Thatcham. SU507670 (JL)
2/07/08 Two females at Brookfield School Tilehurst. SU663754 (JL)
04/08 Adult in Mill Meadows, Henley. SU767825 (SR)

Triturus cristatus cristatus Great Crested Newt
29/03/08 Four adults at Sutton Courtenay Env. Educ. Centre. SU501917 (Rd'A)
30/04/08 21 adults at Little Wittenham Wood. SU566934 & SU573928 (Rd'A)
1/05/08 19 adults at Sutton Courtenay Env. Educ. Centre. SU501917 (Rd'A)
25/05/08 13 adults & immatures at Sutton Courtenay EEC. SU501917 (Rd'A)
27/05/08 10 adults at Little Wittenham Wood. SU573927/8 (Rd'A)
5/06/08 25 adults at Sutton Courtenay EEC. SU501917 (Rd'A)
15/09/08 Five at Ufton Court. SU624667 (Rd'A)

Triturus helveticus Palmate Newt
24/04/08 One adult in Greenmoor Pond, Woodcote. SU645807 (Rd'A)
26/04/08 26 adults at Sutton Courtenay Env. Educ. Centre. SU501917 (Rd'A)

1/05/08 19 adults at Sutton Courtenay Env. Educ. Centre. SU501917 (Rd'A)

23/05/08 Two adults in Ufton Court ponds. SU624667 (Rd'A)

Rana temporaria Common Frog

600 near Oaken Wood, Hambleden taken across road to breeding pond. SU768854 (JS)

No frogspawn in Earley garden pond. (previous years lots of frogs) SU7472 (AA)

20/01/08 One in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)

21/02/08 Spawn at Thatcham Discovery Centre (earliest ever for site.) SU637919 (DD)

29/02/08 66 in Tilehurst garden plus first frogspawn. SU666742 (JH)

5/03/08 Spawn in Didcot garden. SU521895 (Rd'A)

6/03/08 Seven clumps of spawn & 13 adults in Didcot garden. SU521895 (Rd'A)

13/03/08 Frogspawn at Shinfield Park. SU728695 (JH)

15/03/08 Small amount of frogspawn in Cholsey pond. First for several years, but predated before hatching. SU592868 (TR/RR)

15/03/08 Spawn in Goring Heath garden. SU634792 (Rd'A)

11/08/08 & 23/08/08 One in Cholsey garden. SU592868 (TR)

REPTILES

Lacerta vivipara Common Lizard

17/02/08-24/10/08 Less recording carried out than in 2007, but this was by far the best ever year for lizards on this Cholsey site. There was plenty of evidence of breeding success and an increase in the number of mini colonies. Number peaked on 15/09/08 at 37 smashing the previous record of 16 recorded in 2007. SU592868 (TR/RR)

21/05/08 Two adults at Nettlebed Common. SU700872 (Rd'A)

31/08/08 One adult at Parsonage Moor. SU460998 (Rd'A)

28/09/08 Several at Decoy Heath. SU6163 (MKL)

6 dates Search of whole site of Warburg Reserve yielded only 3 adults – suggests a major decline here for this species. SU719880 (Rd'A)

Anguis fragilis Slow-worm

15/03/08-21/10/08 This was the year when accurate counting became difficult, such were the numbers found under some sheets. There was an amazing peak count of 76 individuals on 18/09/08. During the year these lizards were found under all but two of the 34 snake sheets spread all around this Cholsey site. Casualties were once again minimised during hay cutting, by working from the centre outwards. SU592868 (TR/RR)

29/03/08 One juvenile dug up in Tilehurst vegetable patch. SU666742 (JH)

3/05/08 Two in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)

8/05/08 49 at Warburg Reserve in various sites. SU7188 (MB)

4/07/08 21 at Warburg reserve. SU718879 & SU719880 (Rd'A)

30/07/08 A juvenile at Oxford Road Reading community garden. SU702734 (JL)

25/08/08 Three adults at Ipsden Heath. SU661849 (Rd'A)

21/09/08 Four adults at Maidensgrove Scrubs. SU721879 (Rd'A)

25/09/08 Adult in Didcot garden (7 introduced earlier in the year.) SU521895 (Rd'A)

28/09/08 Several, Decoy Heath. SU6163 (MKL)

Natrix natrix Grass Snake

4/04/08-14/10/08 143 Cholsey sightings in this period, slightly down on 2007. One that trapped itself in a net left beside the pond was a metre long. When released this snake enjoyed a lengthy swim. Most encouraging feature was the high number of newborns late in the season. SU592868 (TR/RR)

5/03/08 Large adult at The Coal, Reading. SU725743 (JL)

8/05/08 Two adults and a juvenile at Warburg Reserve. SU7188 (MB)

10/05/08 One beside pond with head trapped in Ramshorn snailshell – released. SU645807 (SS)

12/05/08-26/05/08 Adult by Whitchurch garden pond. SU6377 (BL)

05/08 Three individuals near Highmoor garden pond. SU705847 (JW)

29/08/08 One at Mackney during Society field trip. SU573902 (TR)

9/09/08 Immature male at Eagle House School, Sandhurst. SU836623 (Rd'A)

12/10/08 Clutch of 8 hatched eggs in centre of dead tree in Wallingford Castle meadows. SU611899 (Rd'A)

17/10/08 One at Dinton Pastures. SU778718 (JH)

Vipera berus Adder

25/05/08 Two adults at Warburg Reserve. SU719880 (AP)

11/06/08 Two adults at Warburg Reserve. SU719879 (MB)

4/07/08 Female at Warburg Reserve. SU718879 (Rd'A)

20/07/08 One at Broadmoor Bottom. SU8562 (JL)

28/09/08 Two at Decoy Heath. SU6163 (MKL)

BATS

Pipistrellus sp Pipistrelle

Not monitored in detail, but impression is of constant numbers that are now frequenting more of the Cholsey site than previously. SU592868 (TR)

5/06/08 One at Sutton Courtenay Env Ed Centre. SU501917 (Rd'A)

22/07/08 One in Didcot garden. SU521895 (Rd'A)

14/11/08 Three small bats (probably pipistrelles) at Crowsley Park. SU7379 (FT)

28/07/08 A few bats (probably Pips) flying in an Earley garden. Numbers thought to be declining. SU7472 (AA)

Myotis daubentonii Daubenton's bat

30/04/08 Adults over pond in Little Wittenham Wood. SU573928 (Rd'A)

INSECTIVORES

Erinaceus europaeus Hedgehog

13/04/08 Two foraging in Didcot garden. SU521895 (Rd'A)

22/04/08 One in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)

8/05/08 Adult at Hagbourne County Primary School. SU525882 (Rd'A)

22/05/08 One in Cholsey garden. SU592868 (TR)

9/06/08 One in Tilehurst garden. SU666742 (JH)

22/06/08 One in Earley garden. SU7472 (AA)

7/07/08 One at Tilehurst. SU606726 (JL)

20/07/08 Road kill at South Moreton. SU557884 (Rd'A)

08/08 Dog carrying baby hedgehog out of greenhouse at Bradfield. SU602729 (JL)

17/08/08 Adult and juvenile in Earley garden, another sighting on 20th. SU7472 (AA)

3/09/08 Adult found sleeping in tortoise box in Didcot garden. SU521895 (Rd'A)

7/09/08 One found indoors at Bradfield. SU602729 (JL)

10/09/08 Large adult in Cholsey garden late at night. SU592868 (TR/RR)

13/09/08 Road kill at Englefield. SU635716 (JL)

1/10/08 Large adult on Cholsey gravel path. SU592868 (RR)

5/10/08 Juvenile in Earley garden. SU7472 (AA)

20/11/08 One in Cholsey garden SU592868 (TR)

2/12/08 One in Cholsey garden (too small to survive winter.) SU592868 (TR)

Sorex araneus Common Shrew

15/03/08 to 14/10/08 Seen on 33 occasions, usually singles. In 2007 there were 64 sightings on this Cholsey site. SU592868 (TR/RR)

22/02/08 One under tin at Decoy Heath. SU6163 (JL)

22/02/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR. SU653697 (JL)

4/05/08 One adult under refuge at Decoy Heath. SU611634 (Rd'A)

20/12/08 Two at Paices Wood. SU585636 (JL)

Sorex minutes Pigmy Shrew

4/04/08 to 11/10/08 Seen on just 4 occasions, usually singles. In 2007 there were 16 sightings on this Cholsey site. SU592868 (TR/RR)

Neomys fodiens Water Shrew

18/09/08 One at Bray Pit Reserve. SU906785 (JL)

Talpa europaea Mole

Spread out from the usual places around Cholsey, molehills seemed to be everywhere. For the second successive year there was a noticeable increase in those asking how to eradicate them from gardens. (TR)

19/12/08 200 molehills in Great Shefford paddock. SU341709 (JL)

CARNIVORES

Meles meles Badger

12/02/08 Road kill at Lower Basildon. SU605792 (TR)
9/03/08 Road kill between Streatley and Lower Basildon. SU6079 (TR)
11/03/08 & 17/03/08 Road kills at Ufton. SU613688 (JL)
18/03/08 Road kill at Maidenhead. SU8879 (JL)
22/04/08 Road kill at Bradfield. SU5873 (JL)
27/04/08 Latrines at Moor Copse. SU6373 (JL)
17/05/08 Road kill at Sulham. SU646744 (JL)
3/06/08 Road kill at Tilehurst. SU657742 (JL)
16/06/08 Road kill at Bradfield. SU594726 (JL)
26/06/08 Two road kills at Woodcote, both juveniles. SU642827 & SU654823 (Rd'A)
8/07/08 & 14/07/08 Road kills at Chapel Row. SU575698 (JL)
25/07/08 Road kill at Streatley. SU5979 (JL)
07/08 Regular sightings in Tilehurst garden. 1 adult 2 juvs. SU669757 (JL)
12/08/08 Road kill at Tilehurst. SU676698 (JL)
17/09/08 & 12/11/08 Road kills at Aldermaston. SU552661 (JL)

Mustela nivalis Weasel

3/02/08 Adult at Clayfield Copse. SU7277 (JO)
1/07/08 One at Englefield. SU6272 (JL)
14/07/08 One at Bagnor. SU453694 (JL)
22/07/08 One at Churn. SU515830 (TR)
27/10/08 An adult at Bradfield. SU602729 (JL)
12/11/08 One at Kintbury. SU368673 (GC)

Mustela erminea Stoat

7/03/08 One at Woolhampton. SU573664 (GC&JC)
8/04/08 One at Frilsham. SU539742 (TR)
06/08 One at Bradfield. SU6073 (JL)
16/09/08 One at Lewknor. SU710980 (GC)

Mustela putorius Polecat

8/03/08 Road kill at Shillingford. SU598918 (RR)
8/04/08 Road kill at Ashampstead. SU551769 (TR)

Mustela vison Mink

2/01/08 One dead & carried by a dog at Aldermaston Wharf. SU6167 (RA)

Vulpes vulpes Fox

22/02/08 One at Paices Wood. SU588636 (JL)
18/03/08 One dead at Woolley Firs. SU8579 (JL)
30/03/08 Droppings and scent noticed in Earley garden. SU7472 (AA)
15/04/08 Road kill at Midgham. SU5666 (JL)

26/04/08 One at Moor Copse. SU641735 (JL)
4/05/08 An adult at Decoy Heath. SU611634 (Rd'A)
5/05/08 One in Cholsey meadow. SU592868 (TR)
27/05/08 One crossing Wallingford Road, Cholsey. SU600878 (TR)
3/06/08 One standing outside Cholsey kitchen door SU592868. (TR)
6/06/08 Cub in Cholsey meadow. SU592868 (TR)
6/06/08 One at Emmer Green. SU707768 (GC&JC)
22/06/08 Two road kills at Theale. SU6371 & SU6270 (JL)
25/06/08 One in Reading. SU690723 (GC&JC)
07/08 Adult seen regularly in Tilehurst (cub also seen.) SU6675 (JL)
22/08/08 Repeated barking at night in Cholsey meadow. SU592868 (TR/RR)
3/11/08 One at Hill Green, Cholsey. SU595876 (TR)
6/11/08 One at Streatley. SU588818 (TR)
8/11/08 One at Emmer Green. SU713767 (GC)
15/11/08 Three at Bere Court. SU6274 (JL)
17/11/08 One at Beenham. SU593692 (GC)
20/11/08 Two dead at Hosehill LNR. SU651698 & SU684697 (JL)
22/11/08 One at Bracknell. SU832678 (GC)
24/11/08 An adult in Didcot. SU522896 (Rd'A)
4/12/09 One at Hill Green, Cholsey. SU589879 (TR)

Lutra lutra Otter

11/08 One at Hosehill LNR. SU647698 (JL)

Rattus norvegicus Brown Rat

Regularly seen in Bradfield garden where 2 or 3 shot each month. SU602729 (JL)
Regularly eating ducks' corn at Thatcham Nature Discovery Centre. SU500670 (JL)
25/03/08 Three at Woosehill. SU790696 (JH)

DEER

Muntiacus reevesi Muntjac

11/02/08 One at Shinfield Park. SU728695 (JH)
15/04/08 Adult with fawn at Paices Wood. SU5863 (JL)
17/04/08 One at Crowmarsh SU618901 (GC&JC)
12/05/08 One at Emmer Green. SU705768 (GC&JC)
23/05/08 One at Ufton Court. SU624667 (Rd'A)
5/06/08 One at Emmer Green. SU708768 (GC&JC)
10/06/08 One at Goring. SU607807 (GC&JC)
25/06/08 One at Emmer Green. SU713765 (GC&JC)
27/07/08 One at Hardwick. SU650780 (GC&JC)

6/08/08 One at Nettlebed. SU703859 (GC&JC)
22/11/08 One at Welford. SU405735 (GC)
Singles at Bradfield, Stanford Dingley, Tidmarsh;
Moor Copse, Englefield, Eling, & Bucklebury
Common (JL)

Capreolus capreolus Roe Deer

13/01/08 One at Binfield Heath. SU742788
(GC&JC)
22/02/08 Three in Reading. SU706705 (GC&JC)
11/05/08 One at Moor Copse. SU635738 (JH)
13/05/08 One entered Cholsey garden through
open gate. SU592868 (TR/RR)
12/08/08 One near Lewknor Reservoir.
SU716971 (Rd'A)
3/11/08 Six at Hill Green, Cholsey. SU5987 (TR)
11/12/08 Four at Decoy Heath. SU612636 (JL)
26/12/08 Four at Wasing Wood. SU5763 (JL)
26/12/08 & 30/12/08 Four & three at Hill Green,
Cholsey. SU5987 (TR)

Dama dama Fallow Deer

1/06/08 Two at Skirmett. SU772888 (GC&JC)
27/06/08 Four adults at Lambourn. SU3276 (JL)
11/09/08 Four at Warburg reserve. SU712880
(TR)

RABBITS & HARES

Lepus europaeus Brown Hare

18/01/08 Eight at Stanford Dingley. SU5772 (TR)
22/01/08 Nine at Englefield. SU6372 (JL)
21/04/08 Two near Oakley Wood. SU646886
(Rd'A)
27/04/08 Six at Hampstead Norris. SU5375 (JL)
3/06/08 Eight at Pangfield. SU5671 (JL)
6/06/08 One at East Hanney SU432917
(GC&JC)
29/08/08 One at Mackney during Society field
trip. SU5789 (TR et al)
7/09/08 Two on Cholsey Hill. SU584878 (TR)
25/12/08 Three at Cholsey. SU598858 (AS)
26/12/08 Four hare coursers caught by police at
Cholsey Hill; 1 live hare seen, two killed by dogs.
SU584878 (TR)

Oryctolagus cuniculus Rabbit

7/05/08 12+ at Aldworth. SU540813 (JL)
7/06/08 11 juveniles at Burghfield Mill. SU6770
(JL)

CONTRIBUTORS

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

(AA) Alice Ayers, (AB) Andrew Burdock, (AP) Alan Parfitt, (AS) Alan Strachan, (BL) Becky Lusby, (DD) Desmond Dix, (EA) Environment Agency, (FT) F Taylor, (GC) Gordon Crutchfield, (JC) Jane Crutchfield, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere & associates, (JO) J Oliver, (JS) John Sumpter, (JW) Jill Ward, (MB) Martin Burdock, (MKL) Michael Keith-Lucas, (Rd'A) Rod D'Ayala, (RA) R Angus, (RR) Ro Rayner, (SR) Sally Rankin, (SS) Sue Sandford & (TR) Tony Rayner

RODENTS

Sciurus carolinensis Grey Squirrel

Singles at Yattendon; Ashampstead, Fence
Wood, Bradfield, Tilehurst, Aldermaston, Paices
Wood, Eling, Bere Court. (JL)

Apodemus sylvaticus Wood Mouse

19/05/08 to 21/10/08 9 Cholsey sightings, all
from just three of the 34 metal sheets. SU592868
(TR/RR)
01-03/08 Singles trapped in Tilehurst loft &
garage. SU666743 (JL)
08-09/08 One in Tilehurst garden under log
piles. SU666743 (JL)
17/01/08, 11/4/08 and 20/8/08 one eating bird
food in Earley garden. SU7472 (AA)
7/07/08 One in Didcot garden. SU521895 (R'dA)

Microtus agrestis Field Vole

15/03/08-21/10/08 Seen on 80 occasions at
Cholsey, well down on 2007. SU592868 (TR/RR)
21/05/08 One under tin at Decoy Heath. SU6163
(JL)
3/11/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR.
SU653696 (JL)

Clethrionomys glareolus Bank Vole

15/03/08-21/10/08 Seen on 141 occasions at
Cholsey, massively down on 2007. SU592868
(TR/RR)
20/03/08 Three under tin at Decoy Heath.
SU612634 (JL)
4/05/08 One under refuge at Decoy Heath.
SU611634 (Rd'A)
21/05/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR.
SU653657 (JL)
11/06/08 Two juveniles at Hosehill LNR.
SU653697 (JL)
24/06/08 One dead at Bradfield. SU5872 (JL)
5/07/08 One at Emmer Green. SU705768
(GC&JC)
19/07/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR.
SU648693 (JL)
6/08/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR.
SU653697 (JL)
20/09/08 One under tin at Hosehill LNR.
SU653697 (JL)

Arvicola terrestris Water Vole

No records submitted.

THE WEATHER AT READING DURING 2008

Ken Spiers

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A second disappointing year in a row; although the summer was not as wet as last year's, the total rainfall was still the fourth highest in the last twenty years. There were no snow days in winter but spring had the highest number since 1979. The year was very cyclonic throughout, with high pressure not staying around long enough to act as a block, so giving us fine, dry and warm weather. The only time there was a blocking high was in February and December, which were the driest months of the year. They also recorded the year's highest mean monthly pressures. Sunshine was lacking, with only February and June way above their long term averages and August and November way below theirs. It was an odd year when it came to the temperatures, with the first half above average and the second half below. The result of this was the lowest annual mean temperature since 2001; however, it was still 0.5° Celsius above the long term average, mainly due to climate change over the last few decades.

January generally unsettled and very wet, with the second week producing nearly two-thirds of the monthly rainfall; the final total made January the wettest month of the year. For most of the month, there was a mild west, south-westerly flow across the country, pushing temperatures above average, with sunshine amounts just below average. From the 22nd onwards, the weather conditions became more settled as high pressure established itself over the southern part of the country. Notable occurrences; this was the first January since before 1960 that hasn't recorded an air frost and on the 11th, 17.4 millimetres of rainfall was recorded, making it the wettest January day since 2001.

February quite the opposite to the January; no rainfall recorded from the 6th to the 23rd, inclusive, helping to make this February the driest month of the year. Also, the number of air frosts was the highest since 1996, due to high pressure positioning itself over Europe and acting as a block against any weather systems from tracking their way across the country. Temperatures were above average during daylight hours, however, with clear skies at night there were quite a few air frosts; the highest number since 1996. Sunshine was the main feature of the month, with nearly 127 hours recorded, making this the sunniest February since before 1957. The weather turned a little more unsettled in the last week but remained fairly dry as weakening fronts crossed our region.

March dry early on in the month but turning rather unsettled and stormy, especially during the second week, when wind gusts reached 50 mph at times. The 9th and the 15th were very wet days; the 15th was the wettest March day since 2005 and the second wettest since 1984. The total rainfall for the month was fifty per cent above the long term average; the wettest March since 2001. A period of much cooler weather set in by the start of the third week, when a cold front moved southwards bringing with it a cold northerly air flow over the country. There were frequent snow showers from the 22nd until the 26th when temperatures began to rise as frontal systems moved in from the west. There were reasonable amounts of sunshine throughout the month, between the precipitation events, with the total for the month just a few hours below average.

April started reasonably warm, with sunny periods and occasional light showers. However by the 5th, a cold front moved southwards over the country, with temperatures dropping sharply. The 6th saw a trough move southwards over our region, and this brought with it heavy snow; a depth of 6 centimetres was recorded at the University met. site. Temperatures remained below average for the next couple of weeks, with air frosts at night totalling the highest number since 2003. By the 20th temperatures began to rise and the next few days were sunny with a few light showers. The 27th witnessed a thunderstorm in the morning but rainfall was light. The last couple of days recorded forty per cent of the month's rainfall as a deep depression crossed southern England; the 29th was the wettest day of the month.

May the first half was warm; with temperatures day and night well above average. It was mainly dry throughout this period and very sunny, with only two days with reasonable amounts of rainfall recorded: the 4th and 15th. The third week did see temperatures dip below average, with ground frosts at night; however, it remained dry and sunny. By the 24th, weather conditions became more unsettled, when a depression with associated fronts tracked its way eastwards over the southern half of the country. It remained unsettled until the end of the month; however, temperatures rose above average and there were a few sunny spells. Overall, this was the warmest May since 1992.

June was a reasonable summer month, temperatures and rainfall around average and sunshine well above average; sunniest month of the year. There were brief periods of unsettled weather; one of these was at the start of the month, with heavy rainfall, recorded on the 2nd and 3rd. From then on turning dry and very sunny, with temperatures rising as high pressure developed over the southern part of the country. Another interruption was when a cold front moved southwards, producing rain on the 11th and 12th. However, fine weather soon returned and it wasn't until the 18th, when a weak depression tracked its way over southern England, that light rain was recorded. Settled conditions quickly returned and remained until the end of the month.

July an unsettled start, with depressions and associated fronts tracking their way across the country, making it very wet at times, with a thunderstorm on the 7th. The 9th recorded 20.5 millimetres of rain, the highest daily total since July 2007. There were reasonable amounts of sunshine between the periods of rain; however, temperatures during this period were a little below average. From the 13th onwards, conditions became more settled, becoming dry and fairly sunny, with temperatures slowly rising. Southern counties were affected by a low pressure system on the 28th, becoming very hot and humid and ending with a thunderstorm during the evening. It was also the warmest day of the month and the year, as it turned out, with a temperature of 28.4° Celsius.

August another very disappointing summer month, with sunshine 40% below the long term average; making it the dullest August since 1965. Temperatures during daytime were below average but little above during night, with daily sunshine totals low, only reaching double figures on the 14th and 15th. It was only in the last week there was any resemblance to summer, when high pressure stationed itself over the southern half of the country. This produced dry but dull weather with temperatures near normal. High pressure had moved away by the 30th, with the next day cloudy and wet, to add to the gloom.

September the unsettled weather continued, with rain at times and temperatures edging to below average. There was a thunderstorm, accompanied by light rain, during late afternoon of the 2nd and the 5th recorded 12.8 millimetres of rain, the wettest day of the month. By the 12th, high pressure began to build to the south west of the British Isles, influencing our weather for the next twelve days; dry and fine, with temperatures near or a little above average. However, with clear skies at night, ground frosts were recorded on the 20th and 21st. As the high pressure drifted north-east, it brought a northerly air flow over the British Isles, with weak fronts moving south-eastwards over the country. As high pressure finally moved away, a westerly air stream set in over the country, with rain on the last day of the month.

October started dry and sunny, with temperatures near average. This was followed by a short wet spell, 4th to 7th inclusive, improving again as high pressure moved in from the south west. The second week witnessed fog in the mornings, clearing to give dry, sunny days, with temperatures well above average. It remained fairly dry into the third week; however, as high pressure moved away, winds became westerly and temperatures dropped back to near normal. The last week saw a dramatic change, as high pressure to the west of the British Isles brought northerly winds over the country with temperatures dropping as a cold front moved south over our region. This was followed by a trough, also moving south, bringing with it rain turning to snow, during the evening of the 28th. This was the first snow recorded in the month of October at this site since 1941, and the first time since 1910 that snow was reported as lying the next morning. Air frosts were recorded on the 28th and 29th, with the 29th recording 14.5 millimetres of rain, the wettest day of the month.

November was a cyclonic month, with bands of rain affecting the region throughout the month; with only brief dry spells. The 1st and 10th were the wettest days, with the 10th recording 21.9 millimetres, the wettest day of the year. On the 23rd snow fell during the early morning but this soon turned to rain. With the number of sunless days the second highest since 1994, it was no wonder that it was the dullest November since that year.

December the first week was cool, sunny with showers at times, merging to give longer periods of rain. This situation carried on into the second week, with night frosts; however, becoming dull by the 12th, lasting to the 16th. Temperatures began to rise, just before Christmas to above average, with a westerly airflow over the country. However, by Boxing Day, high pressure was influencing our weather, with winds blowing from an easterly direction and temperatures soon dropped well below average; heavy frosts were recorded on the 30th and the 31st. Overall, this was the coolest, driest and sunniest December since 2001.

DAILY WEATHER RECORDS: 2008 – UNIVERSITY OF READING (WHITEKNIGHTS)

	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year
Daily Temperatures °C													
Mean	7.2	5.9	7.0	8.8	14.3	15.1	17.0	16.9	13.8	10.5	7.7	4.1	10.7
Mean Maximum	10.2	10.7	10.5	13.6	19.2	19.6	21.5	20.4	17.9	14.7	10.5	7.1	14.7
Mean Minimum	4.1	1.0	3.4	4.1	9.4	10.6	12.5	13.3	9.6	6.2	4.8	1.1	6.7
Mean Daily Range	6.1	9.7	7.1	9.5	9.8	9.0	9.0	7.1	8.3	8.5	5.7	8.0	8.2
Extreme Maximum	13.8	15.4	15.0	19.6	26.2	25.3	28.4	25.5	20.0	21.6	14.2	12.4	28.4
Date	20th	14th	11th	26th	11th	9th	28th	30th	19th	12th	15th	22nd	28th July
Extreme Minimum	0.2	-6.0	-3.1	-2.0	3.1	6.0	7.0	7.9	3.9	-2.0	-2.4	-4.8	-6.0
Date	6th	17th	5th	8th	22nd	5,6th	4th	15th	28th	29th	23rd	30th	17th February
Extreme Grass													
Minimum	-4.6	-11.8	-9.4	-8.2	-3.0	0.0	0.8	3.1	-1.0	-5.0	-7.6	-8.5	-11.8
Date	6th	17th	5th	8th	19,20th	16th	22nd	15th	28th	28th	23rd	30,31st	17th December
Days with													
air frost	0	12	2	6	0	0	0	0	0	2	2	13	37
ground frost	15	22	16	14	5	0	0	0	4	13	10	24	123
Hrs at/below 0°CXXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	0.0	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX	XXXX
Sunshine Hours													
monthly total	51.5	126.7	100.1	164.0	183.2	226.2	197.9	117.9	118.8	138.1	43.0	66.2	1533.6
% of Possible	19.5	43.5	27.2	39.5	38.1	45.8	39.8	26.2	31.3	41.5	16.0	26.6	34.1
Daily mean	1.66	4.37	3.23	5.47	5.91	7.54	6.38	3.80	3.96	4.45	1.43	2.14	4.19
Precipitation													
amount in mm	90.4	21.5	71.8	55.7	63.3	49.5	76.6	70.7	43.8	52.7	73.2	31.9	731.1
Rain days	18	7	17	21	15	8	13	20	12	11	19	5	166
Max rain in one day													
(mm)	17.4	6.1	15.9	15.6	15.0	16.2	20.5	13.9	12.8	14.5	21.9	10.8	21.9
Date	11th	5th	15th	29th	25th	2nd	9th	11th	5th	28th	10th	12th	10th July
Mean wind speed													
(mph)	5.6	3.8	5.1	3.7	3.4	2.8	3.1	3.4	2.8	2.9	3.6	3.2	3.6
Days with													
sleet or snow	0	0	5	2	0	0	0	0	0	2	1	0	10
Snow lying	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	2
Fog at 0900 GMT	2	1	0	1	0	0	0	1	1	3	0	2	11
Thunder	0	1	0	1	0	0	2	1	2	0	0	0	7
Hail	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	3
Pressure													
Mean (mbs)	1013.4	1024.1	1007.2	1010.9	1015.9	1017.7	1014.3	1010.9	1018.3	1015.4	1014.7	1019.2	1015.2
Highest	1031.7	1043.2	1025.6	1031.3	1025.3	1026.4	1027.0	1022.0	1036.7	1032.1	1034.4	1037.8	1043.2
Date	25th	16th	3rd	5th	9th	22nd	27th	26th	26th	10th	17th	26th	16th February
Lowest	979.1	997.4	968.2	987.5	1005.1	1008.8	995.7	988.8	994.0	995.2	994.5	980.7	968.2
Date	15th	4th	10th	30th	1st	19th	7th	12th	6th	5th	30th	4th	10th March
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec	Year