

# The Reading Naturalist

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# **THE READING NATURALIST**

**No 65 for the year 2012**

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

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This is my first attempt at producing the Naturalist and I am deeply indebted to my predecessor, Malcolm Storey, for setting up the technology to make a complex task as simple as possible.

Thanks also go to all the contributors for their efforts in meeting the deadlines whilst carrying on with busy lives. Special thanks go to Jan and Ricki for the records of the walks, excursions and meetings.

So it is time to get your thinking caps on about interesting articles for next year. The spring, summer and autumn stretch ahead to inspire you in your particular field of interest. So don't forget to document and photograph those interesting expeditions whether they are near or far.

Chris Ash (Hon. Editor)

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## OBITUARY

### Catherine Side

Catherine died after a two year battle with breast cancer aged 58 on August 15th 2012.

Catherine had an enthusiastic interest in natural history, particularly bird watching. All her many trips in this country and abroad became opportunities to observe the birds and other wildlife. Her knowledge of all types of birds was truly remarkable; she was able to make accurate bird identifications from the merest glimpse.

Educated at Gloucester and Cambridge University, Catherine had many accomplishments. Working in the food industry she had the distinction of being the first female master brewer. She moved to work in the USA and Canada and became active in the Institute of Food Science and Technology.



She moved to Pangbourne twenty years ago and contributed to many local activities. A gifted musician, she played the double bass for local orchestras. She would often bring leaflets along to society walks to promote concerts.

Many members may remember the interesting talk she gave with her husband and New Zealander, Ray Winger, in October 2010 on the wildlife around Auckland.

Catherine will be remembered for her friendly curiosity for all sorts of things, including a passion for natural history.

## PRESIDENTIAL RAMBLINGS - 2012 IN RETROSPECT

### Chris Bucke

It is usual in Britain for some characteristics of the seasons in any year to be unusual, but 2012 was even more unusual than usual. If that sentence is familiar, the same was written in last year's Presidential Ramblings about 2011 so perhaps 2012 was not all that unusual! The winter was pleasant with some sunny days with snow on the ground providing ideal conditions for examining animal and bird tracks. It was unusually dry, so much so that by the end of March many plants had not made the growth normally expected and farmers were anticipating catastrophic drought. The idea of transporting water from north Britain to the arid south through the canal system was revived (and should not be forgotten). How things changed! In the remaining nine months there was enough rain for it to be the second wettest year recorded. Temperatures were never high and sunshine levels were low so some species did not thrive but molluscs, worms, mosses, liverworts and ferns did very well. Grass grew abundantly so the grazier was able to leave his cattle in Basildon Park into December. Chalk grassland species, challenged by lack of moisture in many summers, provided spectacular displays of bloom. It was not a good autumn for fungi but the conditions led to very fine autumn colours extending over a longer period than normal.

The Society was as active as ever through the year. The winter evening talks were very varied and well attended. Several new members and visitors were welcomed. The winter weekend and Wednesday walks at the beginning of the year were well attended but the wet conditions restricted numbers walking in the autumn. The summer outings were well attended and, in general, managed to avoid really wet days. However one Saturday walk, from Long Wittenham, went ahead in a spectacular thunderstorm with pyrotechnic effects, very memorably. As before, the team of members led nature walks round Basildon Park on Friday mornings just about throughout the year. National Trust members proved to be hardy, some walking in conditions that were much less than

ideal, but the numbers walking were fewer than last year, not surprisingly. Interestingly, there are now many “regulars” for whom Friday morning walks around the park are part of normal life.

High spots of the year were the visit to Plantlife’s reserve at Ranscombe Farm in Kent, where many unfamiliar species were found, mainly arable “weeds” but also bee and man orchids. The autumn trip to Wakehurst Place to see autumn colours was also successful. Some members resolved to go there in the spring/summer to see some of the choice wild species growing there.

Informal relations have been established with the Friends of the new nature reserve at Fobney Island. Development of plant communities will be recorded there. During 2012 a plant species list was produced for the very biodiverse levelled landfill site at Field Farm, Burghfield Bridge. The future of that site is undecided.

It will be fascinating to see how the seasons develop in 2013 and how, for instance, orchid populations were affected by the extreme wet of 2012.

## **MEMBERSHIP**

### **Norman Hall**

12 new members joined the society in 2012:

Maureen Carver of Tilehurst	Jean Hall of Tilehurst
Stephen Coulson of Thatcham	Mrs A. Hawthorne of Woodcote
Avril Davies of Henley-on-Thames	Andrea MacGregor of Henley-on-Thames
Phil Dean of Thatcham	Ken White of Ashford Hill
Roger Dobbs of Thatcham	Jennifer & Victoria Wickens
Carolyn Gowers of Burghfield Common	

## **MEMBERS’ OBSERVATIONS**

### **Ricki Bull**

Before each evening talk, members and visitors are invited to announce their recent observations.

3 Jan

- Chris Bucke – Lesser Celandine in flower on 2nd Jan. in West Wycombe and at least 15 different species in flower during any walk in December.
- Jan Haseler – Cowslips and other plants in flower on the Berkshire Downs.
- Sally Rankin – Loddon Lily already in flower.
- Fred Taylor – Mushrooms and toadstools still to be seen.
- Colin Dibb – Tree in Pangbourne with at least 30 clusters of Mistletoe.

17 Jan

- Chris Bucke – Bullfinch along the Thames Path near Tilehurst Station; 25 species of plants in flower at Brimpton.
- Jan Haseler – Stinking Hellebores at Streatley
- Kit Brownlee – Painted Lady Thursday the 12th Jan at Watlington Street.
- Martin Sell – 5 Bullfinches along with Redwings in garden.
- Renton Righelato – 1-2 Bitterns on White Swan Lake at Dinton pastures.
- Sally Rankin – Evening Primroses in flower; 10 Goldfinches feeding in garden

21 Feb

Roger Frankum – Hungerford Marsh – Hawfinch eating Lichen, *Xanthora parietina*.

Jan Haseler – Swallowfield churchyard – Snowdrops, Aconites, Primula and Celandine flowering.

Fred Taylor – Basildon Park – Aconites flowering and about 2 dozen Honey bees around them.

Martin Sell – Churn walk: 3 Short-eared Owls, Hare; 11 Roe Deer in two fields; Remenham hedgerow – 40 Reed Buntings and one Tree Sparrow.

Chris Bucke – Mutton Copse - Green Hellebores beginning to unfold; Stinking Hellebores with and without red colouration; Coltsfoot.

David Owens – Red-throated Diver at Dinton pastures.

Dot Lincoln – Henley Road Gravel Pits – Smew, Goosander and male Scaup.

**Exhibition:** Chris Bucke – From Stichens Green – *Aceria fraxiniflora* – Ash flower gall on Ash flowers from last year.

6 Mar

Renée Grayer – Treecreeper and Goldcrest on walk.

Michael Keith Lucas – c.23rd Feb - Frogspawn in pond.

Jeremy Welsh – Hawfinch

Dot Lincoln – 25 Feb female Brimstone; Red Admiral.

Rob Stallard – 1st March – Hummingbird Hawkmoth.

Chris Bucke – Primroses abundant

Martin Sell – Frogspawn in pond but it froze in the cold weather.

Fred Taylor – Woodcock, Redwings, Deer, Fox.

Tony Rayner – Chiffchaff 28th Feb, Bullfinches.

**Exhibition:** Chris Bucke – Oak stained with dye from the greenstaining fungus

16 Oct

Chris Bucke – 9th Oct – Sparrowhawk at Waitrose killing a Collared Dove with Magpies watching and calling.

Ken and Sarah White – first flock of Redwings over their house

Jan Haseler – visit to Reading Cemetery found 15 Red Admirals, 4 Commas, Muntjac and parasol fungi.

Alice Ayers – slugs eating soft Fox faeces in the garden

**Exhibition:** Parasol Fungi – Sheelagh Hill

20 Nov

Meryl Beek – 2 Ring-necked Parakeets 17th Nov

Martin Sell – 2 Kingfishers, 4 Little Egrets – Wood Green, Theale

Chris Bucke – Parakeets flying over house; Red Admiral 18th Nov

Avril Davis – Otmoor, murmuration of Starlings.

Tony Rayner – 50 Parakeets reported last month in Henley

4 Dec

Martin Sell – Waxwings – Amersham Road, Caversham

Tony Rayner – Fox screaming on moonlit nights

Chris Bucke – Roe deer, Friday 30th Nov at Basildon Park, Fox

**Exhibition:** Forestry Commission sheets on Ash die-back

## EXCURSIONS 2012

Jan Haseler

### Sunday 29 January

The first field trip of 2012 was on Sunday 29 January, when Martin Sell led a joint field trip with the Berkshire, Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust (BBOWT) to the Avon Valley near Ringwood and then to the New Forest. The initial meeting point was the bridge over the River Avon at Ibsley. In a nearby field were several hundred Mute Swans *Cygnus olor*, plus one Bewick's Swan *C. columbianus* and one Whooper Swan *C. cygnus*. While most of the group were scanning the fields for swans, Ian Duddle spotted 3 Otters *Lutra lutra* from the bridge – but by the time he managed to attract the attention of the other members of the party, they had vanished from sight. Next stop was Blashford Lakes, a nature reserve of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust. A hide in a wood of birch and Alder *Alnus glutinosa* overlooked feeders which were being used by Redpolls *Carduelis flammea*, Siskins *C. spinus* and a selection of other finches and tits. Lunch was eaten in another hide, looking out over a lake with Goosanders *Mergus merganser*, displaying Goldeneyes *Bucephala clangula*, distant Black-tailed Godwits *Limosa limosa* and a bank-side Fox *Vulpes vulpes*. The final destination was Blackwater Arboretum in the New Forest. In late afternoon, Hawfinches *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* flew in and perched on the tops of the trees before going to roost. Their bulky bodies and short tails gave them a distinctive torpedo-shaped outline. Crossbills *Loxia curvirostra* were another good find here.

### Saturday 25 February

On Saturday 25 February, Lesley Dunlop led a walk to look at the geology of The Coombes, near Barkham. 17 members started out at the top of the site, on river terrace gravels which had been laid down about 250,000 years ago. An exposed bank showed flint-origin gravel, with the pebbles in a mixture of shapes and sizes. Two Goldcrests *Regulus regulus* in a bush at the side of the track displayed their fiery orange caps and drumming woodpeckers were heard. The route then led down into the woods and onto the Bagshot Sands, which had been laid down in a marine environment 49 – 44 million years ago. The strong orange colouring of an exposed bank of sand indicated that it had a high iron content. There were occasional beds of flat rounded pebbles, which would have been laid down near a beach. Some creatures, perhaps bees, had excavated round holes in the sand. Bluebells *Hyacinthoides non-scripta*, Honeysuckle *Lonicera periclymenum* and Wood Sage *Teucrium scorodonia* were growing in this part of the wood. As the path descended towards the bottom of the woods, the conditions became boggy and streams began to appear. This marked the start of the London Clay, laid down 56 – 49 million years ago. The ground flora became notably richer, with Wood-sorrel *Oxalis acetosella*, Lesser Celandine *Ranunculus ficaria*, Barren Strawberry *Potentilla sterilis*, Herb-Robert *Geranium robertianum*, Greater Stitchwort *Stellaria holostea*, Lords-and-Ladies *Arum maculatum* and Dog's Mercury *Mercurialis perennis*. Another track led uphill, back onto the Bagshot Beds. There were many animal burrows dug into the banks at the side of the track and two Roe Deer *Capreolus capreolus* were seen in an adjoining field. Back at the top of the site, on the river terrace gravels, was an area of recent excavations. Lesley explained that the gravels laid down in the Kennet and Thames valleys are made up almost entirely of flint, but the Loddon gravels also include sandstone fragments from the Greensand of the Weald, and a number of these were found.

### Saturday 24 March

The sun was pleasantly warm when Jan Haseler led 23 members on a circular walk from Ufton Nervet on Saturday 24 March. Alexanders *Smyrnium olusatrum* was growing luxuriantly beside the lane through the village. The walk started out westwards along a footpath through fields. First stop was the site of a medieval moated manor house. Common Frogs *Rana temporaria*, clumps of frog-spawn and chains of toad-spawn were seen in the moat and Chiffchaffs *Phylloscopus collybita* were calling from the trees. Next stop was Ufton Court. A Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* was spotted in the avenue of trees leading up to the house. An enormous old Pedunculate Oak *Quercus robur* pollard nearby is reckoned to be more than 500 years old. One of the fishponds was full of yellow Western Skunk Cabbage *Lysichiton americanus* heads. As the ancient sunken track-way which leads west from Ufton Court dropped down from gravel onto clay, the ground became damp underfoot. Primroses *Primula vulgaris* were flowering in abundance on the bank sides and in the adjoining copses. A Lords-and-



Ladies plant was in flower and Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage *Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* and Wood-sorrel were seen. On the bank-side further up were Barren Strawberry and Ground-ivy *Glechoma hederacea*. At Old Farm, the route dropped back north-eastwards across a field of ryegrass, then followed a track below a line of copses. The first Blackthorn *Prunus spinosa* blossom was appearing on the sunny sides of the hedges and pale yellow willow blossom was attracting the bees. A few very early Bluebells were already in flower. Tall seed heads of Small Teasel *Dipsacus pilosus* were showing above a patch of disturbed ground next to the track. The walk continued southwards up a lane, with white Sweet Violets *Viola odorata* and a very early Greater Stitchwort in flower on the banks. Another footpath crossed a field with Giant Puffballs *Langermannia gigantea*, before dropping down into Seward's Gully, where flowering Moschatel *Adoxa moschatellina* and the leaves of Pignut *Conopodium majus* were seen. The warm sunshine had brought out early butterflies and Brimstone *Gonepteryx rhamni*, Comma *Polygonia c-album*, Peacock *Inachis io* and Red Admiral *Vanessa atalanta* were all seen during the walk.

### **Sunday 15 April**

There was a strong northerly breeze blowing on the afternoon of Sunday 15 April, bringing with it a few short showers of rain and hail. Nevertheless, 23 members assembled by Clayfield Copse, next to Caversham Park, to look at spring flowers on a walk led by Michael Keith-Lucas. No-one could have been disappointed – most of the spring flowers that could have been expected were there and in flower, giving proof, if any were needed, that it is not always necessary to travel far to visit good sites. Michael explained how to distinguish between Common Dog-violet *Viola riviniana* and Early Dog-violet *V. reichenbachiana*, how to separate the polyploid and diploid forms of Lesser Celandine, how to identify male and female Dog's Mercury and Yew *Taxus baccata*, and why *Sorbus torminalis* is called in English the Wild Service-tree. Differences between the floras of Blackhouse Wood, which is ancient woodland, and Clayfield Copse, part of which was old park land which had been neglected and become woodland, were noticed. The old park land still had some Lebanon Cedars *Cedrus libani* to emphasise the point. Besides the Wild Service-tree, two other unusual members of the *Rosaceae* were noticed – the Wild Pear *Pyrus pyraeaster*, and the Wild Apple *Malus sylvestris* subsp. *syvestris*. Goldilocks Buttercup *Ranunculus auricomus* and an unusual Comfrey, which when keyed out proved to be the White Comfrey *Symphytum orientale*, were added to the list of species seen. Green Woodpeckers *Picus viridis* were seen and heard throughout the afternoon, and at one stage there were several voles, scuttling among the fallen wood and leaf litter.

### **Saturday 28 April**

Renée Grayer led 11 members on a field trip to Harefield Copse and Boxgrove Wood, Tilehurst on the cold wet afternoon of Saturday 28 April. The walk started out from Little Heath at the junction of Pincents Lane and City Road. The route followed a footpath through a horse-grazed field, where Renée pointed out that the first field buttercups to come into flower in spring were Bulbous Buttercups *Ranunculus bulbosus*, with reflexed sepals. The path led into Harefield Copse, where the Bluebells were close to their best. Scattered amongst them were Yellow Archangel *Lamium galeobdolon*, Goldilocks Buttercup, Woodruff *Galium odoratum* and Wood Anemone *Anemone nemorosa*, with both Early Dog-violet and Common Dog-violet in flower close to the path. A diversion along a smaller side path revealed a big clump of Early-purple Orchids *Orchis mascula* and a number of Wild Service-trees. Dropping down through the woods, Wych Elm *Ulmus glabra* and Southern Wood-rush *Luzula forsteri* were seen. The bottom of the woods was wetter, with some particularly slippery clay patches on the footpath. Here Moschatel, Enchanter's-nightshade *Circaea lutetiana* and Primrose were found, together with Red Currant *Ribes rubrum* and Gooseberry *R. uva-crispa* bushes and another patch of Early-purple Orchids. An abrupt boundary at a wood bank from carpets of Bluebells to a big patch with no Bluebells hinted at a different history to the adjacent woodland. An area which had recently been cleared of conifers was covered by a sea of Wood Spurge *Euphorbia amygdaloides*. On the climb back up through the woods, Wood Melick *Melica uniflora*, Sanicle *Sanicula europaea* and Three-nerved Sandwort *Moehringia trinervia* were added to the species tally. Blackcap *Sylvia atricapilla* and Chiffchaff were heard.

### **Saturday 12 May**

Julia Cooper and Trish Marcouse organised a visit to the Organic Research Centre at Elm Farm, Hamstead Marshall on Saturday 12 May – a welcome dry and sunny day. Agro-ecology researcher Dr Jo Smith introduced the 11 members present to the Centre and its activities



(see <http://www.organicresearchcentre.com>).

Jo explained that agro-forestry is a type of integrated land use which balances productivity with environmental protection. At the trial site in Flatbottom Field, strips of short rotation coppice had recently been planted, with 12 metre alleys of grassland remaining between them. The trees were faster growing Willow *Salix viminalis* and Alder, which grows more slowly but fixes nitrogen. Both species should thrive in the damp clay loam soil. Competition from other vegetation was reduced by using a photo-degradable barrier, which it was hoped would be more effective than the jute tried previously. Once the trees are established, they can be cut every 2-3 years and converted to wood chip for bio-energy, or possibly used as fodder for grazing animals. The effect of different management techniques on the trees and their environment will be evaluated.

The walk then followed the farm trail, a permissive path round the farm funded under Countryside Stewardship. Large numbers of St Mark's Flies *Bibio marci* were seen in Flatbottom. The adults emerge around St Mark's Day (25 April) and live for only about a week. A diversion was made through a small damp copse, where a variety of woodland plants and ferns were seen. The ditch between Woodcote North and Quarry Field was interesting, with ferns including Hard Shield-fern *Polystichum aculeatum*. Brimstone, Orange-tip *Anthocharis cardamines*, Peacock and Green-veined White *Pieris napi* butterflies were seen in the fields. An area of unimproved grassland with a small pond at the eastern end of Quarry Field was botanically richer than the other pastures, with Pignut *Conopodium majus*, Betony *Stachys officinalis* and Devil's-bit Scabious *Succisa pratensis* in the grassland, and Monkeyflower *Mimulus guttatus* in the pond. Moschatel was found in the hedgerow at the eastern edge of Flatbottom. The last stop was in Donkey Field, an area of damp unimproved grassland which was rather overgrown. A large clump of Water Avens *Geum rivale* was in flower here, together with Betony and Devil's-bit Scabious. An Orange-tip butterfly on Cuckoo Flower *Cardamine pratensis* was being eaten by a spider. The group then returned to the Centre for welcome refreshments. When preparing to leave, an Osprey *Pandion haliaetus* being mobbed by a Red Kite *Milvus milvus* was spotted overhead, rounding off an interesting visit.

### **Saturday 26 May**

Chris Raper and Malcolm Storey led a field trip to BBOWT's Hartslock reserve near Goring on Saturday 26 May. 15 members gathered on a hot and sunny afternoon with a strong easterly wind. The Monkey Orchids *Orchis simia* were in full flower. The two Lady Orchids *Orchis purpurea* which were in flower were a little past their best. They were first recorded on the reserve in about 1997 and DNA analysis shows that they probably originated from Provence. The hybrid offspring of the Monkey and Lady Orchids, which first appeared in 2002, are going from strength to strength. They are considerably taller than either of their parents and share characters from both. So far, they have been well behaved, keeping out of the main Monkey Orchid area and moving instead towards the woods - one has already appeared on the outside of the fence. While Chris recounted the history of the hybrids, a Green Hairstreak *Callophrys rubi* butterfly fluttered about in the tree behind his head.

Another speciality of the reserve is the Downy-fruited Sedge *Carex filiformis*, which grows in a small patch near the bottom of the slope. Members of the group took it in turn to lie down and inspect the fruits with a hand-lens. Returning to the top of the hill, there was welcome shade in the wood, where a few White Helleborines *Cephalanthera damasonium* were in flower. A number of butterflies were flying on the hillside, including Dingy Skipper *Erynnis tages*, Small Heath *Coenonympha pamphilus*, Holly Blue *Celastrina argiolus*, Common Blue *Polyommatus icarus* and more Green Hairstreaks. Brimstones and Orange-tips were patrolling along the edge of the woods and a single new generation Small Tortoiseshell *Aglais urticae* was seen. Moving further into the reserve, the Horseshoe Vetch *Hippocrepis comosa* appeared to be doing particularly well. Pasqueflowers *Pulsatilla vulgaris* had been introduced a few years ago. They had been planted in a regular grid, which made them easy to find, and one was still in flower. Semi-parasitic Bastard-toadflax *Thesium humifusum* was growing amongst the sward and a single specimen of the metallic blue Bastard-toadflax Bug, or Down Shieldbug, *Canthophorus impressus* was captured for closer inspection. A Hobby *Falco subbuteo* was watched as it flew over the woods and the fields next to the Thames.

The fields at the top end of the valley are now being managed by BBOWT. Chris explained that these had just been a sea of long grass when the Trust first took them over, but after a few seasons of hard grazing, the structure, with its many anthills, has reappeared. From the far side of the field, Graham Saunders heard an animal calling and spotted a Fox just inside the wood, carrying a Rabbit

*Oryctolagus cuniculus* in its mouth. Initially the Fox was being followed by a single cub, then 2 more cubs appeared. They were about three-quarters of the size of their parent and quite active. The Rabbit was calling in distress. The cubs lay on the ground with paws forward and heads up, intently watching the action as the Rabbit was subdued. Although Graham was only about 10 metres away, none of the Foxes saw him.

### Saturday 2 June

A small number of members met at BBOWT's Sutton Courtenay Environmental Education Centre on the evening of Saturday 2 June for a dusk walk and nocturnal newt survey. Newts are most active at night and best seen by torchlight. Unfortunately the weather was not kind and the persistent rain at the start of the evening continued to persist – making the post-dusk torchlight survey impossible (newts don't like the disturbance to the pond surface caused by rain). The bottle traps set overnight (and emptied in the morning) caught 9 Smooth Newts *Triturus vulgaris* and 3 Great Crested Newts *T. cristatus* from Education Pond, the largest of the ponds on site, and 6 Great Crested Newts from the smaller Newt Pond. Of note was a single Frog tadpole caught in one of the bottle traps – a species that has only just re-colonised the site after many years' absence, being first seen to breed again in 2011. For the record, a replacement torching survey was undertaken a few days later, giving an idea of the number of newts that might have been seen if conditions had been better. In the Education Pond 9 Great Crested and 37 Smooth Newts were seen - and in the Newt Pond were 21 Great Crested and 20 Smooth Newts.

### Thursday 7 June

The rain ceased in the late afternoon of Thursday 7 June, after about 24 hours of stormy weather. Nine intrepid members and guests, led by Chris Bucke, met at Theale church and explored areas adjacent to the footpath through the golf-course to Malpas. In the early stages of the walk it was apparent that wet vegetation has wetting power superior to that of running water but the discomfort was forgotten when the (normally) wet areas were reached. The surface of the ditch between the footpath and the M4 was completely covered with Common Duckweed *Lemna minor* and there were fine displays of Flag Irises *Iris pseudacorus*. Many more of these were noted during the walk. Once the golf course had been reached, really interesting species were noted in ditches and ponds beside tees and greens. The first pond had around 50 spikes of Water Violet *Hottonia palustris*, Bulrush *Typha latifolia*, Hemlock Water-dropwort *Oenanthe crocata*, Fool's Water Cress *Apium nodiflorum*, a pondweed *Potamogeton* sp. and various sedges as well as commoner species of wet areas. After passage through another area of very wet grass, Blossomend Copse was reached. This apparently interesting ancient woodland is surrounded, in effect, by a moat. Nightingales *Luscinia megarhynchos* have been noted there in the past, but not one was heard singing. Conspicuous plants there were Primroses and Wood Spurge. Further on, more ponds and ditches provided further spikes of Water Violet and some quantity of Mare's Tail *Hippuris vulgaris*, a few Branched Bur-reeds *Sparganium erectum*, Common Spike-rush *Eleocharis palustris*, the beautiful "dangly" Cyperus Sedge *Carex pseudocyperus* and other less conspicuous sedges. The party returned to Theale through North Street, lamenting the closure of the Thatchers Arms and noting a striking population of the garden escape Oriental Poppy *Papaver orientalis* by the roadside.

### Saturday 23 June

The Society's annual coach trip, on Saturday 23 June, was to Ranscombe Farm, Plantlife's flagship reserve in the North Downs near Rochester in Kent. The plants of the thin chalky soils above the Medway have been known to botanists for over 300 years - Meadow Clary *Salvia pratensis* was first described from here in 1699, as was Hairy Mallow *Althaea hirsuta* in 1792. The reserve is a working arable farm. Two fields are particularly special for their arable plants – Kitchen Field at the southern end of the reserve and Longhoses Field, close to the entrance. Most of the group set out towards Kitchen Field, walking along tracks through the farmland. The pace slowed when a wide cultivated field margin, bright with poppies, was encountered. Amongst the Common Poppies *Papaver rhoeas* were the smaller darker red flowers of Rough Poppy *P. hybridum*, with bristly round seed capsules. The nationally rare Narrow-fruited Cornsalad *Valerianella dentata* was abundant and there was also a large number of Broad-leaved Cudweed *Filago pyramidata* plants, of which Ranscombe holds 99% of the UK population.

At the side of the next track were specimens of Slender Thistle *Carduus tenuiflorus* (or Seaside Thistle,

as some of the group knew it), which were tall with small pale pink flowers. The route skirted the edge of Great Wood, with its dense, tall Sweet Chestnut *Castanea sativa* coppice. Next to the wood was another wide cultivated field margin, where Meadow Clary, Corncockle *Agrostemma githago*, Venus's-looking-glass *Legousia hybrida*, Smith's Pepperwort *Lepidium heterophyllum* and Dwarf Spurge *Euphorbia exigua* were amongst the finds. A corner of Great Wood had about 15 spikes of Man Orchid *Aceras anthropophorum* flowers, a few Bee Orchids *Ophrys apifera* and a number of plants of Hairy Mallow, with its delicate pink flowers. In the open clearing beyond, a Holly Blue butterfly settled on a clump of Wild Liquorice *Astragalus glycyphyllos* and there were a number of Pyramidal Orchids *Anacamptis pyramidalis*. A picnic lunch was enjoyed at the top edge of Kitchen Field, looking down across the steeply sloping valley below. A few Ground-pine *Ajuga chamaepitys* plants were found nearby. Kitchen Field had only been ploughed and planted in April. From the footpath across it, Annual Mercury *Mercurialis annua*, Scarlet Pimpernel *Anagallis arvensis*, Field Pansy *Viola arvensis* and other still small arable weeds were identified.

At the far side of Kitchen Field, the footpath entered Brockles Field, a former arable field which has been in set-aside for about 15 years and is developing a rich flora. Grass Vetchling *Lathyrus nissolia*, Pyramidal Orchid and Common Broomrape *Orobanche minor* were amongst the plants which were seen here. The southern side of the field drops down steeply, giving good views southwards up the Medway Valley. The route then dropped down through the woods of Mill Hill, where White Helleborine, Broad-leaved Helleborine *Epipactis helleborine*, Deadly Nightshade *Atropa belladonna* and Columbine *Aquilegia vulgaris* plants were found and a clearing had Horseshoe Vetch. Returning along the track next to the railway line at the bottom of the reserve, two Whitethroats *Sylvia communis* were spotted on a fence, one with food in its bill. The final section of the walk was through Longhoses Field, where Long-headed Poppy *Papaver dubium*, with a smooth, elongated, seed capsule was found. Other plants seen here included Long-stalked Crane's-bill *Geranium columbinum*, Corncockle and many Broad-leaved Cudweed plants. The coach then drove to the nearby Shorne Woods Country Park, where tea and cake were enjoyed.

## Saturday 7 July

On Saturday 7 July, John Lerpiniere led a group of 8 members on a field trip to the woods above Rushall Farm, Bradfield. The walk started out along the edge of a wheat field above the chalk pit. Colin Dibb explained that the organic farm has a 6-year rotation, with 3 years of grass and clover, grazed by sheep and cattle, to enrich the soil, followed by a year of wheat – the hungriest but most profitable crop, followed by 2 years of less-demanding crops, such as barley. The route then led through Owlpit Copse and into the first of the small meadows in the woods. The field trip had been specially planned to coincide with the flight periods of the White Admiral *Limenitis camilla* and Silver-washed Fritillary *Argynnis paphia* butterflies, but on a morning of continuous cloud cover, none were on the wing. Meadow Brown *Maniola jurtina*, Ringlet *Aphantopus hyperantus* and Marbled White *Melanargia galathea* butterflies were all seen, together with single specimens of Small Skipper *Thymelicus sylvestris* and Red Admiral.

A delicate St John's-wort plant with orange buds was identified as Slender St John's-wort *Hypericum pulchrum*. Further on, a more robust plant with pale yellow flowers and buds and downy stem and leaves was identified as Hairy St John's-wort *H. hirsutum*. Later, a big clump of Perforate St John's-wort *H. perforatum* was also found. A significant proportion of the Marsh Thistle *Cirsium palustre* flowers were white, rather than purple, and there were some pink Selfheal *Prunella vulgaris* flowers, as well as the more usual purple specimens. Some of the Common Spotted-orchids *Dactylorhiza fuchsii* had white flowers and these plants all seemed to have leaves without spots. The second small meadow had figwort plants with square 4-winged stems and bluntly tipped leaves which were identified as Water Figwort *Scrophularia auriculata*. Field-rose *Rosa arvensis*, with white flowers and a pointed style, was found near the top of the field. A dense mat of red clover with narrow dark green leaves and dark red flowers was identified as Zigzag Clover *Trifolium medium*. Wild Strawberries *Fragaria vesca* provided a delicious snack. The return route led back down through Owlpit Copse and into a very muddy field where a group of cub scouts were camping. Finally, the exposed face of the chalk pit was inspected, with white chalk from the Cretaceous period, laid down about 85 million years ago, at the bottom. This was eroded for about 30 million years, before the next layers were deposited unconformably. The thin dark layer above the chalk, containing sharks' teeth, is supposed to date from the time of the mass extinction of the dinosaurs, 57 million years ago. Traces of iridium are thought to have an extra-terrestrial origin. Above are orange layers of sands and clays from the Reading beds.

## Saturday 21 July

The Society's annual moth-trapping night was held on Saturday 21 July at Withymead Nature Reserve, on the north bank of the Thames between Goring and South Stoke. Norman Hall was unable to come on the Saturday night. Instead, he stayed overnight on Friday 20 July and ran 3 traps in the area around the Visitor Centre. Norman had more than 90 different species of moth in his traps and most of the micro-moths in the combined list were identified by him. Highlights of Norman's catch included Green Arches *Anaplectoides prasina*, the large pure white White Satin Moth *Leucoma salicis* and an impressively large Privet Hawkmoth *Sphinx ligustri*. On the Saturday night, Roy Dobson ran a mercury light over a sheet by the Visitor Centre and a light trap in the nearby orchard. Roy's catch included Common Footman *Eilema lurideola*, Scarce Footman *E. complana* and Dingy Footman *E. griseola* moths. Peter Holland ran a trap with a blended bulb near the Visitor Centre and a Heath trap on the boardwalk through the reed bed. This is where he took the star moth of the night, a Dotted Fan-foot *Macrochilo cribrumalis*, the first recorded specimen for VC23 Oxfordshire. Dotted Fan-foot is a moth which is currently expanding its range into our region from the south-east. The first Buckinghamshire specimen was recorded in the east of the county near Chorleywood in 2009. The first Berkshire specimen was recorded in Windsor Forest in 2010, followed by 2 more records from a Maidenhead garden in 2011.

Jan Haseler ran 3 lights. The first was a mercury vapour light over a sheet at the south-west corner of the boardwalk through the reed bed. The second was an actinic light on a Skinner trap on a platform above the north-west corner of the boardwalk, overlooking the adjacent even bigger area of reed bed which stretches towards South Stoke and is owned by one of the Oxford colleges. The third was a mercury vapour light on a Robinson trap under a big oak in the adjacent woodland. The catch included several Large Twin-spot Carpets *Xanthorhoe quadrifasciata* and a single Balsam Carpet *X. biriviata*. The former were noticeably larger, while the Balsam Carpet had a smooth basal edge to the central cross-band. The Balsam Carpet is another moth which is expanding its range from the south-east. The Crescent *Celaena leucostigma*, a reed bed specialist, was another highlight here. Next morning, a few members came along to view a selection of the moths. They sat in the sunshine outside the Visitor Centre and were able to compare the different Footman species and the various Carpets. The Poplar Hawkmoth *Laothoe populi* and Privet Hawkmoth posed obligingly for photographs on the adjacent Rosebay Willowherb *Chamerion angustifolium* flowers. Warden Keith Tomey then kindly led a walk round the reserve, during which the reed bed moths were released at the trapping site. We would like to thank Keith and Dorothy Tomey for their hospitality (especially the coffee and cakes!).

## Saturday 28 July

On Saturday 28 July, the weather was fine and cool, just right for a country walk. 24 members and guests met in Ferry Lane, Medmenham for a very varied walk, led by Chris Bucke, in an area dominated by the River Thames and by past human activity. The first habitat encountered was water meadow. A ditch at the start of the walk provided a good show of Water Plantain *Alisma plantago-aquatica* and the water meadow proved very species rich with Ragged Robin *Lychnis flos-cuculi* persisting later than expected and Marsh Valerian *Valeriana dioica* and Yellow Loosestrife *Lysimachia vulgaris* attracting particular attention. The braver members of the party detected colonies of non-stinging Nettles *Urtica dioica* subsp. *galeopsifolia*. Hobbies were noted hunting dragonflies and damselflies, apparently successfully. On leaving the water meadow, there was an abrupt change of habitat. The path had a steep chalk cliff on one side and swampy areas on the other. The latter were once part of the pleasure grounds of the Danesfield Hotel and the area was dominated by alien species, at least three bamboos and planted trees and shrubs. It has a very fine colony of Loddon Lily *Leucojum aestivum* visible in the spring. The chalk slopes had Box *Buxus sempervirens* reproducing vigorously but the most conspicuous species was Hart's-tongue Fern *Asplenium scolopendrium* in great quantities. Some of these had fronds that split into two at the tip. The path climbed and passed through a tunnel to a shady area where there was a colony of Nettle-leaved Bellflower *Campanula trachelium*, some of which were a very attractive white-flowered variant. It emerged into species-rich dry chalk grassland. This did not provide especial rarities but was very interesting because different areas seemed rich in different species: a large colony of Goat's-rue *Galega officinalis* attracted attention, as did Burnet-saxifrage *Pimpinella saxifraga* and Common Restharrow *Ononis repens*, both of these apparently confined to particular areas. The whole area was probably part of the pleasure grounds of the Danesfield Hotel, so the different areas may have been subject to different cultural



regimes in the past. The party returned by the same route but most had the intense pleasure of walking through Suzanne Phillips' lovely garden at Medmenham Mill. Any tendencies to note the wild species in the garden were rapidly eliminated by the beauty and variety of the cultivated species.

### Sunday 5 August

22 members and guests joined Sally Rankin for a walk around Stoke Row on Sunday 5 August, starting at the sports ground. A Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* hovered above the long grass at the northern boundary of the field, before perching on the cricket screen. The route led down through a conifer plantation to Newnhamhill Bottom, where a flower-rich field on the side of the valley is open access land. Sightings here included Harebell *Campanula rotundifolia*, Agrimony *Agrimonia eupatoria* and Common Knapweed *Centaurea nigra*, with Essex Skipper *Thymelicus lineola*, Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper *Pyronia tithonus* butterflies and Six-Spot Burnet *Zygaena filipendulae* moths. Continuing up the valley, Wood Barley *Hordelymus europaeus* and Nettle-leaved Bellflower were found at the side of the lane. Sally then led the group up through woods and fields to the pond, where Gypsywort *Lycopus europaeus*, Lesser Spearwort *Ranunculus flammula* and Purple-loosestrife *Lythrum salicaria* were growing round the water's edge. Higher up in the field were cherry trees, planted to give an income for maintaining the Maharajah's Well. The well is 112 metres deep, dug through layers of chalk, sand and gravel to the water table below. It was donated to the village by the Maharajah of Benares and provided up to 700 gallons of water per day. Next stop was the churchyard, where the flower-rich acid grassland is an uncommon habitat for South Oxfordshire. Heather *Calluna vulgaris*, Betony, Greater Bird's-foot-trefoil *Lotus pedunculatus* and Heath Speedwell *Veronica officinalis* were amongst the finds here. The final part of the walk was in the woods to the south of the village. The footpath led through lichen heath, where both Pill Sedge *Carex pilulifera* and Remote Sedge *C. remota* were identified. Deep in the shade of the Beech *Fagus sylvatica* woods, the nationally scarce Green-flowered Helleborine *Epipactis phyllanthus* was an exciting find. Nearby, about 10 plants of the saprophytic Yellow Bird's-nest *Monotropa hypopitys* were discovered, pushing their way up through the Beech litter. Finally, several plants of Violet Helleborine *E. purpurata* were seen, growing on a roadside verge at the edge of the village.

### Saturday 25 August

Martin Sell led a walk at Little Wittenham on Saturday 25 August, starting at the Earth Trust's Neptune Wood, which was planted in 2005 to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Battle of Trafalgar. Nine members set out along a footpath which crossed three meadows that had been sown with a wildflower mix. The first had not been cut and was still quite flowery, with numerous Meadow Brown butterflies and a few Common Blues. A hay crop had already been taken off the other two fields. Several Common Broomrape flowers were spotted close to the path. The hedgerows in Little Wittenham proved to be particularly productive for the nibblers amongst the group, with yellow Mirabelle plums, purple damsons and small orange plums. These were followed later in the walk by blackberries and Wild Strawberries. The route crossed the Thames, then turned upstream for a short distance before re-crossing at Day's Lock. From the bridge at Little Wittenham, the tall spikes of Bulrush *Schoenoplectus lacustris* were seen amongst the riverside vegetation. Confusingly, this is a member of the Sedge family and is completely unrelated to Bulrush or Common Reedmace *Typha latifolia*. Towering cumulo-nimbus clouds had been threatening rain from the start and now the rain began to fall in earnest, accompanied by thunder and lightning which approached ever closer. Bankside flowers included Orange Balsam *Impatiens capensis*, Brooklime *Veronica beccabunga*, Purple-loosestrife, Marsh Ragwort *Senecio aquaticus* and Marsh Woundwort *Stachys palustris*. A Hobby was glimpsed several times. At last the storm moved away and Swallows *Hirundo rustica* and House Martins *Delichon urbica* were watched flying low over the riverside meadows. Several Reed Buntings *Emberiza schoeniclus* were seen at Clifton Meadow. From here, the route turned south along a track with wide flowery margins, where Small White *Pieris rapae* butterflies were flying in the sunshine. On the other side of the hedge was an extensive field of opium poppies. The track turned into a lane and Common Cudweed *Filago vulgaris* was an unexpected find at the roadside. From Long Wittenham back to the car park, the footpath ran parallel to the lane. Next to it were several tall branched spikes of Twiggy Mullein *Verbascum virgatum* and blue-flowered Chicory *Cichorium intybus*, plus a pink-flowered mass of Great Willowherb *Epilobium hirsutum* in the adjacent ditch.

### Saturday 8 September

Graham Saunders led an evening walk to look for bats on Saturday 8 September, starting from

Aldermaston Wharf. Before the walk started, he talked about the different species of bat which are native to Britain. A Red Admiral butterfly flew across the car park and settled on the roof of a parked van. The 14-strong group set out downstream along the towpath of the Kennet and Avon Canal. Ploughman's-spikenard *Inula conyzae*, Great Mullein *Verbascum thapsus* and Dark Mullein *V. nigrum* were noted on the hedge side, while Orange Balsam was in flower next to the water and a Mother of Pearl *Pleuroptya ruralis* moth was disturbed from the vegetation. The sky was crossed by a web of aircraft condensation trails. At the first lane crossing the canal, the route turned south for a few hundred yards. Tall spikes of Purple-loosestrife were in flower on the banks of a stream which passed under the road. The group then followed a footpath which ran back between the River Kennet and a gravel pit. Great Crested Grebes *Podiceps cristatus* were seen on the pit and several Grey Herons *Ardea cinerea* flew briefly, silhouetted dark against the sunset sky. A family of Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos*, with five well-grown youngsters, swam down the river. With clear skies, the temperature dropped rapidly and the first stars began to appear. Graham's bat detector, set to a frequency of 55 kHz, picked up the echo-location calls of a Soprano Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pygmaeus*, but nobody was able to spot it. Then, in a sheltered stretch of river where it was overhung by trees, the Daubenton's Bats *Myotis daubentoni* were seen. About half a dozen individuals were flying up and down, low over the river. Graham shone a powerful torch beam across the surface of the water and the bats could be seen clearly as they flew through the light. Daubenton's Bats have pale undersides and relatively large feet. The bat detector, set to 40 kHz, had a steady pattering note, with scattered 'burp' sounds as a bat homed in on its prey. No more bats were seen as the group walked back along a tree-lined track to the canal at Aldermaston Wharf. Graham scanned the surface of the pool below the lock with the torch beam, but there were still no signs of any bats. He reported that, when he had done the walk in the opposite direction a few nights before, he had failed to see any bats above the canal. The walk finished with some astronomy – as well as identifying the Plough and Cassiopeia, Graham pointed out the constellation of Cygnus the Swan.

### **Saturday 15 September**

Renée Grayer led a walk at the National Trust's Watlington Hill on a pleasant sunny afternoon on Saturday 15 September. A number of butterflies were flying round the car park, including a Holly Blue, a Red Admiral and a Speckled Wood *Pararge aegeria*. 15 members set out through the woodland and out onto the open hillside. Vervain *Verbena officinalis*, Yellow Rattle *Rhinanthus minor* in abundance, Wild Basil *Clinopodium vulgare*, Common Centaury *Centaureum erythraea* and Yellow-wort *Blackstonia perfoliata* were amongst the first flowers encountered. A small-flowered gentian was identified as Autumn Gentian *Gentianella amarella*. Many of them had already finished flowering. A much larger-flowered plant was clearly a Chiltern Gentian *G. germanica*, with transverse wrinkles up the outside of the corolla tube and a relatively short calyx at its base. But then a number of intermediate flowers were found, showing characteristics of both plants – perhaps hybrids between the two species. A single Small Heath butterfly was spotted on a sheltered slope. Then the Frog Orchids *Coeloglossum viride* started to appear – first one, then 5 and eventually about 30. They are small and yellowish-green and very easily overlooked. There were white-flowered specimens of Small Scabious *Scabiosa columbaria* and Common Milkwort *Polygala vulgaris* and other finds included Blue Fleabane *Erigeron acer*, Common Rock-rose *Helianthemum nummularium* and Squinancywort *Asperula cynanchica*. The spikes of Heath Speedwell were found on top of ant-hills. On the short grassland at the top of the ridge were rings of an orange fungus with a sunken cap, probably some sort of Milk-cap. Also found here was a specimen of The Miller *Clitopilus prunulus*, which had a smooth pale cap, a distinctive smell and an off-centre stalk. In the disturbed soil where a conservation group (Sonning Common Green Gym) had cut down encroaching hawthorn last winter were clumps of Wild Candytuft *Iberis amara* and a single plant of Deadly Nightshade. A male Brimstone butterfly flew past as the group walked back into woods.

### **Sunday 30 September**

Michael Keith-Lucas led a field trip on Sunday 30 September which visited two very different habitats. The morning walk, attended by 8 members, was on the dry, sandy heath land around Frensham Pond, near Farnham, while the afternoon walk was on the wet bog at Thursley National Nature Reserve, a few miles to the east. Both sites are on the acid, infertile soils of the Lower Greensand. Some of the plants at Frensham are more typically found in coastal areas or in the Brecklands of East Anglia. Sand Sedge *Carex arenaria* has long rhizomes and these were sending up long lines of evenly-spaced plantlets. Small plants in the open area near the Visitor Centre included Common Stork's-bill *Erodium*



*cicutarium*, Sheep's Sorrel *Rumex acetosella*, Mossy Stonecrop *Crassula tillaea* and Small Cudweed *Filago minima*. Bell Heather *Erica cinerea*, Ling and Dwarf Gorse *Ulex minor* were all in flower. A number of the big and hairy caterpillars of the Fox Moth *Macrothylacia rubi* were seen. Protected from trampling behind a fence was an area of lichen heath and a number of different species were identified – the delicate branched *Cladonia portentosa*, the more stumpy *C. uncialis*, the cups of *C. chlorophaea* and the browner *C. rangiferina*. Alder Buckthorn *Frangula alnus* bushes were covered in black berries and there were some big colonies of wood ants.

The walk at Thursley started from the Moat car park, with White Water-lilies *Nymphaea alba* in the nearby pond. The dominant plants were sedges, rushes and mosses. There were two different kinds of carnivorous sundews – the Oblong-leaved variety *Drosera intermedia* on bare peat and the Round-leaved Sundew *D. rotundifolia* on moss, with the Marsh Clubmoss *Lycopodiella inundata* growing nearby. Raised water levels on the reserve meant that the track was flooded in several places, which forced some delicate balancing on submerged planks. Marsh St John's-wort *Hypericum elodes*, Bog Asphodel *Narthecium ossifragum*, Bogbean *Menyanthes trifoliata* and a bladderwort were all growing near the path. A few late Swallows and House Martins were still to be seen. Towards the end of the walk, two Raft Spiders *Dolomedes fimbriatus* were spotted, lurking on the surface of the water next to the board walk.

### Sunday 14 October

Europe's most poisonous fungus, the Death Cap *Amanita phalloides*, was the one of the highlights of the fungus foray which Gordon Crutchfield led at New Copse, Gallowstree Common. It has a smooth greenish cap and its swollen base is encased in a white bag or 'volva'. Fortunately this is a rare fungus, because if consumed, its toxins destroy cells in the liver and kidneys and it is usually lethal. The Death Cap was spotted close to the path and Gordon picked it up for closer inspection, at which point the cap broke off the stem. It is to be hoped that he washed his hands carefully before eating supper. Heavy rain in the preceding days had contributed to a bountiful selection of fungi in the woods for the 11 members who had come on the walk. Two different sorts of puff-ball were identified – the Common Puffball *Lycoperdon perlatum* growing on soil, and the pear-shaped *L. pyriforme* on dead wood. Butter Cap *Collybia butyracea*, with a greasy-feeling cap, was plentiful near the entrance to the woods. Saffroncap Bonnet *Mycena crocata* is a Chilterns speciality. Its stem exudes an orange-staining liquid and it was growing under Beech. Other finds under the Beech trees included purple Amethyst Deceivers *Laccaria amethystea*, the white fingers of Stag's Horn *Xylaria hypoxylon*, Red-cracked Boletus *Boletus chrysenteron*, Common Yellow Russula *Russula ochroleuca* and the Glistening Ink Cap *Coprinus micaceus*. A large yellow slug looked like a fallen leaf. On the edge of a grassy ride junction were a number of tall Parasol Mushrooms *Macrolepiota procera*, with an obvious ring and a snakeskin pattern on the stem. *Gymnopilus junonius* is a tawny coloured gill fungus which normally grows at the base of trees. A surprise find was a specimen growing 2 metres up the trunk of a Beech tree, masquerading as a bracket fungus. On the walk back, a number of twisted specimens of Elfin Saddle *Helvella crispa* were found in the grass at the side of the ride and a single red Fly Agaric *Amanita muscaria* was growing under birch.

### Thursday 1 November

Wakehurst Place in West Sussex was the destination for the joint coach trip with Reading Gardeners on Thursday 1 November, organised by Ian Duddle. Wakehurst Place is run jointly by the National Trust and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. The visit had been arranged to catch the best of the autumn colours, but it proved to be an unpredictable season - many trees were still green, some had already dropped their leaves and a few were at their best. Near the entrance to the gardens was an eye-catching drift of pink and white cyclamens. Two guided tours of the grounds had been organised. The first group started out via the enormous sequoias to the water garden. Next to the stream were a number of clumps of Royal Fern *Osmunda regalis* and several Black-poplar *Populus nigra* trees were growing nearby. The path then went along the side of the valley to a viewpoint which looked out over a steep outcrop of sandstone. The route continued into an area with North American trees, before returning through the pinetum, where there were some interesting fungi, including a clump of Fly Agarics and a ring of funnel-shaped fungi. On the lawn in front of the house, the spikes of many small yellow club fungi were poking through the grass. In the afternoon, most of the party looked round the Millennium Seed Bank. There were informative displays about the collection, cleaning, drying and chilling of the seeds. One of the panels explained the problem of recalcitrant seeds, which cannot be

dried below 40% moisture and which are only viable for a limited time. These include Sweet Chestnut and Oak.

### **Sunday 11 November**

Autumn colours were much in evidence for the walk at Wokefield Common and Starvale Woods, between Burghfield Common and Mortimer, on Sunday 11 November. The Beeches, Larches and Sweet Chestnuts were a glorious mixture of yellows, oranges and gold but the leaves on the Oaks, Hazels *Corylus avellana* and Alders were still predominantly green. The field trip, attended by 16 members, was a joint enterprise between Jan Haseler, who navigated, and Gordon Crutchfield, who identified the fungi. The walk started from the pine plantation next to the pond at Wokefield Common. Around the car park were rings of Clouded Agaric *Clitocybe nebularis* and many Common Earth-balls *Scleroderma citrinum*. At the base of a pine tree were several specimens of Cow Boletus *Suillus bovinus* which were orangeish pink and sticky on top, with a complicated sub-cell structure on the pores on the underside. Some fungi are best identified by taste. Gordon invited volunteers to test (and then spit out) small bits of The Sickener *Russula emetica*, which was initially bland, but then gave a fiery chilli sensation on the tongue. A second species, *R. sardonia*, was so unpleasant that all Gordon's subsequent tasting suggestions were politely declined. Fortunately, a tube of strong peppermints was produced to remove the after-taste. Small pale-yellow gelatinous spoon-shaped fungi growing out of a dead pine twig were identified as Pale Stagshorn *Calocera pallidospathulata*. This was first discovered in Yorkshire in the 1980s and has subsequently been widely recorded across the country. Other species in the pine plantation included Common Yellow Russula, Bay Boletus *Boletus badius*, False Death Cap *Amanita citrina* and the slimy olive-brown wax cap Herald of Winter *Hygrophorus hypothejus*.

The route then led southwards across a steep valley into Starvale Woods. Back in the summer, White Admiral, Silver-washed Fritillary, Comma and Peacock butterflies had all been seen on sunny bramble blossom a little further down the valley. At the side of the wide grassy ride were Wood Spurge and Wood Sage, and Herb Robert and Creeping Buttercup *Ranunculus repens* were still in flower. The next track led through a Sweet Chestnut plantation to a row of magnificent old Beech trees. On a fallen Beech trunk were the flattened lumps of Black Bulgar *Bulgaria inquinans* and the lines of small pale purple jelly-like lumps of *Ascocoryne sarcoides*. One of the standing trees had a curving column of shiny white Porcelain Fungus *Oudemansiella mucida* and grey Oyster Mushrooms *Pleurotus ostreatus*. Growing out of the bank below the Beeches was a single specimen of *Boletus luridus*. The pores underneath were bright red with a yellow rim. Gordon split open the cream-coloured stem and it immediately began to stain a dark blue-green. Several specimens of the slimy greyish brown Beech Milkcap *Lactarius blennius* were found amongst the fallen leaves.

The next stage of the walk was the open heathland across the road. The invasive American rush *Juncus tenuis* was growing on the tracks. Both Gorse *Ulex europaeus* and Dwarf Gorse were seen - the latter had noticeably smaller prickles. Most of the heath was covered by a blanket of heather, but the Pixie Cup Lichen *Cladonia pyxidata* was spotted in some of the gaps. Re-crossing the road, the route then led through another pine plantation. Finds here included the False Chanterelle *Hygrophoropsis aurantiaca*, *Collybia maculata* and *Cortinarius semisanguineus*. The next footpath went through Hazel coppice and for the first time there were signs of a rich herb layer, with leaves of violets, Wood-sorrel, Sanicle, Bugle *Ajuga reptans* and Wood Spurge. The path dropped down through the wood, then ran alongside a small stream. Ferns were growing on its steep shady banks, including Broad Buckler Fern *Dryopteris dilatata*, Male Fern *D. filix-mas* and Hart's-tongue. At the edge of the wood was a small flowery meadow, with Betony, Devil's-bit Scabious and Marsh Thistle. The light was beginning to fade during the return walk to the car park.

### **Saturday 15 December**

Chris Bucke found a brief window of good weather on the morning of Saturday 15 December for a circular walk in the valley of the Thames near Henley. The walk, which was attended by 10 members, started from the car park at Mill End, crossed a very full River Thames at Hambleden Mill, then followed the Thames Path in a south-easterly direction. Great Crested Grebes, Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* and a single Dabchick *Tachybaptus ruficollis* were seen here. The path turned away from the river and went through a small patch of wet woodland. A Song Thrush *Turdus philomelos* was disturbed from the undergrowth and a Red Kite perched on a branch above the side of the track. The

route followed the lanes through Aston then turned onto a footpath which climbed westwards out of the village. The flint wall at the start of the path was covered in lichens. Views opened up across the Thames and over to the Chilterns beyond. A female Kestrel perched on a wire, before flying off. Yellowish clumps of Mistletoe *Viscum album* could be seen in some of the big trees on the other side of the river. A few plants were still in flower, including Dandelion, Pineappleweed *Matricaria discoidea*, Groundsel *Senecio vulgaris*, Daisy *Bellis perennis*, Shepherd's-purse *Capsella bursa-pastoris* and White Dead-nettle *Lamium album*. The walk continued across the fields, skirted the edge of Remenham Wood and then dropped back down towards the river. A number of Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo* were roosting on trees above the water, a Buzzard *Buteo buteo* was circling above the far bank and a few Egyptian Geese *Alopochen aegyptiacus* were seen. About 30 Ring-necked Parakeets *Psittacula krameri* were roosting and feeding in an ivy-covered hedge. Back at Hambleden Weir, a Common Gull *Larus canus* was standing on a mooring post, with its greenish-yellow legs and bill distinguishing it from the Black-headed Gulls *L. ridibundus* on the adjacent posts, which had red legs and bills. The final sighting was a Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, which flew overhead.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank all the members who have led walks in 2012. Renée Grayer provided detailed species lists and Rob Stallard has taken many of the photographs which have been used on the Excursions section of the Society's website. I would also like to thank Chris Bucke, David Cliffe, Julia Cooper and Rod D'Ayala for their contributions to this report.

## MID-WEEK WALKS 2012

**Chris Bucke, Martin Sell, Ricki Bull, Chris Ash, Jan Haseler, Julia Cooper, Ian Duddle,  
Fred Taylor, Sheelagh Hill, Gordon Crutchfield**

### 18 January

On the damp but mild morning of 18<sup>th</sup> January, Chris Bucke led a walk which started from Tyle Mill, followed the lane south to Sulhampstead then turned right onto the footpath towards Ufton Green and Padworth. The land to the left of the path sloped uphill, while there were signs of springs down to the right. There was a flock of about 10 Skylarks. One of the arable fields had a number of Musk Thistles, mostly covered by spiders' webs. Another field had a selection of different plants in flower, including Pineappleweed, Field Pansy and Red Dead-nettle. Samples of the stout and hairy Common Mouse-ear and the more delicate Common Chickweed were taken for closer study in the pub afterwards. Snowdrops were in flower at Ufton Green. The gravel pits near Padworth did not have a great variety of water fowl, but sightings included a few Greylag Geese, Shovelers, Pochards and Great Crested Grebes. The exposed bank of the River Kennet had a dark layer, which Chris explained was peat which had formed behind a beaver dam in the distant past. Guelder-rose berries on bushes at the side of the path were bright red, but rather shrivelled. After crossing the river at Aldermaston Wharf, the route followed the towpath of the Kennet and Avon Canal back to the start. Fieldfares and Redwings were seen in the bankside trees and big clumps of Greater Tussock-sedge were identified. A Kingfisher flew along the canal and then perched in a bankside Hawthorn, showing its chestnut breast. Most of the party then went to the Fox and Hounds at Theale for lunch.

### 15 February

It was mild but windy when Martin Sell led a walk at Churn on the Berkshire Downs on 15<sup>th</sup> February. As the 15-strong party walked up towards the Ridgeway, singing Skylarks and Corn Buntings were heard and there were big flocks of Fieldfares, Lapwings and Chaffinches. A Brown Hare was sitting up in the middle of a field of winter wheat. It waited long enough for everyone to get good views, before running away across the field. Highlights of the walk were 3 Short-eared Owls which got up from rough grass next to the track, then settled on posts on a nearby fence. A herd of 11 Roe Deer was seen in the middle of another big field of wheat, with some feeding and some lying down. The railway enthusiasts were able to reminisce about their last journeys on the former Didcot to Newbury line, whose route was crossed twice on the walk back to the cars. Everyone then went to the Red Lion at Blewbury, where there was rather a long wait for lunch.

## **21 March**

Ricki Bull led a walk through Dinton Pastures Country Park and then along the River Loddon on 21<sup>st</sup> March. The willows were covered in pale golden blossom and the Blackthorns were coming into flower. A Chiffchaff was calling from close to the track between White Swan and Black Swan lakes and a Kingfisher was spotted on the River Loddon, close to Lavell's Lake. Many clumps of Loddon Lilies were just coming into flower on the river bank. Close inspection showed the tiny teeth on the edges of the flower stem, which distinguish the wild flowers from their cultivated relations. From the Ron Bryant hide, the group were able to look out over the lake at Lea Farm, where a pair of Goldeneyes and a Redshank were amongst the sightings. The walk continued downstream along the bank of the Loddon. A Fox was spotted in the field across the river, with an agitated Moorhen on the bank below. As the temperature rose in the brightening sunshine, butterflies started to appear – patrolling Brimstones, plus Peacocks, Commas and a Red Admiral. The walk terminated at the Wheelwrights Arms, where most people stayed to lunch.

## **April**

Poor weather conditions (lashing rain and a strong cold wind) led to the cancellation of the April walk.

## **16 May**

Chris Ash led a walk round the southern part of Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve on 16<sup>th</sup> May, starting from the Cowleaze Wood car park. The dew pond at the top of the reserve was uncharacteristically full and even had a visiting Mallard. A Dingy Skipper butterfly was nectaring on Dandelion flowers in the first field. The hillside to the south was the site of an unsuccessful experiment in using goats for scrub control – they failed to tackle the scrub, but needed supplementary feeding in winter. Cowslips were abundant in the steep south-facing field, the leaves of Common Spotted-orchids were showing well and there were several rings of St George's Mushrooms. At Bald Hill, the next west-facing field, there was a wonderful display of Early-purple Orchids. The open grassland situation came as a surprise to those who had only seen these flowers in woodland before. Tiny-flowered Early Forget-me-not and Common Whitlowgrass were in flower on some of the ant hills. Juniper bushes which had been planted about 15 years ago and were doing well inside a rabbit-proof fence were inspected. Leaving the field at the bottom, there was a Hornbeam with an impressive display of witch's broom. The return route came back up across Linky Down, first through a sheep-grazed field and then through steeper chalk grassland, where a number of Grizzled Skipper butterflies were seen. Finally, back along the sheltered track at the top of the reserve, Blackcaps and a Garden Warbler were singing, an Orange-tip and a few more Grizzled Skippers were found and black St Mark's Flies were abundant. Most of the 11-strong group then went to the Carriers Arms at Watlington for lunch.

## **20 June**

Chris Bucke led 15 members on a walk round the Wellbarn Estate in the Berkshire Downs on 20<sup>th</sup> June, starting from Starveall above Aldworth. The route started out eastwards along the edge of a field of oilseed rape, crossed the Ridgeway, then went through Town Copse, where there had evidently been a good display of Bluebells and Ramsons. There were splendid views as the track dropped gently down into Unhill Bottom. Greater Knapweed was in flower and the brightly coloured caterpillars of the Mullein Moth were found on the leaves of Black Mullein. Few arable weeds, apart from Black-grass, had survived in the barley crop at the bottom of the valley. A Brown Hare was spotted higher up the slope and a Buzzard was being mobbed by crows. On the return route back up beside Unhill Wood, there were glimpses of how the hillside might once have looked, with sheets of Common Rock-rose and Wild Thyme, together with Pyramidal Orchids, Dropwort and Squinancywort. The butterfly count slowly rose during the walk, with Brimstone, Meadow Brown, Small Heath, Holly Blue, Common Blue and Speckled Wood identified. Most of the group then went to the Bell at Aldworth for lunch, where a Large White in the garden was added to the butterfly tally.

## **18 July**

The walk at Pamber Forest on 18<sup>th</sup> July, led by Jan Haseler, had been planned to coincide with the peak flight period for the woodland butterflies, the White Admirals, Silver-washed Fritillaries and Purple Emperors, but the sky was overcast and there had been an exceptional amount of rain in the preceding weeks, so it was mud rather than butterflies which typified the morning. The walk



started from the car park at Impstone Road at the north-west corner of the Forest. In the grassy ride beside the first stream, Common Cow-wheat, Tutsan, Betony and Marsh Thistle were all in flower and Ringlets were still flying, despite the cloudy conditions. The observant botanists at the back of the group also spotted Trailing St John's-wort and Broad-leaved Helleborine. There were many clumps of Hard Fern, with fertile fronds in the centre and infertile fronds on the outside. The route then turned southwards into the main spine ride which crosses the forest. Black berries were beginning to form on a big Alder Buckthorn. Pamber Forest is one of the North Hampshire strongholds for the uncommon Wood Horsetail which was growing at the side of the track. The path then looped through a heathy section, where abundant Bilberries were enjoyed by some of the group. A Tawny Grisette fungus still had a substantial part of the veil remaining and its tawny cap had a serrated edge. Betony, Lesser Spearwort and Lady Fern were found along the next ride. Sneezewort was growing in the open clearing at the end, and in a brief brighter moment, a pair of Small Skipper butterflies was seen. Continuing southwards along the main track, Common Spotted-orchids and False Fox Sedge were amongst the plants in the verge. The fungus *Mycena pelianthina* had a smell of radishes and purple-edged gills and a piece of blue-green stained wood had fruiting bodies of the Green Wood-cup. A Silver-washed Fritillary was disturbed from bramble blossom, but flew off before the people at the back had a chance to see it. Next destination was the pond, which would have been good for dragonflies on a sunny day, but alas none were to be seen. A lizard was spotted hiding in a twiggy bush at the side of the pond, and it remained there motionless while most people had a look at it. The next fenced section was wood pasture with a distinctive browse line on all the trees. An area of open acid grassland had Common Centaury, Bird's-foot Trefoil and many Cinnabar caterpillars on Ragwort. A Wild Service-tree was spotted on the final climb back to the cars. The walk was followed by lunch at the Plough at Little London.

## 15 August

Julia Cooper and Ian Duddle led a walk round Greywell on 15<sup>th</sup> August, starting and ending at the Fox and Goose pub. The route started out across the road and onto the towpath of the Basingstoke Canal, passing over the entrance to the Greywell tunnel. Two Dabchicks were feeding in the crystal-clear water and the banks were colourful with pink Great Willowherb, creamy Meadowsweet and yellow Common Fleabane. Marestails and Starworts were growing in the canal. There was a brief diversion to explore the ruined Odiham Castle. The walk then continued across the edge of the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Wildlife Trust's (HWT) Warnborough Greens reserve and into a section of their Bartley Heath reserve, before entering Butter Wood. The trees provided welcome shelter from the rain, which was gradually becoming heavier. At the top of the wood, Devil's-bit Scabious and Heather were growing in the wide grassy rides. The scenery changed again, as the footpath led down across Greywell Hill Park, with distant views towards Odiham airfield and beyond. Sticky Groundsel was spotted at the side of the track to Greywell Mill. The springs just upstream mark the headwaters of the River Whitewater. Once again, the water was crystal clear and the bankside vegetation was colourful with Purple Loosestrife and pink Hemp Agrimony. The path led downstream to the church, then back along the village street to the pub. After lunch, some of the group braved torrential rain, which fortunately eased off before the visit to the HWT's Greywell Moors reserve. The Trust did a considerable amount of tree felling last winter, to open up the fen and try to reduce the drying effect of the trees. Plants seen included Water Avens, a Trifid Bur-marigold, Water-plantain and Marsh Fern, and several small frogs were spotted.

## 19 September

Fred Taylor led 10 members on a walk around Crazies Hill above Wargrave on 19<sup>th</sup> September. Start point was the top of Bear Lane, where a number of Red Admiral and Comma butterflies were nectaring on a clump of buddleia bushes. The geology of the Bowsey Hill area is very varied, with London Clay overlying Reading Beds in the woods, while the fields below are on Chalk. The walk started out through woodland, with Pendulous Sedge marking out the wetter areas. Many of the trees beside the path looked very old, including a big ash with an enormous bracket fungus and a series of woodpecker holes. One of the willows at the side of a long clearing below power lines had leaves which had been stripped bare to the midrib. (Fred returned the next day and managed to find 2 caterpillars of the Coxcomb Prominent moth.) Wood Spurge and Spurge-laurel were identified. Young beech seedlings appeared to be doing well at the edge of a conifer plantation. As the land dropped down, the path passed through an area of beech woodland, then on to a stretch

where sandy soil had made the conditions especially suitable for Badger excavations. After walking through the village of Crazies Hill, the next track went through farmland, with fine views across the valley of the Thames to the Chilterns. Several Buzzards and a Kestrel were seen, but there were no signs of the Swallows which had been present a few days earlier. There was a pause to sample the small purple plums which were growing in the hedge beside the next lane. Speckled Wood butterflies were flying in the sunshine and Pale Toadflax plants were in flower on the bank. The route then followed a footpath back up and across several fields and continued along a sunken lane. A sheltered rushy pasture had Water-plantain, flowering mint and a number of butterflies, including a Small Tortoiseshell, several Small Whites and a Large White. New views opened up towards Reading, with the line of the Hampshire Downs in the background and the Hannington TV mast on the horizon. Further round was the outline of the Wellingtonia Avenue at Finchampstead. The path then climbed back up through the woods, with more Commas and Speckled Woods. In the final woodland section, a line of tall Poplars beside a small stream looked as if it had once been planted in a garden setting. Afterwards, some of the group enjoyed lunch at the Queen Victoria at Hare Hatch.

### 17 October

Ricki Bull led a walk from the King William IV pub at Hailey on Wednesday 17<sup>th</sup> October. There had been heavy rain overnight and there were extremely heavy showers in the afternoon, but the walk took place in bright sunshine with a stiff southerly breeze. The route started out northwards across the fields towards Woodhouse Farm. A pheasant shoot was under way, but fortunately the guns were pointing away from the footpath. Clumps of conical shiny fungi in the first stretch of woodland were identified as Glistening Ink Cap and a distinctive Magpie Fungus was spotted. The route then turned eastwards, following a track up through the fields towards Mongewell Woods. There were still a few flowers to be seen, including Wild Mignonette, Burnet-saxifrage, White Campion, Wild Basil and Field Scabious. In the hedgerow were black Buckthorn berries and the red berries of hawthorn and rose. The leaves on the trees in Mongewell Woods were still predominantly green, with the first autumn colours just beginning to appear. In the woods, several Earthstar fungi were found and a Roe Deer crossed the path. A flock of Goldfinches were resting on the fence in the fields above the wood and a single Red Admiral butterfly flew along the hedge. A Common Shrew darted out from under a sheet of plastic which was lying beside the path. An unusual tree in the farmyard at Homer Farm was identified as a Mulberry and there were a number of Yellow Stainer fungi in the grass. The walk finished by following the track back eastwards down towards the pub, where most of the 8-strong party stayed for lunch.

### 21 November

Squeezed between heavy overnight rain and torrential afternoon rain, Sheelagh Hill managed to find a window of opportunity for her walk on 21<sup>st</sup> November when the weather was merely damp. The walk started from The Bottle and Glass at Binfield Heath. 4 members headed north-eastwards along the lane before turning off onto the track through High Wood. Part way through the wood, a bank with big old coppice stools marked an ancient trackway. In the grassy fields beyond, a number of Field Blewits were found. In Harpsden Wood, abundant yellow fungi with a smell of coal tar were identified as Sulphur Knight *Tricholoma sulphureum*. Leaves of Woodruff and Wood Spurge indicated that this was long-established woodland. At the base of a beech tree was a big patch of foam, which was thought to be a slime mould. A number of specimens of The Blusher were seen, with a flat dark brownish-red cap covered with pale scales. Other species identified included Common Puffball and Clouded Agaric. The next stretch of track, across a field of winter wheat, was sticky under foot. Entering Upper Hailey Wood, there was an enormous flat pale tan-coloured fungus with a cap which was at least 20cm across. A Roe Deer was disturbed and raced away. On the far side of Lower Hailey Wood, the route followed a track to Shiplake Row, before turning west towards Binfield Heath. The Spindle bushes in the hedgerow had an abundant crop of pink berries. Their leaves showed no sign of changing colour yet. At the top of the hill, there was a brief diversion down the track running south towards the Reading-Henley Road. Jelly Ear and a white jelly-like fungus were growing on a dead branch at the side of the track. As the group walked back through the fields, the sky became darker and heavy rain began to fall. Fortunately Chris Ash's car was strategically parked in Kiln Lane and it was used to cover the last half mile to the pub, which was warm, dry and served excellent food.



## 18 December

The last mid-week excursion of the year was on 18<sup>th</sup> December, when Gordon Crutchfield led 8 members on a walk which started from the Black Horse at Checkendon. The route followed footpaths through woods and fields to the village church, then turned westwards to cross the grounds of Checkendon Court. A line of large fungi in the short parkland turf were probably Field Blewits, but their decaying state made identification difficult. At the end of the park, another footpath turned northwards into woodland. A fallen beech log had 2 different kinds of bracket fungi, Silver-leaf (notorious for damaging plum trees) and *Bjerkandera adusta*. After a short stretch along a quiet lane, the next footpath turned into the woods of Braziers Common. Pale leaves on the ground came from Whitebeam trees, which favour chalky soils. Some of the hazel coppice stools were very large and old. A conifer log had the orange specks of the fungus *Dacrymyces stillatus*. At the bottom of a steep stretch of path was a hazel which proved, on closer inspection, to be covered by a number of different fungi. *Stereum rugosum* had pale tan-coloured flakes which stained red when scraped. *Hypoxylon fuscum* formed small black lumps along a branch. The route back passed a massive ancient oak tree in the farm yard at Scot's Farm. Most of the party then enjoyed lunch at the Black Horse, where there was a welcoming log fire and good beer.

Thanks go to Jan Haseler for the reports and to all the leaders for an excellent selection of walks and pubs.

## INDOOR MEETINGS 2012

Ricki Bull

### 3 January - Gilbert White – the man who started us all bird-watching by John Eyre (chairman of the Hampshire Ornithological Society)

The title of this talk was a statement by John Fisher and is probably true. Gilbert White was an 18<sup>th</sup> century curate, born in Selborne Hampshire in 1720 in a house which has been preserved and is now called the Gilbert White House. White studied and graduated at Oriel College, Oxford. He lived in Selborne most of his life and did not travel very far as he suffered sickness when travelling by coach. He visited London, the South coast and Rutland on horseback. White studied the flora and fauna of Selborne in detail and wrote down everything he saw. In later years he wrote about his observations to his friends Pennant ('Letters to Pennant', 1767-1780) and Barrington ('Letters to Barrington', 1769-1787). In 1789 he published his famous book, 'The Natural History of Selborne', which was based on the letters to Pennant and Barrington. White had also written the 'Garden Kalendar' (1751-1773), which was a record of the crops etc. he was growing in his garden and the 'Flora Selborniensis' (1766-1767), in which he started to use the Latin names of plants. There is only one known drawing of White and he was apparently rather short of stature.

White was especially interested in birds and other animals that were only around in certain seasons, so he did not record much on robins and blackbirds, which were there all year round. In his time not much was known about migration and it was thought that the birds that disappeared in the winter were hibernating, e.g. swallows were thought to go to the bottom of a pond. White himself thought that migration was more likely, but when he saw martins at the end of October, he wrote to Pennant that these birds would probably hibernate as it was too late in the season to migrate.

White made great contributions towards the knowledge of birds, e.g. about nightjars, cuckoos and ring ouzels, which were all still common in Selborne at the time. He also sorted out the differences among the three *Phylloscopus* warblers; the willow warbler, chiffchaff and wood warbler, on the basis of their song, colours of their legs and differences in plumage. Moreover, he was the first person to describe the lesser whitethroat. He also wrote notes about how common the various birds were in his area, although he did not give any numbers. The raven was common and so were woodlark, redstart, song thrush and grey partridge. White did not record any Dartford warblers, probably because there was a mini Ice Age at the time and Dartford warblers do not survive harsh winters (in the last cold winters 95% of them died). White also recorded the weather, so that we

know that there was much snow in the winters.

White was the first recorder of several birds in Hampshire, e.g. waxwings, snow buntings, little auk and the black-winged stilt, which was seen at Frensham Pond, and which he called the rarest of British birds. He knew that this species migrated.

If White was to come back today, he would see many changes in the landscape and the birds. The cropping regime is very different now and not very bird-friendly. New crops are often sown in the autumn, so that no stubbles, weeds and seeds are left in the winter. The grains are stored in silos with no access for birds. Farms are not often mixed, so there are fewer farm animals, and horses are no longer needed for agriculture. Therefore there are far fewer insects around. There is also not much rough land left. White would be amazed at the agricultural improvements (higher yields and far fewer pests and diseases), but no doubt he would miss many species of birds and notice the far smaller numbers of bird species that are left. However, there are some species around now that were not yet there in White's time, e.g. collared dove, Canada goose and little ringed plover. Bird ringing and recently radio transmitters have given us much more data on the migration of birds.

Gilbert White's book 'The Natural History of Selborne' was very influential. Amongst many others it inspired Darwin and made us think about the impact that we are making on the environment. White can therefore be seen as one of the first ecologists.

(Summary by Renée Grayer)

## **17 January - Bird Conservation in Ecuador – Dr Renton Righelato**

The work in Ecuador described in this talk has been accomplished through the World Land Trust, an organisation formed in 1989 to conserve threatened areas that have a high level of biodiversity. WLT funds local conservation organisations to buy, develop and manage land sustainably. Renton took the audience on a tour of Ecuador from south through north by describing several of these reserves.

Ecuador ranges geographically from high, volcanic peaks of 6000m down to the lowland rainforest, mangroves and lagoons at sea level. Tapichalaca Reserve is cloud forest at 2-3000m and was set up in 1999 to protect lower slopes that were being eroded by conversion to pasture. More than 10 species of endemic birds are found there, including the jocotoco antpitta, a red data book species. Other wildlife includes: 130 endemic plants; 65 endemic orchids, including 29 species not seen elsewhere; frogs, including 10 new species found on the reserve; spectacled bear, mountain tapir and white-fronted capuchin.

Yungwulla Reserve, slightly north of Tapichalaca but in a fairly low and drier area, is another of the reserves. Here is found the pale-headed brushfinch, formerly thought to have been extinct. The population of these birds plummeted due to parasitism of nests by cowbirds. After a programme of control (female cowbirds were shot) the population increased from 10-20 between 2000-2002 to over 100 today. Maintaining this population relies partly on a decrease in farming as cowbirds tend to feed on farmed areas. The growing trend towards urbanisation eases this problem as the farmers are frequently willing to accept payment for their land since the money enables them to live in the town and train for gainful employment.

Buenaventura is a cloud forest at 1000-1800m and the territory of the el oro parakeet. Ocelot, puma and the western white-fronted capuchin can be found there. 330 bird species have been recorded in this reserve whose habitat was improved by acquiring land between the forest fragments and re-foresting it, thus creating a connected environment.

Travelling farther north in Ecuador one finds the Yanacocha Reserve near Quito. Here at 3000-3500m in the paramo can be found the Andean wolf (or fox), imperial snipe, the carunculated caracara and the Andean condor along with the population of the critically endangered black-breasted puffleg, a hummingbird which was adopted as the emblematic bird of Quito.

Near the Columbian border is the Rio Canande Reserve, a lowland rain forest where more than 6m of rain falls per year and where the average temperature is 25-30C. This area lies within a region where timber extraction is active. This reserve was formed originally to protect the Great Green Macaw but like the other reserves the list of wildlife species is long, varied and includes many endemic and threatened species. Staff at the reserve have had workshops to help and train local community members in forest conservation management.

The habitat loss globally for tropical rain forests is more than 10 million hectares per year. The remaining forest has large areas of degraded land. Renton gave the example of the Brazilian Rain Forest which today has only 7% of the area that was found there in 1900. Reasons for the loss of this territory are the conversion to pasture by local populations, selective logging locally done, large-scale logging which also requires the transport infrastructure to be built into remaining areas, and lowland and large-scale agriculture, currently fuelled by the demand for soya and biofuels. Institutional or government action to control emissions through setting a market value for standing forests, water resources and biodiversity would help in protecting these areas. The biggest single effect would be as a result of adoption of the Kyoto Agreement. At present not one of these is forthcoming.

More information on the World Land Trust and the reserves can be found at:  
<http://www.worldlandtrust.org/>

### **7 February - Presidential Address - Photosynthesis Professor Chris Bucke**

The speaker used simple Power Point slides and analogue materials to illustrate the talk. The latter included some plants, a safety match, bubble solution and a plastic box full of green hosepipe. He began by describing the importance of biological membranes and listed materials that plants need from the environment to complete the complex series of processes by which carbon dioxide is "fixed", first into chemical compounds with 3 carbon atoms, eventually into glucose, with 6 carbon atoms. To achieve this, the newly fixed carbon compounds have to be "reduced" chemically which means adding hydrogen atoms to them via the compound NADPH (Nicotinamide adenine dinucleotide phosphate). This process requires large amounts of energy in the form of ATP (Adenosine triphosphate). To produce NADPH and ATP, quantities of positively charged hydrogen ions (protons) and negatively charged electrons have to be released from water molecules and, initially, kept separate from each other. Solar energy activates chlorophyll located in two "photosystems" in the chloroplast: the first removes electrons from a complex enzyme containing manganese ions that binds them as soon as they are released from the water and boosts their energy level. They then pass through a series of chemicals, first cytochromes, then quinones, then plastocyanin to the second photosystem where they are given another boost of energy and pass through a compound called ferredoxin which passes them to NADP which gains a negative charge which is neutralised by a hydrogen ion. All the electron-carrying materials are located in the very complex membranes of "thylakoids": passage of electrons through the quinones carries hydrogen ions from the outside of the thylakoid membrane to the inside. ATP is made from ADP (Adenosine diphosphate) and phosphate, using the energy released as the hydrogen ions pass out of the thylakoids. Much more ATP is needed than NADPH, hence the need for two photosystems: when no more NADPH is needed the activated electrons are passed back to the quinone pool, allowing more ATP to be made.

Finally, the speaker pointed out that plants have to deal with circumstances where there is too much energy and not enough water and/or carbon dioxide. Then the wasteful process "photorespiration" occurs, the key enzyme RUBISCO (Ribulose-1,5-bisphosphate carboxylase oxygenase) "fixing" oxygen instead of carbon dioxide. He described strategies that some plants use to store carbon dioxide and carry on making new sugar in circumstances where the water supply has run low. They incorporate carbon dioxide into malic acid and hence are named "C-4" plants.

The talk was followed by quite spirited discussion.

## **21 February - Lowland Meadows of England: History, Conservation and Wildlife**

### **Jo Hodgkins**

The fundamental distinction between meadows and pastures is that the former are mown for hay whilst the latter are grazed by animals. Meadows are semi-natural with plants that are native and wild. Mowing is done at different times of the year to encourage different types of plants, although grazing may be done after the hay has been cut.

Neutral soil meadows were the subject of this talk although meadows can vary according to soil, terrain and acidity. Botanically the best are unimproved with no fertiliser, manure or re-seeding. On these there are 40-50 species of plant per square metre, mainly spring or early summer flowering, with fine-leaved grasses. There are fewer specialist meadow animals than plants – anthills, for example, developing when meadows are left undisturbed.

There are fewer than 10,000 hectares of unimproved neutral grassland in England, a decline of 98% in the last 75 years. Although it is unknown how much of this is meadow and how much is pasture, it is likely that only a small per cent is meadow. In Berkshire between 1984 and 1995 there was a continuous additional loss of 50%. Most of what remains is fragmented, making it more difficult for wildlife to survive.

Historically, meadows originated in the tundra grasslands that replaced the ice. As climate warmed, trees and scrub moved in along with large herbivores. Early hunter-gatherers foraged and gathered game in this environment whereas the first Neolithic farmers began growing crops and developing stock. The development of grasslands continued in the Bronze Age. When man had developed tools that allowed grass to be cut, meadows followed, enabling feed to be stored for the period during late winter and early spring when grass did not grow.

The first written record of a meadow (derived from the OE word for 'to mow') was in a grant via charter by King Hlothere of Thanet in Kent, AD 679 of a meadow. Meadows were mentioned in the Domesday Book although this was more similar to heath than to meadow or pasture. They became permanent fixtures in the middle ages where a distinction was made between common and private meadows.

The 1500's was the pinnacle of water meadow management, the first mention being in 1523. These meadows were engineered to take advantage of floodplains, with ditches and channels. In the 18th century the decline began with the start of the agricultural revolution. By 1700 grass seeds were available to buy, enclosure acts split more common meadows into private hands and it was easier to get fertiliser; improvement brought higher yields.

Meadows decreased in value in the 20th century as a result of the food shortages of WWII (with the associated encouragement to grow more through intensification and food subsidies), as well as the expansion of settlements and development. Recent atmospheric pollution and climate change has also led to changes in the wildlife that lives on the grasslands.

Possibilities for protecting remaining meadows were discussed. These include SAC (Special Area of Conservation, an EU designation) and SSSI status; priorities in Biodiversity Action Plans; local designations as wildlife or heritage sites; and nature reserves. The Grasslands Trust also has projects to restore and conserve grassland. Agri-environment schemes (such as the Higher Level Stewardship) grants and projects can help conserve grassland; effectiveness of restoration depends on what has been done before; re-creation can take up to 150 years to be effective. On a local level, the most effective ways are to flag up forgotten fragments and/or to create one's own in the garden. Plantlife has information on its website on creating a meadow on any scale:-

[http://www.plantlife.org.uk/things\\_to\\_do/grow\\_wild/wildmeadow/](http://www.plantlife.org.uk/things_to_do/grow_wild/wildmeadow/)

## **6 March - Offa's Dyke First Ever Ancient Tree Survey**

### **Rob McBride**

Seventy to eighty percent of the ancient trees in Northern Europe are in the British Isles. In the South they were planted in places such as the medieval deer parks. The Woodland Trust website's ancient tree hunt has records of trees, some of which were first noted by looking at old maps of an area— see <http://www.ancient-tree-hunt.org.uk/>. There is also an interactive map on which many locally recorded trees can be found.

Rob, who refers to himself as 'The Tree Hunter,' has been walking Offa's Dyke for 4 years using trains, buses, bike, car, hitch-hiking, and walking. He began in Cobowen and is aiming for Chepstow. From the Ancient Tree Hunt website one can follow part of his journey. In 2009 he was involved in recording a programme on 'The Oak at the Gate of the Dead' a tree at the site of the Battle of Crogen, which is believed to be over 900 years old. The link to the programme can be found at: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-north-east-wales-13509267>

Rob showed the society photos of his journey, the trees, and the people who informed him about their histories along the way. Explaining how this knowledge gave him a snapshot of the cultural natural history of Offa's Dyke, he brought his journey to life for the audience.

## **15 March – Members' Evening and AGM**

The Committee has held four meetings over the past year, all at the home of Renée Grayer, for whose hospitality, in addition to her contributions as a committee member, the committee is most grateful. It is also grateful for the contributions of the other retiring committee members – David Owens, Roger Frankum and Rod d'Ayala.

The receipt of the OPAL grant in 2010 gave the society a new impetus as well as new equipment to reach out to the public. This year the society has been involved with several Outreach Projects, helping us share knowledge and expertise with a wider public: the Bioblitz at Basildon Park, the fortnight at the Living Rain Forest and the display at Theale library also involved cooperation and interaction with other local groups.

The committee joined the National Council of Voluntary Organisations during this year. The scheme informs us on organisations and policies in the voluntary sector, and enables us to receive a discount on some Adobe software which may help the work of the recorders, the editor, and other officers.

Given the current petrol prices and the responsibility for reducing 'carbon footprints' a way of encouraging car-sharing, including making members aware of others within their local area is being discussed.

During the year old copies of the Reading Naturalist have been donated to the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew to be entered onto their online library and become available to a wider audience for information and research. Through Malcolm Storey, the society is in the process of making these available to the BHL, an international consortium of natural history and botanical libraries that publishes digital versions of historical reference works online on their website. Members include both the Natural History Museum and Kew.

Subscription rates would be remaining constant for 2012-2013 with a review to be made during the coming year.

Honorary Membership was conferred on Colin Dibb who has been an active member, past Winter Programme Secretary and a constant asset to the society.

The President thanked all those for their presentations and for the hard work behind the scenes



which helped to make RDNHS a healthy and vigorous society. Thanks were given to committee members, recorders, providers of tea, Malcolm Storey for the production of The Naturalists. He apologised should he have missed thanking anyone.

## **2 October - European Mountain Flowers**

### **Chris Bucke**

For his Presidential Address Chris Bucke chose to entertain the audience with a talk on European Mountain Flowers illustrated with slides taken on many walking holidays in the Alps, Pyrenees, mountains of central Spain and the Balkans. He began by stressing the relative paucity of the mountain plants of Britain and moved rapidly to descriptions of the various richer habitats in the mountains further south in Europe. There are many of them: scree, moraine, rock crevices, high meadows and mountain pastures, also woodland. Plants have evolved to find their ecological niches, determined by the availability of nutrients and, to a lesser extent, water. Slides of many plants were projected, with some emphasis on the major families of alpine plants such as campanulas, saxifrages, androsaces, gentians and the many members of the Asteraceae and the Apiaceae. Some of the most spectacular slides showed the huge numbers of narcissi and crocuses that bloom shortly after the snow has melted and the diversity of species that occur in the high meadows and stabilised scree and moraines. Images of the occasional train, butterfly, alpenhorn player and human crept into the talk to provide even more variety.

## **16 October - Woodland Management: Blood Sweat and Tears, Is it all Worthwhile?**

### **Roger Dobbs**

Roger's talk covered the years of BBOWT's ownership of Bowdown Woods.

Bowdown, which is part of Chamberhouse Woods, covers 55ha (135 acres) and has been continuous woodland since 1600, making it a 'semi-natural ancient woodland', 98% of it has an SSSI designation. Bowdown is on a steep slope (with the exception of the area known as the Paper Dump which is an old gravel pit that had been filled with paper pulp).

As with most woodland, Bowdown had been actively managed for centuries until the end of WWII. The oldest individual trees are approximately 250 years old but some coppice stools, especially ash, are 500 years or more. An area of the reserve, known as the Bombsite, was an ammunition dump when Greenham Common Airfield was in use.

By 1983/4 the area was being reclaimed by nature with mature trees growing into woodland, scrub encroaching on the Bombsite and the tree canopy closing over any clearings. BBOWT's objectives were to increase the biodiversity, and to manage and create rides, clearings and heathland. Roger illustrated the successes and difficulties that were faced over the years and the changes made to the management of the site. Effective regrowth of coppiced areas was one of the early lessons to be tackled. This had to include ways of keeping deer from eating the regrowth. Protecting stools via deadwood fences had been ineffective; deer fences and the current method of protecting each stool are preferable. This work, of course, relied in the main on volunteers.

Apart from the initial period during which Manpower Services Commission funding allowed the establishment of paths, drives and basic work, volunteer days have been a necessary part of the conservation programme. Roger traced the number of days over the years; in recent times between 200 and 250 days per year are worked in the conservation of Bowdown. Some of these hours are provided by BBOWT and its Conservation Trainees but the Friends of Bowdown, and the three volunteers who work for the morning once a week provide a large part of these. Not included in those hours are those spent by species recorders.



Roger used the statistics gathered by these recorders to illustrate the impact of conservation over time both on general numbers and specific species. As an example, he explained the methods of recording butterflies and the objectives thereof.

Where rides were not managed, butterflies decreased. On the Bombsite grazed area numbers did not show an increase and this led to re-thinking the ways and time of grazing. As for species, the greatest increase has been in numbers of silver-washed fritillary which breeds in broad-leaved woodland, especially oak woodland or woods with sunny rides and glades. Ten species of butterfly have stabilised and nine have decreased.

Dragonfly and damselfly numbers have been fairly stable with 2012 being a good year while the adder population, similar to national trends, has decreased - perhaps due to fragmentation of isolated communities. Dormice have been found in the woods and boxes are checked fortnightly from April through September. Bird boxes thus far have been used by both Blue and Great Tits.

All the work in Bowdown has showed how important people are to conservation work and Roger concluded by answering his own question with a resounding yes – it is all worthwhile.

## **20 November -- The Jubilee River, its creation and wildlife**

### **Brian Clews**

Brian began his talk with information on the reasons for and construction of the Jubilee River.

Flooding had occurred from the Cherwell Valley, through Cookham and Maidenhead to a severe extent in the past and with increased building on the floodplains of the Thames, floods were affecting yet more people and properties. Plans were made for a hydraulic channel, trapezoidal in shape, to run essentially parallel to the Thames with an expected flow on a typical day to be 10m<sup>3</sup>/sec (commonly called cumecs) and a maximum flow of 215 cumecs during flood control periods, about one-third the flow of the Thames. There was an increased budget for target conservation areas, including reedbed and wetland with some open scrapes; wildflower grassland with natural trees and shrubs; bird boxes, fish passes and otter holts - all over about 193 hectares. As the money gradually ran out, less land was available for this work and for the upkeep of the areas.

The resultant project was opened by the Duke of York in 2002 but flood control was soon found to be inadequate. During the storm of 2003 the Thames reached its capacity in 30 minutes but after opening the floodgates the Jubilee River itself increased from 10 cumecs to 144 cumecs in 15 minutes, only 60% of its expected flow, but even this flow caused severe damage to the weirs and bank. In the aftermath the trapezoidal design of the river was found to be slightly inaccurate. A programme of repair and upgrading, costing about £3.5 million, was undertaken, partly covered by funds from an out of court settlement with the chief designers of the project.

Brian concluded his talk by telling us that the Jubilee River project has been successful in providing a range of habitats for wildlife. Plans for the habitat, which hopefully will be given a designation as a Local Nature Reserve, included a number of target birds in the various areas. Reed and sedge warblers, Cetti's warblers, water rails, cuckoos, bitterns and bearded tits were among the reedbed species that were targeted. These are all present in varying numbers. On the scrapes, wading birds – little ringed plovers, redshanks, lapwings, golden plovers, oystercatchers, and others have been present and some have bred in the past although other species have not continued to use the area. Waterfowl such as teal, coot, garganey, red-crested pochard, mallard and Canada geese are regularly found as well as kingfishers, grey and yellow wagtails and grasshopper warblers.

Many fish, mammal, insect, reptile and amphibian species are resident in their respective habitats. Roach is the most common fish; while mammals are well represented by both welcome (e.g. otter, water vole, fox, badger, and weasel) and unwelcome (mink) species. The wasp spider, brown argus butterfly, *Mystacides azureus* (a predatory caddis fly) and both roussel's and the slender bush cricket are examples of other wildlife to be found in a man-made place well worth several visits.

## **4 December - Thames Basin Heaths, Special Protection Area**

### **Des Sussex**

The Thames Basin Heaths SPA, designated on 9 March 2005 is composed of heathland and forested land covered by a number of local authority areas across Hampshire, Berkshire and Surrey. The heathland is part of Natura 2000, a European-wide network of sites of international importance for nature conservation established under the European Community Directives. The lowland heath supports distinctive flora and fauna, some of which are under threat and in decline. The Ministry of Defence (MOD) owns much of the land although the Forestry Commission, Crown Estates, local authorities and private ownership also own parts. Much of the area is under Open Access.

Des's talk covered the importance of these special areas, and information about species, and habitat management. This area was formerly very vulnerable to development; the creation of SSSI's and SPA's has helped to slow this. Natural England has been proactive in getting protection of and around sites through planning and a three-pronged solution: habitat management, visitor management on the SPA's, and providing alternative recreational access land (known as SANG's – suitable alternative greenspaces). An agreement has been made that there will be no houses built within 400m of the SPA, however this does not take into account community facilities such as schools, libraries and doctors' surgeries. It does mean, however, that any plans for housing development must take account of the SPA.

Des gave information on the conservation of vulnerable bird populations, an important part of the management of the heaths. Numbers of woodlark, a rare bird nationally and in Europe, are now essentially stable within the Thames Basin Heath (TBH) area. Nightjars (nationally stable numbers but with its range declining by 50% in the UK) and Dartford Warblers (whose numbers decrease dramatically in cold winters) are also protected under this designation. Ground-nesting birds are particularly vulnerable during the breeding season in Open Access areas from walkers and dogs as well as in all areas from more usual predators.

Other important fauna species that benefit from conservation practices are adders, emperor moths, silver-studded blue and grayling butterflies, mottled grasshoppers, green tiger and heath tiger beetles and sand digger wasps. Flora of import include lousewort, marsh orchids, cross-leaved heath and cotton grass. Areas of bog within the heathland are not only important for mopping up carbon but also for the conservation of the bog asphodel, sundews, sphagnum mosses and the bog bush cricket.

The need for new ways of managing the heaths has become apparent: cattle grazing schemes, red deer on 'no access' sites, as well as more familiar scrub management. Fires are an issue in some years, and can have devastating effects in the spring and summer. The great damage caused by the Swinley Forest fires had an unforeseen benefit in that it helped the Forestry Commission to realise that ponds are a natural brake for fires while they also enable species of insects such as the small red keeled skimmer dragonflies, raft spiders and newts, to breed.

The members were left with an insight into the wildlife of the TBH area as well as having learned about the realities of balancing this with conflicting human needs.

## **18 December 2012 - Christmas Party**

The Christmas Party, held on the 18<sup>th</sup> December, was thoroughly enjoyed by all who attended. Mulled wine provided by Michael and Jose Keith-Lucas warmed us in body and mind for the usual quizzes, talks and photographic competition while the tables were full of tasty treats brought by members.

David Cliffe read a poem that he had composed, "The Amateur Botanist" (see below) and Ian Duddle gave a talk about honeybees and the plants that they use throughout the year.

The photo voted best overall was Rob Stallard's 'Horse Chestnut Leaf Miner' for which he received a book token in addition to his certificate. The colours of the leaf enhanced the pattern made by the moth larva.

### **The Amateur Botanist - David Cliffe**

I am the very model of an amateur botanist,  
I copy down the Latin names and put them in a big long list.  
My Clapham, Tutin, Warburg, in the trade that's CTW  
Are always in my rucksack just in case I need to find a clue,  
And if you think they're out of date, I'll have you know what you should know,  
I've brought my BSBI lists and copy of Clive Stace also.  
My eye for detail means that I've become a noted splitter –  
The arguments with lumpers can turn out to be quite bitter.  
I then arrange the list of names in taxonomic order,  
And send it to the Naturalists' botanical recorder.  
I'm thorough and meticulous, there can't be very much I've missed,  
I am the very model of an amateur botanist.

When on a field excursion I go dressed for any weather,  
I've gaiters and a big cagoule with map pocket that's clever,  
My vasculum and GPS are always at the ready,  
My trusty folding Leki poles will keep my footsteps steady.  
I talk into a microphone – a miniature recorder  
So that I can remember things in consequential order.  
I can't walk fast and that's because I carry quite a lot of stuff.  
I have to stop from time to time because I'm often out of puff.  
I'm not quite so decrepit as a lot of you have come to think,  
And contrary to rumour I don't bring along the kitchen sink,  
There can't be anything I've missed, it's written down in my check-list,  
I am the very model of an amateur botanist.

Selective as to where I go, a seasoned connoisseur am I.  
And never happier than walking round some noted triple-SI  
And when I find a rarity I sink down on my hands and knees,  
Then hand-lens down and bottom up, no ridiculing if you please,  
Then from its case I extricate my camera, now please don't curse,  
You'll have to wait, I shan't be long, in any case I saw it first,  
You're in my light – just move away, that's if it is no bother,  
For safety's sake I really think I'd better take another.  
In situations such as this I'm careful not to trample –  
Not easy when you're rather stout and walking boots are ample.  
I look behind when I get up – I've squashed it when I thought I'd missed,  
I am the very model of an amateur botanist.

[With apologies to W. S. Gilbert]

### **PHOTOGRAPHIC COMPETITION 2012**

**Ricki Bull – competition coordinator**

**RDNHS Photo competition 2012 Category winners are:**

**Small Is Beautiful – Butterfly:** Jenny Greenham

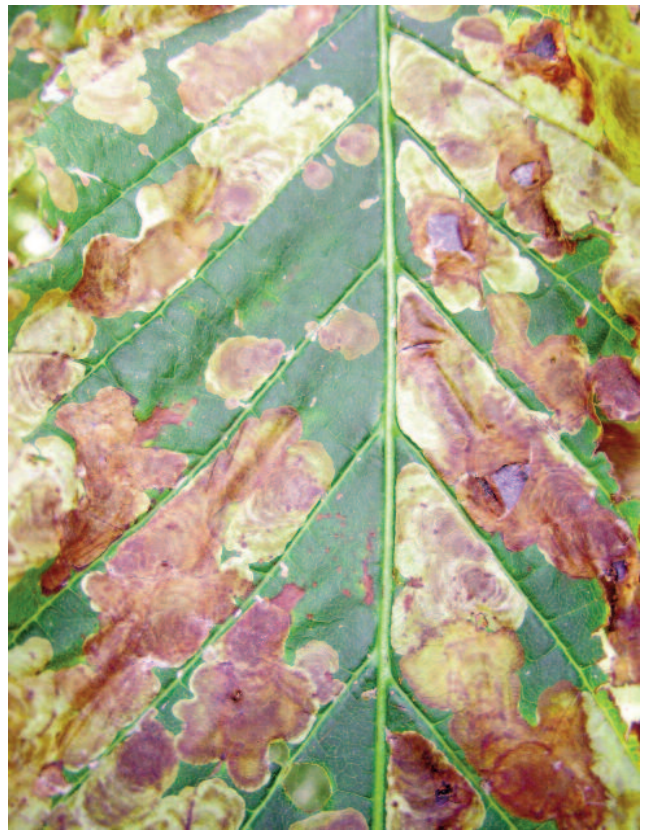
(continued page 29)



Photographic Competition 2012  
winning photographs (see page 26)



Butterfly. Location; Iguazu Falls , Argentina:  
Winner: Small is Beautiful © - Jenny Greenham



Horse-Chestnut leaf miner (*Cameraria ohridella*)  
Winner: Driven to Abstraction and Best Overall Entry  
© - Rob Stallard



Grey Cracker or Common Calico moth subspecies, *Hamadryas februa* Iguazu Falls, Argentina:  
Winner: Pattern Perfect © - Jenny Greenham



The Scarlet Ibis:  
Winner: Colour Prejudice © - Veronica Vincent



Cormorant and Catfish. Location; Iguazu Falls Brazil:  
Winner: Nature in Action © - Jenny Greenham



Rosehips:  
Winner: Three of a Kind © - Jan Haseler



## Photographic Competition 2012: Winning photographs continued and photographs from outings



Left: The Elephant family.

Winner: Little and Large  
© - Veronica Vincent

Right: Swans on the Kennet.

Winner: Against all Odds  
© - Rob Stallard



Below: Privet Hawkmoth *Sphinx ligustri*, Withymead, captured by Norman Hall 20 July 2012, © - Jan Haseler



Above: Slow worm *Anguis fragilis*, Basildon Park May 2012. © - Fred Taylor



Above: Grizzled Skipper *Pyrgus malvae*, Aston Rowant NNR 16th May 2012. © - Chris Ash



Above: Town Hall Clock *Adoxa moschatellina*, Tilehurst 28th April 2012 © - Rob Stallard

**Little and Large** – The Elephant Family: Veronica Vincent

**Three of a Kind** – Rosehips: Jan Haseler

**Nature In Action** – Cormorant and catfish: Jenny Greenham

**Driven To Abstraction and Overall Winner** – Horse-chestnut leaf miner: Rob Stallard

**Colour Prejudice** – The Scarlet Ibis: Veronica Vincent

**Pattern Perfect** – Grey Cracker or Common Calico moth: Jenny Greenham.

**Against All Odds** – Swans on the Kennet: Rob Stallard

## **BASILDON PARK FRIDAY WALKS 2012**

### **Fred Taylor**

Reading and District Natural History Society (RDNHS) co-ordinate and lead natural history walks around Basildon Park, National Trust Property, every Friday from February to November, departing from the Stable Yard at 11.00am. These walks are a significant part of our efforts to bring a greater understanding of wildlife to the general public.

In 2012, the regular walk leaders were Prof. Chris Bucke, Dr Michael Keith-Lucas, Colin Dibb, Ricki Bull and Fred Taylor all from RDNHS and Granville Nicholls, the Park Warden at Basildon, an employee of the National Trust. Additional special topic help was provided by Martin Sell, John Lerpiniere and Tony Rayner.

The year of 2012 will be remembered for the weather. The early spring was warm and dry. From late spring through until Christmas, it rained. This did not, however, deter our intrepid walk leaders - and only on one occasion did the British public not turn out.

In 2012, the start time for the walks was moved to 11.00 am. This proved problematic for the walk leaders. The later time meant that the latter part of the day was lost and that earlier visitors to the Park walks had disturbed animals and birds, scaring them away from the way-marked paths.

At the start of the year, 20th January, before the Park was officially open, an exploratory walk proved extremely rewarding. Three Woodcock were disturbed in the woods to the North side of the Secret Valley. Siskins were flitting through the Larches above. Primroses were in flower in the South corner below the pylons and a Roe deer scampered off through the nearby woods.

This frosty morning walk was complete when three cock Bullfinches were spotted along the perimeter hedge of Mapleton Hill Wood. It was the thin whistle call of the birds that first drew one's attention. Why are these birds always on the other side of the hedge?

Our first public walk of the year was led by Colin Dibb on February 10<sup>th</sup>. A cold morning, with clean white snow. Clear tracks of badger, muntjac, rabbit and fox. But not a human boot-print before us!

The Springtime walks through late February and March were marked by the fine weather and expectation of a long hot Summer. At the start of each walk we were able to point out the flowering Daphne and Butchers Broom, the Yew producing profuse quantities of pollen and in the Gardens, the flowers on Sweet Box and Honeysuckle Species. In the woodland, before the leaves appeared, or the ground-cover had developed, a fine large dog-fox was spotted on several occasions. He was in excellent condition with a magnificent brush and no sign of mange. There are several Earths in the Park and a family of three or four cubs were reared near the House. They could be seen playing



below the Yews, in the early morning, before the Park had opened to the public.

A group of three Black Poplars provided a suitable nest-site for a family of Mistle Thrushes. These were already nesting by the end of March and three young birds were seen with the adults during the Summer. These same trees are the home of the Hornet Clear-wing Moth, with their characteristic holes found around the base of the trunks.

The Spring produced the usual magnificent display of Bluebells in the woodland. These were in strong contrast to the vivid yellow of the bulbous buttercups of the Parkland. Here, the persistent wet weather led to a strong growth of grasses which in turn allowed various perennial flowers to flourish – normally lost to the grazing cattle. Notable were the clumps of Harebells to the South-West of the main house.

The spring migrants arrived – Blackcaps, Chiffchaffs and Willow Warblers being prominent, if not common. A few Swallows hawked through the grass in the Parkland. They worked around the cattle **and the walkers!** as they disturbed insects from the grass. Star of Bethlehem showed at several points near the entrance gate to the Pheasant Park.

By late Spring, both the Buzzards and the Kites had nest sites in the Park. Last year's young Buzzards were still around and they also nested locally, but the weather apparently got the better of all of them and no young birds were seen. Notable sightings in the conifers were 6 Crossbills. These appeared several times through the summer and may also have attempted to breed.

The Park has almost forty nest boxes and these are monitored throughout the breeding season. This year was not a great success. Broods were successfully fledged from only ten boxes – six tits, two robins and two wrens. There were, however, seven boxes at the end of the season with abandoned eggs or dead young. There were signs of Tawny Owl activity in one of the boxes and male and female birds were heard calling in several parts of the woodland. The Park has a good population of Nuthatches. These can be heard calling throughout the year. The more secretive Tree-creeper was also seen on several occasions.

The Park occasionally produces something special for the walkers. One of the highlights this year was in May. We had spoken about the best places to look for wildlife and one rather elderly lady commented she had to keep her eyes on the ground - to prevent her tripping over! But then, what did she see? Our first Slow worm, a fully grown 25cm adult. (See photo).

The Summer display of Common Spotted Orchids in the Secret Valley was again impressive. There were not, however, many Common Twayblades and the Bee Orchid managed less than ten blooms. A special find in the meadow to the front of the main house was the Green Winged Orchid. This was seen by two groups of walkers, but by the third week, it had gone, probably picked by an unenlightened visitor!

Michael Keith-Lucas is particularly popular as a walk leader. All of the other leaders like to accompany him and he never fails to surprise us. This year he identified specimens of Yellow Bird's Nest. This saprophyte was typically found beneath Beech trees, on the perimeter walk.

The wet summer certainly had a negative effect on the birds, the flowering plants and hence the butterflies. There were early spring sightings of Brimstone and Orange Tips. A few Speckled Woods were seen later in the year and a good show of Red Admirals towards the end of Summer. Very few Dragonflies were noted - all-in-all, not a good year for Insects.

As Autumn progressed, we were asked to produce a display of Parkland fruits and berries. A three-hour walk with secateurs and basket produced 16 different species. The most beautiful were the Spindle-berries. These occurred in various hues of pink and orange all around the Park. The hedgerow across the bottom of the Railway Park was especially impressive. It was also a good example of how the variation in soil type affects the growth rates of the hedgerow shrubs.

The leaf miner larvae appear to have had less effect this year on the Horse Chestnut trees, although there was only a poor crop of fruit. The Sweet Chestnuts managed a little better. The native Oak,

however, does not appear to have produce a single acorn throughout the Park!!!! Our display was well received and lasted for 5 weeks.

The early autumn of 2012 did not produce a great display of Fungi. Even so, Chris did manage to find a reasonable supply of Oyster Mushrooms for his pantry, and field mushrooms were found in the Pheasant Park. There was a late flush of Fungi in the woodland but last year's display of Giant Puffballs in the Railway Park was not repeated. On the 7<sup>th</sup> November walk a specimen of the Porcelain Mushroom (*Oudemansiella mucida*) was noted on the old Beech tree to the right of the Start of Walks point and a very large Oyster mushroom was found on the last walk in December in the top wood - but far too ripe to eat!

Our walks proved popular this year, and we were asked by the National Trust to extend them into December. Winter migrant birds began to appear in November and we soon had significant numbers of Redwings and a few Fieldfares. Our last walk produced an amusing sighting of a very wet Buzzard. It was initially perched tightly against the trunk of a Cedar in the Park, sheltering from heavy rain. Disturbed by a photograph-seeking walker, it flew only a few yards onto the ground, and then a few yards further into one of the Lime trees. It really didn't want to fly anywhere!!

This walk also had Blackbirds bathing in the puddles on the woodland path and Redwings flying down from eating the Hawthorn berries for a drink and a wash in the small stream running down the path to the South side of the Railway Park.

Water will be the enduring memory of 2012.

## **EXTENDING THE FLORA OF BERKSHIRE? OR: "WILD" FLOWERS AT 29 DOWNSHIRE SQUARE, READING**

**Chris Bucke**

In "The Flora of Berkshire" Michael Crawley mentions the desirability but impracticality of recording plant species that occur "wild", i.e. fending for themselves, in private gardens. This article attempts to list such species in a suburban garden close to the centre of Reading.

I have tended the garden of 29 Downshire Square since March 1979. The area of the plot including the bungalow is about one-third of an acre. The soil is plateau gravel that was very poor in 1979 but has improved in texture over the decades. Even so, in dry conditions the best way of describing the soil is "dust with flints". The pH is about neutral but there is chalk beneath the surface. I am a plantsman who gains great pleasure from propagating species new to me from seed, purchased or collected from the wild. I am not deterred by having no idea how some species might perform. As a result I attempt to grow far too many species for the space available so the garden is not stylish, more Hyde than Jekyll. It does not suffer from the attentions of herbivores such as deer or rabbits: squirrels contribute acorns and walnuts. In common with many gardeners I have the dilemma between keeping the garden neat and tidy and retaining seed heads as winter food for birds. The latter option prevails in most years. If the garden were abandoned for a couple of years it would be dominated by Ivy and Brambles.

When I arrived the garden had been neglected for several years. There were some routine perennials, phlox, Michaelmas daisies, golden rods, many aquilegias and some bulbs, plus a lot of poor lawn, much of which has been removed. A surprise was the appearance in the first spring of the attractive blue blowers of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob (*Trachystemon orientalis*) which I had not seen before. This seeds itself around vigorously and has to be controlled. I have given away specimens with the instructions "plant and stand clear". It comes in two forms, the rarer lacking the red pigment. It became apparent that the garden had been woodland at some time in the past: Celandines appeared in large numbers (they are the bulbous form *Ranunculus ficaria* subsp. *bulbifer*), as did Wood Avens (*Geum urbanum*), Herb Robert (*Geranium robertianum*), both pink and white-flowered forms, and Enchanter's Nightshade (*Circaea lutetiana*). All persist in spite of my best efforts to eliminate them but I am now aided in controlling the Celandines by the annoyingly large population of wood pigeons that find them good to eat so I do not have the displays of bloom that occurred years ago. A species indigenous to the garden

that seemed charming at first (and is if its invasive properties are ignored) is Procumbent Yellow Sorrel (*Oxalis corniculatus*). This has been spread inadvertently when I have gifted pots of plants to friends, some of whom are still friends.

I made some seriously bad choices in acquiring species. Of an attractive-seeming collection of six species of *Allium*, five died promptly but *Allium triquetrum* (Three-cornered Garlic) survived and now occurs all over the garden and my neighbours' gardens. *Allium vineale*, Wild Onion, arrived from somewhere and is even more difficult to eliminate. Seed of *Duchesnia indica* (Yellow-flowered Strawberry) was acquired from the Alpine Garden Society's seed distribution because I had never heard of this species. It grew well and is now thoroughly naturalised. Other species arrived as unintended gifts. The late Bill Baker was always very generous with plants from his fine garden in Tidmarsh and often there was more in the pot than expected. The attractive small annual *Saxifraga sibthorpii* has persisted for many years and an even more attractive Annual Pink Oxalis (*Oxalis rosea*) is very well established. This behaves very similarly to Mexican Fleabane (*Erigeron karvinianus*) that is also well-established even though my home is anything but stately. I first became aware of the beautiful annual *Phacelia campanularia* in Bill Baker's garden: Chiltern Seeds offers seeds of this lovely thing, which seeds around gently in gritty areas. A very serious error was to introduce the Comfrey *Symphytum tuberosum*, possibly from the population at Lockinge. This is highly invasive and not very attractive: it does, though, disappear from sight at the end of April.

Gardens provide an environment in which spontaneous hybridisation can occur more readily than in the wild. "*Helleborus orientalis*" (Lenten Rose) provides an example of this: I have many that seed around enthusiastically, providing excitement when a new seedling first flowers. *Helleborus foetidus* and *Helleborus corsicus* also seed around but, so far, *Helleborus viridis* has not done so. I have a hybrid swarm of Arums. First came the rare *Arum apulum* grown from seed purchased from the Archibalds, then there was *A. italicum* subsp. *italicum*, then the unmarked *A. italicum* subsp. *neglectum* collected in the Isle of Man. All have flowered and fruited and some bird has introduced *A. maculatum* so now there is a mass of arums with all sorts of leaf patterns and different colours of spadix.

I have *Cyclamen hederifolium* all over the place as the light soil seems to favour seed germination and to favour the ants that move the ripe seed around. *Cyclamen coum* also seeds around pleasingly but cannot compete with the larger *C. hederifolium*. There are many different snowdrops that proliferate but I cannot count them as "wild" because I doubt that any of them reproduces by seed. Flowering at the same time is *Crocus tommasinianus* which gives great pleasure in late February and spreads around well. I have other crocuses and I have seen possible hybrids of these with *C. tommasinianus* but none of these has persisted.

Overseas walking trips have provided opportunities to collect seeds in the wild. The success rate in cultivating these to maturity is not great but some persist. Of various species collected during an Alpine Garden Society expedition to Nepal, the one that survives is *Rosa sericea*, whose new shoots are as attractive as its white blooms and red fruits. It seeds around gently. A trip to Bulgaria provided one of my favourite species, *Celsia rutifolia*, a relative of the mulleins but more graceful. This provides seedlings readily and I suspect may hybridise with *Verbascum* species. Another Bulgarian species that has succeeded from seed is Rayed Tansy (*Tanacetum macrophyllum*); a fine plant for the back of the herbaceous border that I suspect may find its way into the countryside as it seeds itself with enthusiasm. A work trip to Turkey in September provided an opportunity to collect seeds of various species. Seriously prominent among these (it reaches 4m. in my garden!) is Giant Fennel (*Ferula communis*): self sown seedlings are developing well. Two other species of *Ferula* are growing up from seed collected in Kazakhstan but have not yet bloomed. On a different scale, from seed collected in Sicily is the annual *Fedia cornucopiodes* (in the valerian family, half way between centranthus and corn salad in appearance) that has persisted in a gravelly path for many years. Seed of the Perennial Honesty (*Lunaria rediviva*) proved very fertile, producing plants that combine nicely with the Rayed Tansy and with spontaneous seedlings of a perennial, yellow-flowered Dame's Violet (*Hesperis lutea*). Curiously, the common Dame's Violet (*Hesperis matronalis*) does not persist in the garden. Berkshire species that reproduce spontaneously in the garden are Spurge Laurel (*Daphne laureola*) and Wild Candytuft (*Iberis amara*) that seems very much at home in RG1. Stinking Gladdon (*Iris foetidissima*), originally collected at Swanage, seeds around and contributes valuable winter colour.

Some species have surprised me by reproducing well in the garden. A Skullcap, perhaps Somerset

Skullcap (*Scutellaria altissima*), acquired I know not where, has given considerable pleasure and seeds around so well that it is a candidate to be described as a thug. The very choice *Gentiana paradoxa* seeds itself into gritty compost. This gentian merits its name; it tolerates dry chalky conditions unlike the great majority of *Gentiana* species (as opposed to *Gentianella*). Peony species tend not to be good value in the garden as flowers because the blooms are usually short-lived but they earn their places because of the beauty of the young shoots and of their fruits. I did not expect such apparently exotic species to seed around but I have self-sown seedlings of *Paeonia potanini*, *P. mascula* and *P. ludlowii* var. *lutea*. My next-door neighbours acquired a Summer Jasmine (*Jasminum officinale*) years ago and now its offspring have to be weeded out every year. My *Clematis viticella* produces abundant seed which germinates well in the grit of raised beds. *Clematis cirrhosa* also seeds around but less enthusiastically. Another surprise was to find seedlings of a red-flowered form of the South African *Gladiolus dallenii*. A greenish-flowered form of the same species has not showed the same generosity but its relative from South Africa, an Angel's Fishing Rod (*Dierama* sp.) has done so.

More species come to mind, less spectacular than some that have been mentioned. The orange-flowered poppy *Papaver atlanticum* seeds around just as enthusiastically as the Welsh Poppy *Meconopsis cambrica*. Spurgees seem to like my garden: the alpines *Euphorbia myrsinites* and *E. rigida* seed themselves in raised beds. The rather grand spurgees *E. characias* ssp. *characias* and ssp. *wulfenii* thrive and self-seed, producing hybrids between the two subspecies. *Sisyrinchium* species seem always to seed around: *S. striatum* is always available, as are seedlings of the rather confusing small blue and yellow-flowered species. The two Alexanders *Smyrniolus olusatrum* and *S. perfoliatum* have to be kept under control to prevent their taking over areas of garden and swamping other species.

Over the years, other species have proliferated from seeds in the garden but have been eliminated by climatic and nutritional changes or because they threatened to be too invasive. It is apparent from study of my not exceptional garden that Michael Crawley is correct in his supposition that the private gardens of Berkshire contain very many species that might be described as "wild".

Some may be concerned that the species mentioned may "get out" and become the next noxious pests: I doubt that this will be the case. The garden is a protected environment and most species in it are cosseted by weeding out competitors, cultivation of the soil and by feeding. In the wild they would not receive this attention and would die out rapidly. Of the species I have mentioned, the larger ones might well survive: *Euphorbia characias* does persist in several locations in the Reading area (but, I suspect, usually in Oxfordshire). *Tanacetum macrophyllum* might well persist and spread: in Bulgaria it occurs in light shade of woodlands and it is cultivated in several country gardens that are open to the public so there is a source of its small seeds near to suitable habitats. On the evidence of my garden the Skullcap (*Scutellaria altissima*, if that is what it is) would proliferate well in light shade. In gardens *Trachystemon orientalis* can become a major pest, swamping smaller species, but this appears not to be the case when it escapes into the wild. Some of the smaller species might survive well in habitats where is little competition for example the scraped areas of Greenham/Crookham Common where the surface is very gritty. There is a temptation to test this theory but that is illegal.

## VISIT TO APULIA - 14TH TO 21ST APRIL

**Chris Bucke**

A group of 23 members of Reading and District Natural History Society and Pang Valley Ramblers travelled to Apulia, the "heel" of Italy for a sight seeing and walking holiday organised by Ramblers Worldwide Holidays. Our base was Alberobello, a small, ancient town famous for its "trulli", conical houses built of the local limestone. The trulli were a form a tax avoidance that could be dismantled rapidly, so counting as temporary dwellings, some of them now over 200 years old! Alberobello is located at about 1,000 ft above sea level and the climate in April was similar to Britain, cool and showery, though it becomes very hot in the height of the summer.

After a tour of the town and a picnic lunch in the town park on the first morning, our leader took us out of the town to a wood, the Bosco Selvo, for a stroll. This proved to be a wonderful place that some of the party visited four times during the week. It is one of those very interesting areas where northern



European species and Mediterranean species meet, providing great biodiversity. The rather shrubby woodland was not dominated by any one species: an oak *Quercus aegilops* was frequent, there was Bay (*Laurus nobilis*), *Viburnum tinus* (familiar from British shrubberies), a Medlar (*Crataegus azarolus*), Spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*) plus pines and many other species. The first striking species noted were white Asphodels (*Asphodelus albus*): not much later there would be many more Yellow Asphodels (*Asphodeline lutea*). Among these were many Blue Gromwells (*Lithospermum purpureocaerulea*). Very confusingly, an information board at the entrance to the wood described this as *Anchusa aurea*, a key z having been omitted from the specific name! There was some excitement when peonies (*Paeonia mascula*) were found in bloom. A less spectacular discovery that produced excitement nevertheless was Ground Pine (*Ajuga chamaepitys*). There were anemones (*Anemone hortensis* and *A. pavonina*) and in one area leaves of very many cyclamen (*Cyclamen hederifolium*). In the less wooded areas there were orchids (*Orchis italica* and *Ophrys fusca*), a Birthwort (*Aristolochia pallida*), swallow-wort (*Vincetoxicum hirundinaria*), several grape hyacinths, irises still to bloom and much, much more. The birders noted Hoopoes, Nightingales, Sardinian Warblers and Cuckoos and there were a few butterflies including Southern Festoon, Glanville Fritillary and Southern Comma. A black snake proved very co-operative to photographers until extreme close-ups were attempted. All survived!

The next day was more than a little damp. The walk took us on lanes through olive and cherry groves that should have been interesting botanically but were disappointing, the farmers having applied herbicide rather freely. They had missed some fine plants of a Venus' Looking Glass (*Legousia speculum-veneris*) with much larger flowers than our *L. hybrida*. Under hedges there were particularly fine foliage forms of *Cyclamen hederifolium*.

A short coach trip took us to the starting point of another walk that proved to be a great treat, along the Canale di Parro, a covered aqueduct that carries water from the Apennines to the arid Apulian lowlands. This went through open country with extensive views: the vegetation was predominantly Mediterranean, with Cistus shrubs (*Cistus crispus*, *C. albidus* and *C. salvifolius*) just coming into bloom. Various butterflies were noted, especially Green Hairstreaks, Large Tortoiseshell and Scarce Swallowtail, and plenty of birds but the party was really slowed down by the great quantity of orchids. *Orchis italica* was the most frequent, with some *Orchis tridentata* and a few *Orchis laxiflora* and many different *Ophrys*. The latter are not easy to identify but there were Early Spider Orchids (*Ophrys sphegodes*) and many *Ophrys lutea*, many both in number and in different forms. There was *Ophrys fusca* and a few Mirror Orchids (*Ophrys speculum*) and probably several other species. Not only was the walk superb but there was a bar at the end, with beer!

Most of the other days were devoted to sightseeing in some of the small hilltop towns of the region, where rococo architecture predominated. The party did get to see, and paddle in if they wished, the Adriatic. Unexpected organisms found washed up on the shore were sponges: the seaside vegetation was not cared for but, as we were there after noon, Barbary Nuts (*Gynandris sisyrinchium*) (which are late risers, blooming only after lunch) in various forms were noted. A wild Gladiolus was found by one adventurous couple who saw a Harrier and the Bath White butterfly. Geology dominated the end of the day with a visit to vast, extensive limestone caves at Castellaria. That evening the hotel provided, as it did daily, appetising snacks with the pre-dinner drinks: these were bulbous, vegetable and quite tasty. Detective work by one of the party revealed that we had eaten bulbs of the grape hyacinth *Muscari comosum* that had been available the day before, in large quantities, in the local market along with four or five different species of mushroom and a wealth of local produce.

On the final day, because the flight back left in late evening, there was a bonus morning trip westwards into the neighbouring province, Basilicata, to the town of Matera. The oldest houses were built into the limestone cliffs of a spectacular gorge rather similar to a sun-drenched Malham Cove. This area would clearly have repaid some days of exploration as species of *Campanula* could be seen in crevices of the cliffs and there were tracks leading in all directions from the town into open country. The town housed a population of Peregrines. There was time after a late lunch for some to make a final trip to the Bosco Selva. Approaching Bari airport at the end of the trip we really did see the orb of the golden sun dipping into the wine-dark sea!





Above: Raft Spider *Dolomedes fimbriatus* Thursley Common 30 Sep 2012, © - Jan Haseler



Right: Hybrid Monkey/Lady Orchid, Hartslock, 26 May 2012: © - Rob Stallard



Above: Wasp Spider *Argiope bruennichi*, Corner Field of BBOWT's Moor Copse reserve, 9 Sep 2012, the second record for the site. This is a relatively new species for the UK and has been spreading up from the south coast. © - Jan Haseler

Left: Frog Orchid *Coeloglossum viride*, Watlington Hill, 15 Sep 2012, © - Rob Stallard. Below: Chiltern gentian *Gentianella germanica*, same walk © - Jan Haseler



Left: Water-violet *Hottonia palustris*, Theale, 20 June 2012, © - Jan Haseler







Above: Slender St. John's Wort *Hypericum pulchrum*, Rushall Farm Bradfield, 7th July 2012, © - Chris Ash

Left: Laughing Gym *Gymnopilus junonius*, Gallowstree Common on 14th Oct 2012, © - Dave Dare



Rough Marsh-mallow *Althaea officinalis*, Ranscombe Farm, Kent 23 June 2012, © - Laurie Haseler



Loddon Lily *Leucojum aestivum*, Dinton Pastures 21 Mar 2012, © - Jan Haseler



Wild Candytuft *Iberis amara*, Watlington Hill 15 Sep 2012, © - Rob Stallard



Green Elfcup *Chlorociboria aeruginascen*, Pamber Heath 18th July 2012, © - Rob Stallard



## RECORDER'S REPORT FOR BOTANY 2012

### Renée Grayer

The first three months of the year were dry, especially the second half of March when it was sunny and warm. However, just when the hosepipe ban came into force in April, the heavens opened and this month was cold and wet. May was dry again and the last week was very warm, but this weather did not continue into the summer, as the wettest June since 1971 followed. July was also wetter than average, although the last week was fine. October and the last half of December were very wet again, but there was a cold snap in the first half of the month. Four months with more than 100 mm of rain were recorded at the University of Reading in 2012, the first time that this happened for nearly a century. This wet weather affected many of the field trips of the Society this year.

For the names of the plant families and species below, the 3rd edition of C.A. Stace's New Flora of the British Isles (2010) is followed.

#### PTEROPSIDA (Ferns and Allies)

plants. SU592795 (JH)

19 Feb 12. Lower Basildon. SU604789 (JH)

##### 4. Ophioglossaceae

*Ophioglossum vulgatum* Adder's-tongue

6 May 12. Near the pond in Clifton Meadow, Oxon. SU555956 (JW)

*Myosurus minimus* Mousetail

20 May 12. Field at Dunsden Green, more than 200! (JW)

##### 5. Equisetaceae

*Equisetum sylvaticum* Wood Horsetail

18 Jul 12. Pamber Forest. SU613614 (JH)

*Pulsatilla vulgaris* Pasqueflower

30 Apr 12. Aston Upthorpe Downs. More than 10 flowers. SU544834 (JH)

##### 18. Dryopteridaceae

*Polystichum aculeatum* Hard Shield-fern

25 Jan 12. Cornwell Copse, Tilehurst, ca. five big crowns. SU659742 (JH)

*Dryopteris affinis* agg. Scaly Male-fern

20 Jan 12. Paices Wood. SU587640 (JH)

*Ranunculus lingua* Greater Spearwort

12 Jul 12. Several plants in a pond on the outskirts of Woodcote, near Greenmoor Hill. SU647813 (CB)

##### 38. Saxifragaceae

*Saxifraga granulata* Meadow Saxifrage

6 May 12. Clifton Meadow, Oxon. SU555956 (JW)

13 May 12. Winter hill nr Cookham, large number of plants. SU884867 (RG&GT)

23 May 12. Lough Down, Streatley, 12 clumps. SU588812 (JH)

#### MAGNOLIIDAE (Flowering Plants)

##### 30. Papaveraceae

*Papaver hybridum* Rough Poppy

3 Aug 12. North of Goring, edge of the cereal crop. SU615827 (JW)

*Chrysosplenium oppositifolium* Opposite-leaved Golden-saxifrage

29 Mar 12. Old Pond Copse, Maiden Erlegh Reserve. SU752711 (RG)

12 Apr 12. Aldermoor, Woodley. SU775749 (RG)

13 Apr 12. Omer's Gully, Burghfield Common. SU647674 (JH)

##### 32. Ranunculaceae

*Helleborus viridis* Green Hellebore

19 Feb 12. Mutton Copse, Stichens Green. About 40 plants. SU587794 (JH)

1 Mar 12. Mount Hill, Bagnor. More than 40 plants. SU447703 (JH)

*Tellima grandiflora* Fringecups

5 Apr 12. Oak Wood, Maiden Erlegh Reserve. SU748709 (RG)

12 Apr 12. Redhatch Copse, Earley. SU7470 (RG)

*Helleborus foetidus* Stinking Hellebore

6 Jan 12. Lough Down, Streatley. SU589812 (JH)

15 Jan 12. Stichens Green. Four or more

#### 42. Fabaceae

*Genista tinctoria* Dyer's Greenweed  
25 May 12. Chalk grassland at Flint House, Goring. SU628805 (JW)  
20 Jul 12. A few plants in chalk grassland in the grounds of Flint House, near Cray's Pond. SU627806 (CB)

*Trifolium arvense* Hare's-foot Clover  
13 Sep 12. Lower Earley, footpath parallel to Warbler Drive. SU748703 (RG)

#### 44. Rosaceae

*Geum rivale* Water Avens  
2 May 12. Donkey Field, Elm Farm. SU4165 (JC)  
19 May 12. Hogmoor Copse, Moor Copse. Doing well in recently cleared ride. SU634739 (JH)  
15 Aug 12. Greywell Moors reserve. SU7251 (JC&ID)

*Sanguisorba officinalis* Great Burnet  
6 May 12. Clifton Meadow, Oxon. SU555956 (JW)

#### 50. Urticaceae

*Urtica dioica* ssp. *galeopsifolia* Stingless Common Nettle  
28 Jul 12. RDNHS excursion to Medmenham and Danesfield. SU8184(CB)

#### 76. Thymelaeaceae

*Daphne laureola* Spurge-laurel  
6 Jan 12. Lough Down, Streatley. SU589812 (JH)  
13 Jan 12. The Holies, Streatley. SU594800 (JH)  
22 Jun 12. Homefield Wood. SU813867 (RG&GT)

#### 81. Brassicaceae

*Iberis amara* Wild Candytuft  
15 Sep 12. Watlington Hill. SU710936 (RG)

*Lepidium latifolium* Dittander  
Aug 12. Many clumps in the grassland beside the Foudry Brook between the bridge to Kennet Island and the roundabout to Madjeski Stadium. SU711708 and SU709703. (In 2010 there was only a single clump at the Kennet Island end of the site) (CB)

#### 82. Santalaceae

*Thesium humifusum* Bastard Toadflax  
26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve near Goring. SU6179 (CR&MS)

#### 88. Caryophyllaceae

*Cerastium arvense* Field Mouse-ear  
30 Apr 12. Aston Upthorpe Downs. SU544830 (JH&CB)

*Spergula arvensis* Corn Spurrey  
27 Aug 10. Weed patch in arable field near Exlade Street, Checkendon. SU660990 (JW)

#### 99. Primulaceae

*Hottonia palustris* Water-violet  
13 May 12. Cockmarsh nr Cookham, growing in pond. SU883867 (RG&GT)  
7 Jun 12. Theale Wetlands. SU6472 (CB)

#### 102. Ericaceae

*Monotropa hypopithys* Yellow Bird's-nest  
5 Aug 12. Stoke Row. SU6883 (SR)

#### 105. Gentianaceae

*Gentianella amarella* Autumn Gentian  
7 Sep 12. Beacon Hill, Aston Rowant. A group of 7 plants with no purple pigment in flowers or leaves, which are probably sports rather than ssp. *septentrionalis* (which is confined to the North of the UK). In 2009 another such group was found in Aston Rowant at a different location, but had not recurred. SU727972 (CA)

*G. x pamlinii* (*G. germanica* x *G. amarella*)  
hybrid between Chiltern and Autumn Gentian  
15 Sep 12. Watlington Hill. Both *G. germanica* and *G. amarella* grow abundantly in this location and also intermediate forms which are presumably hybrids. SU704936 (RG)

#### 108. Convolvulaceae

*Cuscuta europaea* Greater Dodder  
30 Jul 12. Dorchester Bridge Meadow. Only a very small amount on nettle this year, perhaps because of the dry spring. SU580938 (JW)

#### 109. Solanaceae

*Atropa belladonna* Deadly Nightshade  
15 Sep 12. Watlington Hill. SU704936 (RG)

### 113. Veronicaceae

*Veronica agrestis* Green Field-speedwell  
21 Jul 12. Near the mansion in Cliveden,  
Taplow. SU911852 (RG)

### 115. Hippuridaceae

*Hippuris vulgaris* Mare's-tail  
7 Jun 12. Theale Wetlands. SU6472 (CB)  
15 Aug 12. In Basingstoke Canal near  
Greywell. SU7151 (JC&ID)

### 118. Lamiaceae

*Clinopodium acinos* Basil Thyme  
23 Aug 12. Many plants at the Holies growing  
in cracks in a disused tarmac'd pathway.  
SU593798 (CB)

*Stachys arvensis* Field Woundwort  
18 Sep 12. Locally frequent on arable margins  
in Binfield Heath. SU660990 (JW)

### 121. Orobanchaceae

*Orobanche minor* Common Broomrape  
3 Aug 12. Edge of crop on chalk soil north of  
Goring. SU615827 (JW)

### 128. Asteraceae

*Bidens tripartita* Trifid Bur-marigold  
15 Aug 12. Greywell Moors reserve. SU7251  
(JC&ID)  
16 Aug 12. Along the Thames nr Earley  
Industrial Estate. SU739734 (RG)

*Erigeron karvinskianus* Mexican Fleabane  
18 Sep 12. Hilbury Road, Earley. SU743712  
(RG)

*Petasites fragrans* Winter Heliotrope  
28 Jan 12. In flower on Blounts Court Road,  
Sonning Common. SU707818 (JW)

*Solidago virgaurea* Goldenrod  
23 Jul 12. In bud on road verge Deadmans  
Lane, Woodcote. SU666804 (JW)

### 131. Caprifoliaceae

*Sambucus ebulus* Dwarf Elder  
28 Aug 12. South Stoke, prolific on roadside  
verge, spreading into adjacent fields. A well  
established locality dating back to Druce's  
time. SU603852 (JW)

### 132. Valerianaceae

*Valerianella carinata* Keeled-fruited  
Cornsalad  
12 Apr 12. Instow Road, Earley, nr  
Interpretation Centre. SU750709 (RG)

### 133. Dipsacaceae

*Dipsacus pilosus* Small Teasel  
23 Mar 12. Ufton Nervet, last year's fruit  
heads. SU620671 (JH)  
21 Jul 12. Cliveden, Taplow. SU911852 (RG)  
1 Aug 12. Several plants in the vicinity of the  
visitor centre of the Warburg reserve at Bix.  
SU721879 (CB)

### 138. Apiaceae

*Petroselinum segetum* Corn Parsley  
3 Aug 12. On edge of the cereal crop north of  
Goring, abundant. SU611821 (JW)

### 145. Hydrocharitaceae

*Stratiodes aloides* Water Soldier  
12 Jul 12. Several plants in a pond on the  
outskirts of Woodcote, near Greenmoor Hill.  
SU647813 (CB)

### 154. Melantiaceae

*Paris quadrifolia* Herb-Paris  
14 May 12. Warburg Reserve, Bix. Four  
populations with ca. 50 plants each.  
SU720880 (RG&GT)

### 158. Orchidaceae

*Epipactis purpurata* Violet Helleborine  
5 Aug 12. Stoke Row. SU6883 (SR)  
27 Aug 12. In beech woodland along Corkers  
Lane, Checkendon. SU660826 (JW)

*E. phyllanthos* Green-flowered Helleborine  
5 Aug 12. Stoke Row. SU6883 (SR)

*Cephalanthera damasonium* White  
Helleborine  
26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve near Goring.  
SU6179 (CR&MS)  
1 Jun 12. Cleeve Hill. SU333766 (JL)  
12 Jun 12. Under beech at Flint House, Goring.  
SU628805 (JW)

*Platanthera chlorantha* Greater Butterfly-  
orchid  
1 Jun 12. Lambourn Woodlands, 4 flowers.



SU334765(JL)

1 Jun 12. Cleeve Hill. SU333766(JH)

22 Jun 12. Homefield Wood, tall plants.  
SU814868 (RG&GT)

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

25 May 12. Flowering in chalk grassland at Flint House, Goring. SU625805 (JW)

12 June 12. On wood bank under beech on Busgrove Lane, Stoke Row, 6 plants. SU7679833 (JW)

***Coeloglossum viride*** Frog Orchid

25 Jun 12. Aston Upthorpe, Juniper Valley, ca 14 specimens. SU544832 (SED)

1 Sep 12. Oven Bottom, Berks Downs, 6 plants. SU538835 (JH)

15 Sep 12. Watlington Hill, more than 20 plants. SU704936 (RG)

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

28 Apr 12. Harefield Copse and Boxgrove Wood. More than 10 plants at each site. SU6572 and SU6573 (RG)

14 May 12. Warburg Reserve, Bix, more than 16 plants. SU72068801 (RG&GT)

16 May 12. Aston Rowant National Nature Reserve. SU721962 (CA)

16 May 12. Moor Copse, 25 plants reappeared at the site after several years absence. SU639737 & SU639738 (JL)

***O. militaris*** Military Orchid

22 Jun 12. Homefield Wood. SU814867 (RG&GT)

***O. morio*** Green-winged Orchid

13 May 12. Maidensgrove Common (24 spikes) and front garden in Sonning Common (2 spikes) (JW)

***O. purpurea*** Lady Orchid

26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve, 2 specimens. SU6179 (CR&MS)

***O. simia*** Monkey Orchid

26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve, many specimens. SU6179 (CR&MS)

***O. x angusticruris (O. purpurea x O. simia)***

Hybrid between Lady and Monkey Orchid

26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve, many specimens, doing well. SU6179 (CR&MS)

***Anacamptis pyramidalis*** Pyramidal Orchid

6 Jun 12. Paices Wood. SU593638 (JL)

22 Jun 12. Homefield Wood SU814867

(RG&GT)

23 Jun 12. Lambourn Woodlands. SU326746 (JL)

26 Jun 12. Burghfield Common, Field Farm, huge number of flowers. SU673700 (JL)

28 Jun 12. Lambourn, White Shute, 39 specimens (hundreds in July here). SU331768(JL)

***Ophrys insectifera*** Fly Orchid

14 May 12. Warburg Reserve, Bix. SU713881 (RG&GT)

22 Jun 12. Homefield Wood. SU812868 (RG&GT)

## 161. Amaryllidaceae

***Leucojum aestivum ssp. aestivum*** Summer Snowflake (Loddon Lily)

31 Mar 12 & 1 Apr 12. Survey along the North and South side of the River Thames and along the River Loddon organised by Prof. M. Crawley. Hundreds of individual plants and clumps of plants recorded by members of the Society in SU5979, SU5980, SU5981, SU6079, SU6179, SU6376, SU7576, SU7677, SU7678, SU7683, SU7684, SU7777, SU7778, SU7779, SU7780, SU7785, SU7878, SU7879, SU7880, SU7884, SU7885, SU8183, SU8184, SU8284, SU8484 (CS, JH, JW, LH, MS, RB, RG, SR)

## 162. Asparagaceae

***Polygonatum multiflorum*** Solomon's-seal

13 Apr 12. Omer's Gully, Burgfield Common. SU647674 (JH)

***Luzula sylvatica*** Great Wood-rush

25 May 12. Beech Wood at Flint House, Goring. SU628805 (JW)

## 169. Cyperaceae

***Carex filiformis (C. tomentosa)*** Downy-fruited Sedge

26 May 12. Hartslock Reserve near Goring. SU6179 (CR&MS)

***C. pilulifera*** Pill Sedge

5 Aug 12. Stoke Row. SU6883 (SR)

***C. pseudocyperus*** Cyperus Sedge

7 Jun 12. Theale Wetlands. SU6472 (CB)

## 170. Poaceae

*Danthonia decumbens* Heath-grass

10 Jun 12. Grassland at the southern end of  
Crowsley Park. SU729795 (JW)

### CONTRIBUTORS

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

(CA) Chris Ash, (CB) Chris Bucke, (CR) Chris Raper, (CS) Christine Storey, (GT) Geoff Toone, (ID) Ian Duddle, (JC) Julia Cooper, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere, (JW) Janet and Jerry Welsh, (LH) Laurie Haseler, (MS) Malcolm Storey, (RB) Ricki Bull, (RG) Renée Grayer, (SED) Sheila and Eric Dunford, (SR) Sally Rankin.

## RECORDER'S REPORT FOR MYCOLOGY 2012

### Gordon Crutchfield

When I received The Reading Naturalist in 2011, I was already aware that Malcolm Storey had given up the post of Honorary Editor. As I turned immediately to the Mycology report, I commented that "I hope he doesn't give up as Mycology recorder as well". A week later, Chris Bucke told me that Malcolm had done so and Chris asked if I would take on the job. Whilst I accepted immediately, I made the point that my knowledge is nothing like as extensive as Malcolm's. The world of fungi includes all those yeasts, rusts, smuts, mildews, moulds and black spots about which Malcolm is knowledgeable. For most of us fungi just means the large mushrooms and toadstools and unless I receive reports from other members, my report will centre almost entirely on these species. On behalf of all fungus enthusiasts in the society, I'd like to thank Malcolm for his efforts over the years.

It seems that every recorder's report starts by blaming the unusual weather for some more species appearing in previously unrecorded places, while the common species hardly show at all. 2012 started with three dry months, when water shortages were already a threat. Then we had enormous volumes of rain throughout the rest of the year. There was a 'flush' of fungi at the end of April and early May - species that I normally associate with late summer and early autumn. However although the soil in our woods was saturated throughout the summer, fungi were no more common than usual during this period. It seems it's not just dampness that 'triggers' fungi to appear in September and October. With wet weather and no significant frost until December, the season continued until the end of November.

The following list is a summary of some of the less common species observed.

#### BASIDIOMYCOTA

##### AGARICOMYCETES

###### Boletales

###### Boletaceae

*Boletus edulis* Cep or Penny Bun. 21 Oct 12, California Country Park (GC). The species the restaurants all want.

*Boletus badius* Bay Boletus. 21 Oct 12, California Country Park (GC). An equally good edible.

*Boletus luridus* Lurid Bolete. 11 Nov 12, Wokefield Common (GC). One that we don't often find.

###### Boletales

###### Suillaceae

*Suillus bovinus* Bovine Bolete. 21 Oct 12, California Country Park (GC).

*Suillus granulatus* Weeping Bolete. 21 Oct 12, California Country Park (GC).

###### Boletales

###### Hygrophoropsidaceae

*Hygrophorus Aurantiaca* False Chanterelle. 11 Nov 12. Wokefield Common (GC). Usually a common species in conifer woodland, but relatively rare in 2012.

#### HOMOBASIDIOMYCETAE

##### Russulales

###### Russulaceae

*Russula rosea* Rosy Brittlegill. 1 Oct 12 New Copse, Gallowstree Common (TVFG), 7 Oct 12 Lambridge Wood, Bix (TVFG).

*Russula cyanoxantha* Charcoal Burner 1 Oct 12 New Copse, Gallowstree Common (TVFG).

*Russula xerampelina* Crab Brittlegill 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Helath centre, Greenham (TVFG).

*Russula sanguinaria* Bloody Brittlegill 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Russula caerulea* Humpback Brittlegill 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Russula betularum* Birch Brittlegill 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

#### AGARICOMYCETES

##### Russulales

###### Russulaceae

*Lactarius deterrimus* False Saffron Milkcap 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Lactarius torminosus* Woolly Milkcap 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Lactarius subdulcis* Mild Milkcap 14 Oct 12 New Copse, Gallowstree Common (RDNHS)

### Agaricales

#### Hygrophoraceae

*Hygrophorus chrysodon* Gold-flecked Woodwax 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG). The only site where I ever find this species.

*Hygrophorus hypothejus* Herald of Winter 11 Nov 12 Wokefield Common (RDNHS). 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG).

*Hygrocybe pratensis* Meadow Waxcap 22 Oct 12 Martin Sell's lawn (MS).

*Hygrocybe conica* Blackening Waxcap 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC). 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG), 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health centre, Greenham (TVFG).

*Hygrocybe psittacina* Parrot Waxcap 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Hygrocybe virginea* Snowy Waxcap 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Hygrocybe coccinea* Scarlet Waxcap 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Hygrocybe ceracea* Butter Waxcap 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG).

### Hymenochaetales

#### Rickenellaceae

*Rickenella fibula* Orange Moss-cap 22 Oct 12 Martin Sell's lawn (MS).

### Agaricales

#### Tricolomataceae

*Cantharellula cyathiformis* The Goblet 19 Dec 12 Braziers Common, Checkendon (CB). Finding this species means that winter is fast approaching.

*Clitocybe houghtonii* 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (HAPG).

*Clitocybe dealbata* Ivory Funnel 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Clitocybe rivulosa* Fool's Funnel 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Lepista saeva* Field Blewit 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG). Less common than the Wood Blewit.

*Tricholoma cingulatum* Girdled Knight 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Tricholoma scalpturatum* Yellowing Knight 28 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG).

*Tricholoma ustale* Burnt Knight 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Tricholoma sulphureum* Sulphur Knight 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG). 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Tricholoma fulvum* Birch Knight 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

*Tricholoma portentosum* Birch Knight 31 Oct 12 Ashampstead Woods (TVFG).

### Agaricales

#### Lyophyllaceae

*Lyophyllum gangraenosum* Smoky Dome-cap 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG). The only site I have ever found this species.

*Tephrocybe rancida* Rancid Greyling 31 Oct 12 Ashampstead Woods (TVFG). 11 Nov 12 Wokefield Common (RDNHS). 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG). Not a species I often find, but it occurred at three different sites this year.

### Agaricales

#### Entolomataceae

*Rhodocybe truncata* 22 Oct 12 Greenham Common (TVFG). The first time I have found this species.

### Agaricales

#### Cystodermataceae

*Cystoderma amianthinum* Earthy Powdercap 22 Oct 12 Martin Sell's lawn (MS).

### Agaricales

#### Entolomataceae

*Entoloma rhodopolium* Wood Pinkgill 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Entoloma serrulatum* Blue Edge Pinkgill 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC).

### Agaricales

#### Marasmiaceae

*Macrocystidia cucumis* Cucumber Cap 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG).

#### Agaricales

##### Cortinariaceae

*Cortinarius croceocaeruleus* 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Cortinarius elegantissimus* 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (PAHG).

*Cortinarius torvus* Stocking Webcap 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (PAHG).

*Cortinarius amoenolens* 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (PAHG).

#### Agaricales

##### Inocybaceae

*Inocybe cookei* 2 May 12 Straw Fibrecap Wargrave (GC).

*Inocybe godeyi* 5 Jul 12 Chalkhills Whitchurch (SLP).

*Inocybe rimosa* 5 Jul 12 Split Fibrecap Chalkhills Whitchurch (SLP).

*Inocybe petiginosa* 18 Sep 12 Scurfy Fibrecap Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Inocybe flocculosa* 1 Oct 12 Fleecy Fibrecap New Copse, Gallowstree Common (TVFG).

*Inocybe griseolilacina* 1 Oct 12 Lilac Leg Fibrecap New Copse, Gallowstree Common (TVFG).

*Inocybe bongardii* var. *bongardii* 22 Oct 12 Fruity Fibrecap Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (PAHG).

*Inocybe hirtella* var. *hirtella* 12 Nov 12 Greenacres Health Centre, Greenham (TVFG).

*Inocybe asterospora* 25 Nov 12 Sulham Woods (TVFG).

#### Agaricales

##### Crepidotaceae

*Simocybe sumptuosa* 7 Oct 12 Lambridge Wood, Bix (TVFG).

#### Agaricales

##### Agaricaceae

*Agaricus semotus* 14 Oct 12 New Copse, Gallowstree Common (RDNHS). 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (PAHG).

*Agaricus silvicola* Wood Mushroom 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (TVFG).

*Cystolepiota bucknallii* Lilac Dapperling 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Lepiota magnispora* 22 Oct 12 Lackmore Wood, Woodcote (TVFG).

*Lepiota ignivolvata* 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

#### Amanitaceae

*Amanita phalloides* Deathcap 1 Oct 12 New Copse, Gallowstree Common (TVFG).

#### Cantharellales

##### Cantharellaceae

*Cantharellus tubaeformis* Trumpet Chanterelle 21 Oct 12 California Country Park (GC). 11 Nov 12 Wokefield Common (RDNHS).

#### Agaricales

##### Lycoperdaceae

*Handkea utriformis* Mosaic Puffball 7 May 12 Reading Golf Course (GC).

#### Agaricales

##### Agaricaceae

*Lycoperdon echinatum* Spiny Puffball 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

*Battarraea phalloides* Sandy Stiltball 28 Aug 12 Chalkhouse Green SU7107979 (GC). A red data list species, but the second consecutive year it has been recorded in the Reading Naturalist. It was also found near Abingdon in February 2011 (RD'A) see Note 1.

#### Leotales

##### Leotaceae

*Leotia lubrica* Jellybaby 18 Sep 12 Nettlebed Woods (TVFG).

#### Helotiales

##### Sclerotiniaceae

*Mitrula paludosa* Bog Beacon 6 May 12 Newtown Common (HFG).



## Helotiales

### Helotiaceae

*Chlorociboria aeruginascens* Green Elfcap 18  
Jul 12 Pamber Heath (RDNHS).

### CONTRIBUTORS

Many thanks are due to the following for their help:

RDNHS                Reading and District Natural History Society

TVFG                Thames Valley Fungus group

HFG                Hamshire Fungus Group

Gordon Crutchfield (GC), Martin Sell (MS), Chris Bucke (CB), Pat and Harold Gough (PAHG), Sandra Parkinson (SP), Rod D'Ayala (RD'A)

#### Note 1: *Battaraea Phalloides*

Anybody looking through Roger Phillip's book will see that a number of species are listed as 'rare'. This is often because species can not be identified exactly in the field and identifying them under a microscope involves much time and skill. Often, both young and mature specimens are needed and without a return visit to the site this isn't always possible; hence specimens go unrecorded. Because there are few authenticated records, they get listed as 'rare', when under-recorded is probably the correct terminology.

This is not the case with *Battaraea Phalloides*. Anybody noticing a picture of it in any book will realise what a distinctive species it is. When I first came across it at the end of August 2012, I recognised it immediately. I was jogging along the road from Emmer Green to Kidmore End and there it was on the roadside verge, just before the houses in Chalkhouse Green.

Although this was the first time I had ever seen it, it was present at this spot right through until the end of the year. At first there were nine specimens with a few new ones appearing later. The old ones having quite a 'woody' stipe seemed to last a long time. Unlike most fungi, they didn't seem to get eaten by mice or slugs and the woody stems took a long time to decompose.

It will be interesting to see if it comes up again at this spot next year.

## RECORDER'S REPORT FOR LEPIDOPTERA 2012

### Norman Hall (NMH)

2012 was a bad year for lepidoptera and for lepidopterists. This was mainly because of the almost continuous procession of Atlantic lows coming across the country in June, July and August, giving rise to cold and wet weather with little sunshine. Lepidoptera numbers were well down and lepidopterists had difficulty finding any nights suitable for catching and recording them - and the birds seem to have had difficulty finding enough caterpillars to feed their young. Though the bad summer is what will be remembered most, the weather was in fact unusually warm and dry until the end of March. The torrential rain in April then came as a blessing for the plants, which had been under stress in the drought. Growth was encouraged and foliage was in very good condition in May, which was warm and sunny. Some species of butterflies and moths did very well as a result of this, but then came the 'summer', with few potentially good mothing nights. If you didn't realise that the pale blue areas on the BBC weather forecast graphics might only indicate the possibility of a little light drizzle (which can be quite good for trapping) you probably wouldn't have gone out at all. As it was, many of my trapping sessions in West Berks in 2012, in connection with the Living Landscape Project (LLP), went ahead despite rather poor weather forecasts, and were generally very successful.  
(see <http://www.bbowl.org.uk/node/2952> to read about the Project)

The Autumn weather wasn't too bad, but, alas, there was no Indian summer. It is then usually 'high season' for looking for leaf mines of micromoths, but this year there were far fewer mines to be seen than I have ever experienced. Torrential rain returned in December but, by then, all lepidopterists had given up anyway. Let us hope that 2013 will be better.

A systematic list of this year's records of selected species follows. It is in the order of the 'Bradley numbers' - assigned by Bradley & Fletcher in 1979. Choice of records for inclusion has been based entirely on the statuses of the moths - for macromoths, as given in 'The Field Guide to the Moths of Great Britain and Ireland' by Waring and Townsend; for micromoths, as given in 'A Review of the Status of Microlepidoptera in Britain' by Tony Davis, January 2012 (<http://gms.staffs-ecology.org.uk/downloads/news/Microlep2012.pdf>). If the status is 'common' a record has been included only if it is interesting in the local context. If it is not 'common', the record has been included automatically.

For common butterflies, only the earliest and the latest records have been included, plus the date range for Red Cow cottage, Cholsey, which is surveyed so regularly that it often provides the earliest and latest records anyway. I present the butterfly records in this way every year so that they can be used for phenological analysis, should anyone want to do this.

#### ADELIDAE

(Micromoths, often with very long antennae)

0143 *Nematopogon metaxella* (Local)  
30 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

0457 *Ypsolopha lucella* (Nationally Scarce A)  
22 Jul 12, Broadmoor Bottom, Crowthorne  
SU8562 (JL)

#### GRACILLARIDAE

0266 *Bucculatrix nigricomella* (Local)  
20 Sep 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

#### EPERMENIIDAE

0481 *Epermenia falciformis* (Local)  
14 Jun 12, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU3377  
(JL)

#### YPSOLOPHIDAE

0452 *Ypsolopha nemorella* (Local)  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560,  
Coppiced area. (LLP)

#### COLEOPHORIDAE

0523 *Coleophora hemerobiella* (Local)  
17 Jun 12, Broadmoor Bottom, Crowthorne  
SU8562 (JL)

## OECOPHORIDAE

0637 *Crassa tinctella* (Nationally Scarce B)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107, det. N.Asher. (NMH)

0713 *Agonopterix angelicella* (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

## GELECHIIDAE

0724 *Metzneria lappella* (Local) 26 Jun 12,  
Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)

0735 *Monochroa tenebrella* (Local)  
17 May 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50206667  
(LLP)

0854 *Anacamptis blattariella* (Local)  
8 Aug 12, 2, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
11 Sep 12, Decoy Heath SU611633, brightly  
marked. (JL). Not dissected (NMH)

## TORTRICIDAE

0924 *Hysterophora maculosana* (Local)  
19 May 12, Rushall Farm SU5873 (JL, JH,  
Grahame Hawker)

0951 *Aethes beatricella* (Local)  
26 Jun 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

0971 *Pandemis cinnamomeana* (Common)  
20 Sep 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)  
Though common, this is the least common of  
several very similar species. It has a  
distinctive white head, but the other species  
can also appear to have a white head under  
artificial light. It was very pleasing to see this  
one in daylight, when it can be identified with  
confidence. (NMH)

0979 *Archips crataegana* Brown Oak Tortrix  
(Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

0983 *Choristoneura hebenstreitella* (Local)  
29 Jun 12, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719  
(NMH)

1014 *Isotrias rectifasciana* (Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1018 *Cnephasia communana* (Local)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107, det N.Asher Dissected. (NMH)

1068 *Celypha rivulana* (Local)  
29 Jun 12, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719  
(NMH);  
17 Jul 12, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU3377  
(JL)

1153 *Epinotia sordidana* (Nationally Scarce B)  
10 Oct 12, Greenham Common SU49946524  
(LLP)

1210 *Rhyacionia buoliana* Pine Shoot Moth  
(Local)  
20 Jul 12, 3, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH)

1256 *Cydia servillana* (Nationally Scarce B)  
16 & 27 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689  
(AR)

1279 *Dichrorampha acuminatana* (Local) 10  
Aug 12, Paices Wood, Aldermaston  
SU584638 (JL) Photographed but not  
dissected.

1281 *Dichrorampha simpliciana* (Local) 16  
Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677.  
Not dissected but large, and costal fold to 2/5.  
(LLP)

## CRAMBIDAE

1290 *Chilo phragmitella* (Local)  
26 Jun 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP);  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP)

1292 *Calamotropha paludella* (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1303 *Agriphila selasella* (Local)  
16 Aug 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP);  
20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH)

1329 *Donacula forficella* (Local)  
16 Aug 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677,  
both sexes. (LLP)

1330 *Donacula mucronella* (Nationally  
Scarce B)  
26 Jun 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1336 *Eudonia pallida* (Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)

1350 *Nymphula stagnata* Beautiful China-mark (Local) m  
1 Aug 12, 10, Fobney SU6970, frequent. (JL);  
1 Aug 12, 3, Fobney SU7070 (JL);  
16 Aug 12, 4, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
26 Aug 12, Fobney, Reading SU7071 (JL)

1385 *Ebulea crocealis* (Local)  
19 Jul 12, Inkpen Common SU3763 (JL)

1386 *Opsibotys fuscalis* (Local)  
28 May 12, 4, Lambourn Watts Bank SU330773 (JL);  
1 Jun 12, 30, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU331771 (JL, JH);  
1 Jun 12, Cleeve Hill, Lambourn SU334765 (JL, JH);  
14 Jun 12, 4, Lambourn, White Shute SU3277 (JL);  
14 Jun 12, 10, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU3377 (JL);  
28 Jun 12, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU3377 (JL)

1398 *Nomophila noctuella* Rush Veneer (Migrant)  
20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH). In some years this species is common, arriving as a migrant in Spring and breeding in this country. To receive only one record indicates that it was a very poor year for migration (NMH).

#### PYRALIDAE

1426 *Achroia grisella* Lesser Wax Moth (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677, female. (LLP)

1433 *Cryptoblabes bistriga* (Local)  
31 Aug 12, Bowdown Bomb Site SU50706536 (LLP)

1461 *Assara terebrella* (Nationally Scarce A)  
20 Jul 12, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH)  
This larva of this species is said to feed in mature spruce cones. I often see one or two a year in my garden despite knowing of no mature spruce nearby. It was surprising to find it at Withymead, since there is no spruce there either. I suspect that it can feed in pine cones. (NMH)

1465 *Nephopterix angustella* (Local)  
3 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR) The larvae feed in Spindle berries (NMH)

#### HESPERIIDAE

1526 *Thymelicus sylvestris* Small Skipper  
From 4 Jul 12 to 31 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)  
Latest sighting: 10 Aug 12, 2, Mortimer, field between Starvale Woods and Lockram Brook SU657655(JH)

1527 *Thymelicus lineola* Essex Skipper From 15 Jul 12 to 28 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1531 *Ochlodes sylvanus* Large Skipper From 9 Jun 12 to 23 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1532 *Erynnis tages* Dingy Skipper Earliest sighting: 30 Apr 12, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832 (JH)  
From 11 May 12 to 18 Jun 12, Red Cow SU59238689. Best year ever for this species. (AR)

1534 *Pyrgus malvae* Grizzled Skipper (BAP)  
From 30 Apr 12, 7, Aston Upthorpe Downs, Juniper Valley SU544832, to 23 May 12, Lardon Chase, Streatley SU588809 (JH)

#### PIERIDAE

1546 *Gonepteryx rhamni* Brimstone From 23 Feb 12 to 13 Nov 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1549 *Pieris brassicae* Large White  
From 20 Jun 12, Aldworth SU554794 (RDNHS) to 4 Oct 12, Tilehurst, garden of 99 Westwood Road SU666742 (JH)

1550 *Pieris rapae* Small White  
From 13 Apr 12 to 4 Oct 12, Tilehurst, garden of 99 Westwood Road SU666742 (JH)

1551 *Pieris napi* Green-veined White From 16 May 12, Tilehurst, garden of 99 Westwood Road SU666742 to 3 Sep 12, Grazeley Churchyard SU699669 (JH)

1553 *Anthocharis cardamines* Orange-tip  
Earliest sighting: 23 Mar 12, Finchampstead, Sand Martins Golf Course NE SU802667 (JH)  
From 26 Mar 12 to 30 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)



## LYCAENIDAE

1555 *Callophrys rubi* Green Hairstreak 13 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR) & 26 May 12, 5, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve SU617795 (RDNHS)

1557 *Neozephyrus quercus* Purple Hairstreak 10 Aug 12, Mortimer, field between Starvale Woods and Lockram Brook SU657655 (JH)

1561 *Lycaena phlaeas* Small Copper From 8 May 12 to 3 Oct 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1571 *Plebejus argus* Silver-studded Blue (BAP, Nb)  
11 Jul 12, 68, Wishmoor Bottom SU877633 (JH & JL)

1572 *Aricia agestis* Brown Argus  
From 23 May 12 to 13 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1574 *Polyommatus icarus* Common Blue  
First sighting: 23 May 12, Lardon Chase, Streatley SU588809 (JH).  
From 26 May 12 to 20 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689. Worst showing for over 20 years. (AR).

1575 *Lysandra coridon* Chalk Hill Blue From 8 Jul 12, Lardon Chase, Streatley SU588809 to 31 Aug 12, 3, The Holies, Streatley SU594798 (JH) 17 Aug 12, 43, Lough Down, Streatley SU588812 (JH).

1576 *Lysandra bellargus* Adonis Blue (Nb)  
17 Aug 12, 3, Lardon Chase, Streatley SU588809 & 2, Lough Down, Streatley SU588812 (JH)

1580 *Celastrina argiolus* Holly Blue  
From 29 Mar 12 to 5 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1584 *Limenitis camilla* White Admiral (BAP)  
From 5 Jul 12, Limmerhill Woods, Wokingham SU788683 to 24 Jul 12, 2, Riseley, Bull Lane SU717630 (JH) Also seen at Mortimer, Starvale Woods SU655656, Sulhamstead Bannister, Boarmoor Wood SU643683 & Farley Hill, New Plantation SU746656 (JH)

## NYMPHALIDAE

1590 *Vanessa atalanta* Red Admiral (Migrant)

From 24 Mar 12, Ufton Court SU624667 to 17 Oct 12, Nuffield, Upper House Farm SU660865 (RDNHS)

1591 *Vanessa cardui* Painted Lady (Migrant)  
2 Aug 12 & 11 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1593 *Aglais urticae* Small Tortoiseshell From 23 Feb 12 to 30 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1597 *Inachis io* Peacock  
From 21 Mar 12, Loddon, near Lavell's Lake SU782732 (RDNHS) to 20 Aug 12, Greenham Common SU4964 (JH)

1598 *Polygonia c-album* Comma  
From 11 Mar 12 to 8 Nov 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)  
An equally early record: 11 Mar 12, 2, Moor Copse, Barton's Field E, Compartment 35 SU641736 (JH)

1608 *Argynnis paphia* Silver-washed Fritillary  
From 26 Jun 12, 2, Heckfield, Cattle Copse SU718607 to 10 Aug 12, 2, Sulhamstead Bannister, Boarmoor Wood SU643683 (JH)  
14 Jul 12, 6, Frilsham, Highwood Copse SU556725 (JH)

1614 *Pararge aegeria* Speckled Wood From 2 Apr 12 to 12 Sep 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR) Latest sighting: 19 Sep 12, 3, Wargrave, Bottom Boles Wood SU807797 (RDNHS)

1620 *Melanargia galathea* Marbled White  
From 26 Jun 12 to 2 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1621 *Hipparchia semele* Grayling (BAP) 20 Aug 12, Greenham Common SU4964 (JH)

1625 *Pyronia tithonus* Gatekeeper Earliest sighting: 14 Jul 12, Frilsham, Highwood Copse SU556725 (JH). From 15 Jul 12 to 28 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1626 *Maniola jurtina* Meadow Brown From 13 Jun 12 to 6 Oct 12, Red Cow SU59238689. 180 on 17 Jul 12 (AR)

1627 *Coenonympha pamphilus* Small Heath (BAP)  
Earliest sighting: 26 May 12, 5, Hartslock BBOWT Reserve SU617795 (RDNHS). 28 May 12 to 20 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689. Best year ever for this species. (AR). Latest

sighting 15 Sep 12, Watlington Hill SU705935 (RDNHS)

1629 *Aphantopus hyperantus* Ringlet From 30 Jun 12 to 30 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

#### DREPANIDAE

1655 *Tethea* or Poplar Lutestring (Local) 26 May 12, Snelsmore Common SU46287107 (NMH)

#### GEOMETRIDAE

1661 *Archiearis parthenias* Orange Underwing (Local) 23 Mar 12, 5, Decoy Heath SU6163 (JL)

1677 *Cyclophora albipunctata* Birch Mocha (Local) 26 May 12, 4, Snelsmore Common SU46287107 (NMH)

1680 *Cyclophora punctaria* Maidens Blush (Local) 26 May 12, Snelsmore Common SU46287107 (NMH); 8 Aug 12, 2, Bowdown Woods SU50106560 (LLP); 16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP); 20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 31 Aug 12, 2, Bowdown Bomb Site SU50706536 (LLP)

1693 *Scopula floslactata* Cream Wave (Local) 19 May 12, Rushall Farm SU581728 (JL, JH, Grahame Hawker)

1698 *Idaea muricata* Purple-bordered Gold (Nb) 8 Jul 12, Broadmoor Bottom, Crowthorne SU8562 (JL)

1699 *Idaea rusticata* Least Carpet (Local) 10 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR); 20 Jul 12, 3, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH); 12 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 18 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1705 *Idaea fuscovenosa* Dwarf Cream Wave (Local) 27 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 20 Jul 12, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH)

1711 *Idaea trigeminata* Treble Brown Spot (Local) 18 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 25 Jun 12, 2, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)

1712 *Idaea emarginata* Small Scallop (Local) 16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)

1716 *Rhodometra sacraria* Vestal (Immigrant) 20 Jun 12, Hosehill LNR, Theale SU6569 (JL)

1726 *Xanthorhoe quadrifasiata* Large Twin-spot Carpet (Local) 26 Jun 12, 4, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP); 29 Jun 12, 3, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719 (NMH); 20 Jul 12, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH)

1736 *Catarhoe rubidata* Royal Mantle (Nb) 31 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1771A *Thera cupressata* Cypress Carpet (Uncommon) 27 May 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)

1775 *Colostygia multistrigaria* Mottled Grey (Common) 10 Apr 12, Aldermaston, Paices Wood SU583637, on sallow trunk (JL). [Though it is said to be common, I have never seen it. (NMH)]

1791 *Philereme vetulata* Brown Scallop (Local) 26 Jun 12, 4, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)

1807 *Perizoma albulata* Grass Rivulet (Local) 23 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR); 28 May 12, White Shute, Lambourn SU3376 (JL); 1 Jun 12, 2, Lambourn, Watts Bank SU331771 (JL, JH)

1840 *Eupithecia subumbrata* Shaded Pug (Local) 23 & 24 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1841 *Eupithecia millefoliata* Yarrow Pug (Nb) 16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP) Specimen dissected. (NMH)

1874 *Euchoeca nebulata* Dingy Shell (Local)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH);  
16 Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1878 *Minoa murinata* Drab Looper (Nb) From  
19 May 12, 6, Rushall Farm, Owlpit Copse  
SU5873 & Rushall Farm, Long Copse  
SU581728 (JL, JH, Grahame Hawker) to 12  
Aug 12, Aldermaston, Paices Wood  
SU584638 (JL)

1879 *Lobophora halterata* Seraphim (Local)  
24 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689, first for  
site. (AR);  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH)

1882 *Pterapherapteryx sexalata* Small  
Seraphim (Local)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH);  
26 Jun 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP);  
29 Jun 12, 3, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719  
(NMH)

1883 *Acasis viretata* Yellow-barred Brindle  
(Local)  
27 May 12, 25 Jun 12, 10 Aug 12, 11 Aug 12  
& 20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH);  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560,  
(LLP);  
16 Aug 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1884 *Abraxas grossulariata* Magpie Moth  
(Common)  
18 Aug 12, Hampstead Norreys SU5375 (JL).  
This is becoming less common and is always  
a joy to see. (NMH)

1888 *Ligdia adustata* Scorched Carpet (Local)  
31 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1890 *Macaria alternata* Sharp-angled  
Peacock (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1904 *Plagodis dolabraria* Scorched Wing  
(Local) 26 May 12, 5, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH);  
1 Jun 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

1912 *Ennomos quercinaria* August Thorn  
(Local)

18 Aug 12 & 9 Sep 12, Red Cow  
SU59238689 (AR)

1940 *Deileptenia ribeata* Satin Beauty  
(Common)  
28 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH). This is not common in  
my experience, and is very similar to some  
forms of Mottled Beauty. (NMH)

1970 *Perconia strigillaria* Grass Wave (Local)  
17 Jun 12, 3, 19 Jun 12, 4, 25 Jun 12, 2,  
Broadmoor Bottom, Crowthorne SU8562 (JL);  
25 Jun 12, 6, Wildmoor Heath SU8463 (JL)

#### SPHINGIDAE

1978 *Hyloicus pinastri* Pine Hawk-moth  
(Local)  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

1984 *Macroglossum stellatarum* Hummingbird  
Hawkmoth (Immigrant, suspected resident)  
14 Jul 12 & 24 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689  
(AR)

1992 *Deilephila porcellus* Small Elephant  
Hawk-moth (Local)  
From 29 May 12 to 20 Jun 12, Red Cow  
SU59238689, including an amazing 21 on 1  
Jun 12 (AR). Also seen at Lambourn, Watts  
Bank SU3377 (JL) & Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH)

#### NOTODONTIDAE

2005 *Peridea anceps* Great Prominent  
(Local)  
26 May 12, 3, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH)

2009 *Ptilodon cucullina* Maple Prominent  
(Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

2019 *Clostera curtula* Chocolate-tip (Local)  
24 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR); 26  
May 12, 2, Snelsmore Common SU46287107  
(NMH)

#### LYMANTRIIDAE

2031 *Leucoma salicis* White Satin Moth  
(Local)  
20 Jul 12, 2, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH)

2033 *Lymantria monacha* Black Arches  
(Local)  
8 Aug 12, 25, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
11 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH);  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677,  
(LLP);  
31 Aug 12, Bowdown Bomb Site  
SU50706536 (LLP)

#### ARCTIIDAE

2035 *Thumatha senex* Round-winged Muslin  
(Local)  
26 Jul 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)

2037 *Mitochondria miniata* Rosy Footman  
(Local)  
29 Jun 12, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719  
(NMH);  
8 Aug 12, 7, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
11 Aug 12, 2 & 12 Aug 12, 2, Harcourt Drive  
(Earley) SU73527096 (NMH).  
16 Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

2040 *Cybosia mesomella* Four-dotted  
Footman (Local)  
19 Jun 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR); 26  
Jun 12, 6, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

2043 *Eilema sororcula* Orange Footman  
(Local)  
26 May 12, 31, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH)

2045 *Eilema caniola* Hoary Footman (NB) 11  
Aug 12, 3 & 12 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive  
(Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)

2047 *Eilema complana* Scarce Footman  
(Local)  
20 Jul 12, 12, Withymead SU60138274  
(NMH);  
8 Aug 12, 4, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
16 Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP)

2049 *Eilema depressa* Buff Footman (Local)  
20 Jul 12, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH);  
8 Aug 12, 7, Bowdown Woods SU50106560  
(LLP);  
12 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley)  
SU73527096 (NMH)

2068 *Callimorpha dominula* Scarlet Tiger  
(Local)  
23 Mar 12, 6, Tilehurst SU672737, sunning  
on Green Alkanet. (JL);  
8 Apr 12, Tilehurst, garden SU666743, half  
grown larva on log pile in garden, Green  
Alkanet 5m away. (JL);  
21 May 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR); 27  
Jun 12, Reading, Newtown SU7273 (JL);  
28 & 30 Jun, 1 & 5 & 8 Jul 12, Tilehurst  
garden SU666743 (JL);  
30 Jun 12, Moor Copse SU6373 (JL)

#### NOLIDAE

2078 *Nola confusalis* Least Black Arches  
(Local)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH)

#### NOCTUIDAE

2132 *Xestia castanea* Neglected Rustic  
(Local)  
31 Aug 12, Bowdown Bomb Site  
SU50706536 (LLP)

2157 *Lacanobia w-latinum* Light Brocade  
(Local)  
26 May 12, 2, Snelsmore Common  
SU46287107 (NMH);  
27 May 12, 4 & 9 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive  
(Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)

2194 *Mythimna albipuncta* White-point  
(Recent colonist).  
20 Sep 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP). This was unexpectedly scarce in 2012  
(NMH)

2197 *Mythimna straminea* Southern Wainscot  
(Local)  
26 Jun 12, 10, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP);  
20 Jul 12, 4, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH);  
16 Aug 12, 10, Thatcham Marsh  
SU50166677, (LLP)

2204 *Mythimna obsoleta* Obscure Wainscot  
(Local)  
26 Jun 12, 10, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677  
(LLP);  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50386672, at  
actinic light (LLP, Rob Payne)

2236 *Lithophane socia* Pale Pinion (Local)  
21 Mar 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)



- 2268 *Parastichtis suspecta* The Suspected (Local)  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods, coppiced area SU50106560 (LLP)
- 2279 *Acronicta aceris* The Sycamore (Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2281 *Acronicta alni* Alder Moth (Local)  
26 May 12, Snelsmore Common SU46287107 (NMH)
- 2284 *Acronicta psi* Grey Dagger (Common)  
3 Oct 12, Tilehurst garden SU666743, full grown larva on car tyre front garden. (JL)
- 2291 *Craniophora ligustri* The Coronet (Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
27 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH);  
29 Jun 12, 8, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719 (NMH);  
20 Jul 12, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH);  
8 Aug 12, 19, Bowdown Woods SU50106560, inc 16 coppiced area. (LLP);  
10 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)
- 2300 *Mormo maura* Old Lady (Local) 20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)
- 2301 *Dypterygia scabriuscula* Birds Wing (Local)  
19 & 20 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)
- 2311 *Ipimorpha retusa* Double Kidney (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2316 *Cosmia affinis* Lesser-spotted Pinion (Local)  
20 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)
- 2333 *Apamea anceps* Large Nutmeg (Local)  
22 Jun 12, Fognam chalk pit SU2979 (JL et al.);  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677, (LLP, Rob Payne)
- 2362 *Hydraecia petasitis* The Butterbur (Local)  
16 Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP). An improvement on 2011, when only one was seen (NMH)
- 2368 *Celaena leucostigma* The Crescent (Local)  
20 Jul 12, 3, Withymead SU60138274 (NMH);  
16 Aug 12, 9, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2370 *Archanara geminipuncta* Twin-spotted Wainscot (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
17 Aug 12, Red Cow SU59238689 (AR)
- 2371 *Archanara dissoluta* Brown-veined Wainscot (Local)  
16 Aug 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2377 *Arenostola phragmitidis* Fen Wainscot (Local)  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560 (LLP);  
16 Aug 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2391 *Chilodes maritimus* Silky Wainscot (Local)  
26 Jun 12, 5, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
16 Aug 12, 2, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677, (LLP, Rob Payne)
- 2397 *Panemeria tenebrata* Small Yellow Underwing (Local)  
19 May 12, Rushall Farm SU5873 (JL, JH, Grahame Hawker);  
10 Jun 12, Cleeve Hill, Lambourn SU334765 (JL)
- 2421 *Bena bicolorana* Scarce Silver-lines (Local)  
10 Aug 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH)
- 2423 *Nycteola revayana* Oak Nycteoline (Local)  
29 Jun 12, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719 (NMH); 10 Oct 12, Greenham Common SU49946524 (LLP)
- 2466 *Lygephila pastinum* The Blackneck (Local)  
26 Jun 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP)
- 2473 *Laspeyria flexula* Beautiful Hook-tip (Local)  
19 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH);

26 Jun 12, 7, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
27 Jun 12, 5, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH);  
28 Jun 12, Harcourt Drive (Earley) SU73527096 (NMH); 29 Jun 12, Dinton Pastures C.P. SU781719 (NMH);  
8 Aug 12, Bowdown Woods SU50106560 (LLP)

26 Jun 12, 6, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP);  
16 Aug 12, 3, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP, Rob Payne);  
18 Aug 12, Westlands Avenue SU734702 (Roy Robson via NMH);  
20 Sep 12, Thatcham Marsh SU50166677 (LLP, Mark Trasenster)

2480 *Hypena rostralis* Buttoned Snout (Nb)  
31 Dec 12, Red Cow SU59238689. Flying in bedroom at 11.50PM. (AR). Just in time to make the midnight deadline for 2012 (NMH)

2484 *Schrankia costaestrigalis* Pinion-streaked Snout (Local)

#### CONTRIBUTORS

Thanks are due to the following members for their submissions:

(AR) Tony Rayner, (JH) Jan Haseler, (JL) John Lerpiniere.

(RDNHS) denotes records from Reading & District Natural History Society field meetings.

(LLP) denotes records from Living Landscape Project mothning nights, in which traps were run by Phil Dean, Roger Stace, Rob Payne, Roy Dobson and myself (NMH). I acted as recorder and identifier.

## RECORDER'S REPORT FOR ENTOMOLOGY and OTHER INVERTEBRATES 2012

Chris Raper

Despite another very poor year for summer weather, it was nice to see some of our favourite species returning, if in lower numbers than in some years. The wasp spider was found in a couple of locations around Reading and a few Spring specialists did very well this year. In particular I was surprised to see a new species of tachinid (*Gonia picea*) on Hartslock Nature Reserve – a site that I have been associated for over 20 years. To me, this shows that successive warm, sunny Spring weather has benefitted some of the early emerging species. However, this contrasted with steep declines in some of the “common” mid-summer species, which were nearly absent.

Many thanks to all the observers who persevered in difficult circumstances!

### Insects

#### Coleoptera

*Ptinus sexpunctatus* Panzer, 1792 (a spider beetle)

29 May 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, on windowsill, outdoors, 43 Berryis Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 29/05/2012[A]

*Clytus arietis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Wasp Beetle)  
27 May 2012, Hosehill LNR, SU648694, John Lerpiniere

*Dorcus parallelipedus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Lesser Stag Beetle)

16 Jun 2012, Christchurch Green, Reading, SU727720, Jan Haseler, in garden on Whiteknights Studio Trail

04 Aug 2012, Tilehurst, SU665743, John Lerpiniere

17 Aug 2012, Cholsey, Tony Rayner

*Halyzia sedecimguttata* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Orange Ladybird)

08 Jan 2012, Park Wood, Moor Copse, SU637740, Jan Haseler

*Lampyrus noctiluca* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Glow-worm)

22 Jun 2012, Fognam Chalk Pit LGS, SU297799, John Lerpiniere

*Lucanus cervus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Stag Beetle)

23, 26, 27, 29 Jun (males) & 8 Jul 2012 (female), Tilehurst, SU665743, John Lerpiniere

26 Jun 2012, Tilehurst, SU666742, Jan Haseler

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Unlike previous years no focal point found in 2012 but main

emergence probably missed. Up to 2 seen on various dates – 15 Jun 2012 & from 17 Jul 2012 to 25 Jul 2012.

*Melolontha melolontha* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Cockchafer)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Moth trap counts were: 1 (10 May); 3 (16 May); 12 (17 May); 10 (20 May); 33 (21 May); 27 (22 May); 31 (23 May); 39 (24 May); 8 (26 May); 8 (27 May); 5 (29 May); 3 (1 Jun)

*Oulema obscura* (Stephens, 1831) (a leaf beetle)

13 May 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63487409, general sweeping, Hogmoor Copse - riverside, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 13/05/2012[G], Length: 3.5mm

*Parathelcus pollinarius* (Forster, 1771) (a weevil)

20 Jun 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63457386, on Elder leaf, Hogmoor Copse: inlet, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 20/06/2012[E]

*Phyllobius maculicornis* Germar, 1824 (green leaf weevil)

13 May 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63617360, swept from oak foliage, field margin, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 13/05/2012[A]

*Trixagus dermestoides* (L., 1767) (a small false click beetle)

20 Jun 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63457386, on Burdock leaf, Hogmoor Copse: inlet, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 20/06/2012[H]

## Diptera

*Anomoia purmunda* (Harris, 1780) (spectacled berry fly)

28-Aug-2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, Female, on house window, 4:30pm. , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 28/08/2012[A]

*Asilus crabroniformis* Linnaeus, 1758 (Hornet Robber Fly)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): An exceptionally good, but short season, for this species. Sightings from 1 Aug 2012 to 13 Sep 2012. The count of 46 on 22 Aug 2012 was the second best ever for the site.

*Cheilosia vernalis* (Fallen, 1817) (a hoverfly)

04 Jun 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, Female, visiting Dog Daisy , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 04/06/2012[F], Length: 6.9mmForm with orange antennae.

*Choerades marginatus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (golden-haired robberfly)

19 Aug 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU542683, Female, indoors , 43 Berryís Road, indoors, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 19/08/2012[A]

29 Sep 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, Female, alighted on clothing , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey

*Chorisops tibialis* (Meigen) (dull four-spined legionnaire)

22 Jul 2012, Newtown Road Cemetery, GR: SU47016624, Males, swarming at head height under limes , east side, north of chapel, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 22/07/2012[D]

*Conops flavipes* Linnaeus, 1758 (a thick-headed fly)

21 Aug 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, Male, visiting Ragwort , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 21/08/2012[E]

*Contarinia steini* (Karsch) (a gall midge)

24 Jun 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, galled male flower buds of Red Campion , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey

*Dasysyrphus venustus* (Meigen, 1822) (a hoverfly)

13 May 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63977374, Male, visiting Wood Spurge flowers , Moor Copse - sunny glade, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 13/05/2012[D]

*Gonia picea* (Robineau-Desvoidy, 1830) (a parasite fly)

21 Mar 2012, Hartslock NR, SU616769 – up to 20 seen at one time – the first record for the site and the first time I have seen this Spring species. It also cropped up on many sites across England this year – presumably due to the warm, dry Spring weather in the last 2 years.

*Norellia spinipes* Robineau-Desvoidyi (a dung fly)

20 Jun 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63797412, Female, near pond, on bramble leaf , Park Wood: pond, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 20/06/2012[N]

*Paloptera saltuum* (Linnaeus, 1758) (a flutter fly)

20 Jun 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63457386, wing-waving on Burdock leaf , Hogmoor Copse: inlet, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 20/06/2012[F]

*Physocephala rufipes* (Fabricius, 1781) (a thick-headed fly)

19 Aug 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR: SU54216831, visiting Hemp Agrimony , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey

*Scathophaga suilla* (Fabricius) (a dung fly)

20 Jun 2012, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, GR: SU63797412, Female, near pond , Park Wood: pond, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 20/06/2012[P]

*Sicus ferrugineus* (Linnaeus, 1761) (a thick-headed fly)

22 Jul 2012, Newtown Road Cemetery, GR: SU47006628, Female , by north wall, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 22/07/2012[C]

*Sphaerophoria taeniata* (Meigen, 1822) (a hoverfly)

22 Aug 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:



SU54216831, Male, visiting Mexican Fleabane  
, 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm  
Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm  
Storey, 22/08/2012[A]

*Volucella zonaria* (Poda, 1761)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): As in 2011, frequently  
found on buddleia – dates not recorded.

## Hemiptera

*Canthophorus impressus* Horvath, 1880  
(Bastard-toadflax Bug)  
26 May 2012, Hartslock, SU618793, Chris  
Raper

*Corizus hyoscyami* (Linnaeus) (a rhopalid bug)  
20 May 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:  
SU54216831 , 43 Berryís Road, rear garden,  
Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey

*Eremocoris podagricus* (Fabricius) (a ground  
bug)  
22 May 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:  
SU54216833, on front door sill , 43 Berryís  
Road, front garden, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id:  
Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey,  
22/05/2012[B], Length: 6.5mm. Fore-femurs  
with 2 large antero-ventral spines and many  
smaller ones, pair of pointed tubercles on  
metasternum.

*Eurydema oleracea* (Linnaeus) (brassica bug)  
23 May 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:  
SU54216831, Female, on garden candytuft ,  
43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm  
Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm  
Storey, 23/05/2012[A]

*Legnotus limbosus* (Geoffroy) (a shieldbug)  
27 May 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:  
SU54216831, female, on windowsill, outdoors  
, 43 Berryís Road, rear garden, Coll: Malcolm  
Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm  
Storey, 27/05/2012[A], Length: 4.5mm

## Hymenoptera

*Anthophora plumipes* (Pallas) (hairy-footed  
flower bee)  
24 Apr 2012, Upper Bucklebury, GR:  
SU54216833, Female, visiting garden comfrey  
, 43 Berryís Road, front garden, Coll: Malcolm  
Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm  
Storey, 24/04/2012[B]

*Dinocampus coccinellae* (Schränk, 1802) (a  
wasp parasitoid of 7-spot ladybird)  
20 May 2012, Hartslock NR, SU616796, Chris  
Raper

*Vespa crabro* Linnaeus, 1758 (Hornet)  
28 May 2012, Watts Bank, SU331771, John  
Lerpiniere  
31 Aug 2012, Basildon Park, SU603782, John  
Lerpiniere, nest in bird box  
18 Oct 2012, Paices Wood CP, SU585640,  
John Lerpiniere

## Odonata

*Aeshna cyanea* (Müller, 1764) (Blue Hawker,  
formerly Southern Hawker)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Up to two patrolling or  
laying from 22 Jul 2012 to 6 Sep 2012.

*Aeshna mixta* Latreille, 1805 (Migrant Hawker)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Singles only mostly in  
September, recorded from 19 Aug 2012 to 17  
Oct 2012

*Aeshna grandis* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Brown  
Hawker)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Singles seen from 27  
Jul 2012 to 1 Sep 2012.

*Anax imperator* Leach, 1815 (Blue Emperor,  
formerly Emperor Dragonfly)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): A male patrolling on  
20 Jun 2012 – the sole record for what is  
normally a common species

*Calopteryx splendens* (Harris, 1782) (Banded  
Demoiselle)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Up to two between 22  
Jun 2012 and 2 Aug 2012

*Coenagrion puella* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Azure  
Bluet, formerly Azure Damselfly)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Regularly seen from  
30 Apr 2012 to 27 Jul 2012 with max of 80 on  
28 May 2012.

*Cordulegaster boltonii* (Donovan, 1807)  
(Golden-ringed Dragonfly)  
11 Jul 2012, Wishmoor Bottom, SU876631,  
Jan Haseler

*Gomphus vulgatissimus* (Linnaeus, 1758)  
(Common Clubtail, formerly Club-tailed  
Dragonfly)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): One on 24 May 12; 29  
May 2012 & 6 Jun 12. A good showing for this  
scarce riverine species.

*Ischnura elegans* (Vander Linden, 1820)  
(Common Bluetail, formerly Blue-tailed  
Damselfly)  
Tony Rayner (Cholsey): One record on 27 Jul

2012, probably overlooked on other occasions.

*Libellula depressa* Linnaeus, 1758 (Broad-bodied Chaser)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Frequently seen patrolling or laying, max of 2 from 11 May 2012 to 27 Jun 2012.

*Libellula quadrimaculata* Linnaeus, 1758 (Four-spotted Chaser)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): One on various days between 13 Jun 2012 and 29 Jun 2012.

*Pyrrosoma nymphula* (Sulzer, 1776) (Large Red Damselfly, formerly Large Red Damselfly)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Up to 10 seen from 10 Apr 2012 to 29 May 2012

*Sympetrum striolatum* (Charpentier, 1840) (Common Darter)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Particularly good showing almost daily from 17 Jun 2012 to 17 Nov 2012.

25 Nov 2012, Roundoak Piece, Burghfield Common, SU632655, Jan Haseler, 1m, 1f

## Orthoptera

*Meconema meridionale* (Costa, 1860) (Southern Oak Bush-cricket)

23 Oct 2012, Leckhampstead, SU437772, John Lerpiniere

*Metrioptera roeselii* (Hagenbach, 1822) (Roesel's Bush Cricket)

Tony Rayner (Cholsey): Once again commonly heard and seen for an extended period.

*Pholidoptera griseoaptera* (De Geer, 1773) (Dark Bush-cricket)

06 Oct 2012, Hosehill LNR, SU646695, John Lerpiniere

## Spiders

*Araneus quadratus* Clerck, 1757 (Four-spot Orb-weaver spider)

19 Sep 2012, Padworth Common, SU619645, John Lerpiniere

*Argiope bruennichi* (Scopoli, 1772) (Wasp Spider)

09 Sep 2012, Corner Field, Moor Copse BBOWT Reserve, SU639734, Jan Haseler

23 Aug 2012, Des Sussex: I found quite a few in the rushy habitat area at the Reading Services near Jn 11 of M4 (London bound services). I found 6 wasp spiders in a fairly brief 'survey' of a small area of the habitat.

There must have been more.

## Mollusca

*Dreissena polymorpha* (Pallas, 1771) (zebra mussel)

31 Mar 2012, Beale Park, GR: SU61977829, Dead shells found beside fishing lake, shore of fishing lake, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 31/03/2012[C]

*Anodonta anatina* (L., 1758) (duck mussel)

31 Mar 2012, Beale Park, GR: SU61977829, Dead shells found beside fishing lake, shore of fishing lake, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 31/03/2012[B], shell 85 x 53 x 26.4mm (L:D = 3.2)

*Unio tumidus* Philipson, 1788 (a freshwater mussel)

31 Mar 2012, Beale Park, GR: SU61977829, Dead shells found beside fishing lake, shore of fishing lake, Coll: Malcolm Storey, Id: Malcolm Storey, Voucher: Malcolm Storey, 31/03/2012[A], Shell: 65 x 33 x 25.2mm (L:H=2, L:D=2.6)

## RECORDER'S REPORT FOR VERTEBRATES 2012

### Tony Rayner

My grateful thanks to all those who have contributed to this report. Once again special thanks are due to Rod D'Ayala, Jan Hasler and John Lerpiniere for their unrivalled input. Note also Alan Parfitt's impressive toad count and conservation work at Hambleden. Where the location is not stated, the records relate to Red Cow, Cholsey SU592868.

### BIRDS

#### 1 Exceptional local record

##### ***Ciconia ciconia* White Stork**

26/4/12 Six in wheat field on Cholsey Hill  
SU581877 (TW/TR)

#### 2 Seen/heard on local RDNHS field trips or in members' gardens)

##### ***Pandion haliaetus* Osprey**

12/5/12 One harassed by a Red Kite at  
Hamstead Marshall SU413655 (JC/TM)

##### ***Falco subbuteo* Hobby**

26/5/12 One at Hartslock SU618793  
(CR/MSt)  
28/7/12 Unspecified number hunting  
dragonflies at Medmenham SU808840 (CB)  
25/8/12 One at Little Wittenham SU570955  
(MS)

##### ***Cuculus canorus* Cuckoo**

26/5/12 One at Hartslock SU6179 (CR/MSt)

##### ***Psittacula krameri* Ring-necked Parakeet**

15/12/12 30 at Mill End, nr Henley SU780852  
(CB)

##### ***Asio flammeus* Short-eared Owl**

15/2/12 Three at Churn SU533830 (MS)

##### ***Turdus philomelos* Song Thrush**

28/4/12 One at Harefield Copse, Tilehurst  
SU6572 (RG)  
26/5/12 One at Hartslock SU6179 (CR/MSt)

##### ***Carduelis flammea* Lesser Redpoll**

21/12/12 Four in Cholsey garden feeding on  
nyger seed (TR/RR)

##### ***Miliaria calandra* Corn Bunting**

15/2/12 Unspecified number at Churn  
SU5282 (MS)

### FISH

No records received

### AMPHIBIANS

#### ***Bufo bufo* Common Toad**

Feb/Mar 7,500 adults collected and carried  
across road at Oaken Wood Hambleden.  
New pond planned to reduce road crossings  
(AP)  
28/2/12 One under snake sheet in Cholsey  
garden (TR)  
28/2/12 Adult shedding spawn in school pond  
SU662753 (JL)  
14/3/12 20+ at Rushall Manor Farm  
SU584724 (JH)  
24/3/12 Spawn at Ufton Nervet SU632673  
(JH)  
10/5/12 Adult on Cholsey drive (TR)  
12/5/12 Tadpoles in Cholsey pond (TR/RR)  
29/5/12 One in Cholsey garden (TR)  
17/6/12 Adult under Broadmoor Bottom  
refuge SU856628 (JL)  
19/7/12 Immature at Burghfield SU647686  
(JL)  
13/9/12 Three found in Cholsey meadow  
when haymaking (TR)  
12/10/12 One found in Cholsey meadow (TR)

#### ***Triturus vulgaris* Smooth Newt**

Just a few sightings of singletons in Cholsey  
pond due to lack of open  
water (TR)  
2/6/12 Nine at Sutton Courtenay EC  
education pond SU501918 (Rd'A)

#### ***Triturus cristatus cristatus* Great Crested Newt**

2/6/12 Nine at Sutton Courtenay EC incl 3 at  
SU501918 and 6 at SU501917 (Rd'A)

#### ***Rana temporaria* Common Frog**

20/1/12 Adult in Tilehurst garden SU665743  
(JL)  
15/2/12 Spawn in Tilehurst garden SU666742  
(JH)  
7/3/12 70+ in Tilehurst garden SU666742  
(JH)  
24/3/12 Spawn at Ufton Nervet SU632673  
(JH)  
19/5/12 Immature at Hogmoor Copse  
SU634740 (JL)

27/7/12 Froglet on Cholsey drive (TR)  
 15/8/12 Several juveniles at Greywell Moors Reserve SU7151 (JC/ID)  
 24/8/12 Juvenile at Tilehurst allotment SU672748 (JL)  
 1/9/12 Two in Cholsey garden (TR/RR)  
 6/9/12 Adult in Park Wood SU636741 (JL)  
 13/9/12 One found in Cholsey meadow when haymaking (TR)  
 27/9/12 One found in Cholsey orchard (TR)  
 29/10/12 Adult in Tilehurst allotment SU672748 (JL)  
 29/10/12 Two seen in Cholsey garden pond fringe (TR)

## REPTILES

### ***Lacerta vivipara* Common Lizard**

25/2/12 to Mid Oct 12 Greenham Common  
 150 recorded from 12 of 25 survey areas. 127 of the total were adults (Rd'A)  
 14/3/12 to 29/8/12 295 sightings at Cholsey in this period with a max. of 21 on 8/5/12 Well down on 2011 (TR)  
 23/3/12 Adult on Decoy Heath logs SU611634 (JL)  
 26/6/12 Five on Paices Wood logs SU584638 (JL)  
 11/7/12 Three adults at Broadmoor Bottom SU8562 (JL)  
 11/7/12 Adult at Wishmoor Bottom SU876633 (JL)  
 18/7/12 One at Pamber Heath SU621607 (JH)  
 8/8/12 Four on Paices Wood logs SU584638 (JL)  
 19/9/12 Adult at Padworth Common SU618646 (JL)  
 25/9/12 Four under Decoy Heath refuges SU6163 (JL)  
 10/10/12 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)

### ***Anguis fragilis* Slow-worm**

31/1/12 Juvenile disturbed in soil at Tilehurst allotment SU662739 (JL)  
 23/2/12 Adult male under Wokefield Common refuge SU655664 (JL)  
 25/2/12 Four at Greenham Common (CR)  
 18/2 to Mid Oct 12 Greenham Common  
 3,244 recorded in 19 of 25 survey sites.  
 2,494 of these were adults (Rd'A)  
 28/2/12 to 30/09/12 A total of 921 sightings, well down on previous years on account of far fewer observation days at Cholsey. The maximum count of 77 on 29/08/12 shows the population continues to thrive. (TR)  
 23/3/12 Four under Decoy Heath refuges SU611634 (JL)

11/7/12 Five under Broadmoor Bottom refuges SU856628 (JL)  
 15/7/12 12 under Decoy Heath refuges SU611634 (JL)  
 27/7/12 Four Broadmoor Bottom refuge SU856628 (JL)  
 1/8/12 One at Englefield Market Garden SU625719 (JL)  
 1/8/12 12 under Decoy Heath refuges SU6163 (JL)  
 28/8/12 Adult female under Padworth Common refuge SU618644 (JL)  
 8/8/12 Two under Paices Wood refuges SU583638 (JL)  
 4/9/12 Eight under Decoy Heath refuges SU6163 (JL)

### ***Natrix natrix* Grass Snake**

15/3/12 to 30/09/12 a total of 72 sightings with a maximum of 14 plus a one metre long skin on 30/9/12 at Cholsey site. Plenty of young - evidence of breeding (TR)  
 18/2/12 to Mid Oct 2012 Greenham Common  
 325 recorded from 17 of 25 survey areas. 172 of the total were juveniles (Rd'A)  
 26/3/12 Two coupling pairs at Bearwood Golf Course SU773694 (JH)  
 20/5/12 Adult under refuge at Paices Wood SU583636 (JL)  
 21/5/12 One at Hogmoor Copse SU634741 (JL)  
 2/6/12 & 9/6/12 Immature at Hosehill LNR SU648694 (JL)  
 26/6/12 Three adults under refuges at Paices Wood SU5863 (JL)  
 15/7/12 Two adults under refuges at Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)  
 1/8/12 Immature under refuge at Decoy Heath SU610634 (JL)  
 3/8/12 One in Brimpton garden SU568631 (JL)  
 22/8/12 Two under refuges at Hosehill LNR SU6569 (JL)  
 11/9/12 Immature under Decoy Heath refuge SU611633 (JL)  
 12/9/12 Large shed skin at Paices Wood SU584638 (JL)

### ***Vipera berus* Adder**

25/2/12 Two at Greenham Common (CR)  
 18/2/12 to Mid Oct 12 Greenham Common  
 Minimum of 85 seen in 12 of 25 survey areas.  
 Some breeding proved. (Rd'A)  
 23/3/12 3 adults 2m1f under separate refuges at Decoy Heath SU611634 (JL)  
 8/7/12 Adult female under Broadmoor Bottom refuge SU855629 (JL)  
 15/7/12 & 1/8/12 Adult female under Decoy Heath refuge SU611634 (JL)



28/8/12 Juvenile under Padworth Common  
refuge SU618644 (JL)  
19/9/12 Female under Decoy Heath refuge  
SU611634 (JL)  
19/9/12 Female under Padworth Common  
refuge SU618645 (JL)

## BATS

### ***Pipistrellus pipistrellus* Common Pipistrelle**

24/9/12 One hunting outside Cholsey kitchen  
window at 6.40 AM (RR)  
24/10/12 A late sighting of one flying around  
Cholsey garden. (TR)

***Pipistrellus pygmaeus* Soprano Pipistrelle**  
8/9/12 One at Aldermaston Wharf SU610667  
(GS)

***Myotis daubentonii* Daubenton's**  
8/9/12 Six at Aldermaston Wharf SU610667  
(GS)

### ***Nyctalus noctula* Noctule**

1/9/12 One being chased by two  
Sparrowhawks (TR)  
5/9/12 to 8/9/12 Three or four near Cholsey  
sewage works SU591872 (TR/RR)

## INSECTIVORES

### ***Erinaceus europaeus* Hedgehog**

14/4/12 Road kill at Theale SU636715 (JL)  
24/4/12 Road kill at Southcote SU696724 (JL)  
24/5/12 Two under log piles at Great Shefford  
SU383753 (JL)  
25/5/12 One, possibly dead, beside M4 at  
Yattendon SU546739 (JL)  
18/7/12 One at Englefield SU625718 (JL)  
24/7/12 One heard in Cholsey garden  
(TR/RR)  
6/8/12 Road kill at Purley SU651762 (JL)  
1/9/12 Road kill at Tidmarsh SU634746 (JL)  
17/9/12 Road kill at Moultsford SU592835 (JL)

### ***Sorex araneus* Common Shrew**

25/2/12 Adult under refuge at Paices Wood  
SU583636 (JL)  
5/5/12 One under refuge at Hosehill LNR  
SU648694 (JL)  
21/7/12 One under refuge at Hosehill LNR  
SU651697 (JL)  
23/8/12 to 30/9/12 Total of 3 sightings at  
Cholsey site (TR)  
20/9/12 One dead on path at Decoy Heath  
SU612634 (TR)  
17/10/12 One at Ipsden Heath SU662859  
(RB)

### ***Sorex minutes* Pigmy Shrew**

15/3/12 One at Cholsey site (TR)

### ***Neomys fodiens* Water Shrew**

21/3/12 Adult under refuge at Paices Wood  
SU583636 (JL)

### ***Talpa europaea* Mole**

Flooded fields probably kept moles on the  
move in search of dryer ground.(TR)

## CARNIVORES

### ***Meles meles* Badger**

22/1/12 One at Newell Green SU867714  
(GC)  
10/2/12 Tracks in snow at Basildon Park  
SU606784 (JH)  
27/2/12 Adult road kill at Lower Basildon  
SU599795 (JL)  
14/3/12 Adult road kill on M4 bridge at  
Tidmarsh SU632735 (JL)  
13/4/12 Adult road kill at Englefield SU626711  
(JL)  
15/4/12 Active sett at Clayfield Copse  
SU729771 (JL)  
27/5/12 Road kill at Aldermaston SU612686  
(JL)  
27/8/12 Road kill at Purley SU648761 (JL)  
4/9/12 Road kill at Padworth Common  
SU615642 (JL)  
Sept/Oct 2012 Not seen but plenty of scats &  
digs in Cholsey meadow. (TR/RR)  
15/10/12 Road kill at Englefield SU636724  
(JL)

### ***Mustela nivalis* Weasel**

13/1/12 One crossing road at Upton  
SU515864 (TR)  
4/4/12 One at Theale SU629704 (GC)  
17/5/12 One crossing road at South Moreton  
SU565881 (RR)

### ***Mustela erminea* Stoat**

2/4/12 One near Juniper Valley SU550843  
(TR)

### ***Mustela putorius* Polecat**

25/2/12 Adult road kill at Pangbourne  
SU622773 (JL)  
23/8/12 Road kill at Avington SU378673 (JL)

### ***Mustela vison* American Mink**

22/3/12 One by Thames near pill box  
SU607862 (CS)  
15/6/12 Female swimming at Fobney, &  
probable juv. On bank SU702710 (JL)

***Vulpes vulpes* Fox**

9/1/12 One at Tilehurst SU654734 (JL)  
 18/2/12 One by Thames, Cholsey SU6086 (EN)  
 28/2/12 Adult near Cox's Farm, Cholsey SU595881 (TR)  
 21/3/12 One at Dinton Pastures (RB)  
 30/4/12 One at Frilsham SU540732 (JL)  
 26/5/12 Female carrying Rabbit, & 2 cubs at Hartslock SU621793 (GS)  
 29/5/12 One at Caversham SU712749 (GC)  
 5/6/12 One at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)  
 13/6/12 One at Burghfield SU680707 (GC)  
 7/8/12 One at Pingewood SU680700 (GC)  
 11/9/12 Road kill at Ufton SU626682 (JL)  
 12/9/12 Road kill at Aldermaston SU591646 (JL)  
 22/10/12 One crossing road at Streatley at 1PM SU692793 (JL)  
 29/11/12 & 1/12/12 Extended screaming after dark near Cholsey cottage (TR/RR)  
 11/12/12 One on Tilehurst garden wall (CR)

***Lutra lutra* Otter**

No records – RDNHS failed to respond to monitoring request.

***Rattus norvegicus* Brown Rat**

9/4/12 Two juveniles at Emmer Green SU713767 (GC)  
 16/4/12 One at Sonning Common SU692801 (GC)  
 5/5/12 Two at Hosehill LNR under bird feeders SU647695 (JL)

**DEER*****Muntiacus reevesi* Muntjac**

24/1/12 Road kill at Bradfield SU612730 (JL)  
 23/2/12 One in neighbour's Cholsey garden (TR/RR)  
 24/2/12 One at Decoy Heath SU611632 (JL)  
 4/3/12 One in Cholsey garden (TR)  
 23/4/12 Road kill at Tidmarsh SU616746 (JL)  
 3/5/12 One at Heath End SU584630 (JL)  
 16/5/12 One at Burghfield SU668707 (JL)  
 25/5/12 Two at Winterbourne Wood SU4471 (JL)  
 20/7/12 One in Cholsey garden (RR)  
 13/9/12 One at Hogmoor Copse SU635740 (JL)  
 18/10/12 One at Nettlebed SU708857 (GC)  
 28/11/12 One calling early evening in Cholsey (TR)

***Capreolus capreolus* Roe Deer**

15/2/12 Five adults at Beenham Wolf Trust SU684695 (JL)

15/2/12 Eleven at Blewbury Down SU515819 (MS)  
 18/2/12 Three near Caps Lane, Cholsey SU6086 (EN)  
 25/2/12 Two at The Coombes, Arborfield SU772675 (LD)  
 1/3/12 One at Broadmoor Bottom SU855627 (JL)  
 25/3/12 Two adults at Theale SU642704 (JL)  
 16/4/12 One at Cornwell Copse SU658741 (JL)  
 30/4/12 One at Sulham SU639744 (JL)  
 30/4/12 Two at Frilsham SU5473 (JL)  
 26/5/12 One at Curridge SU485723 (JL)  
 15/6/12 One at Ufton Nervet SU635665 (JL)  
 15/8/12 One at Paices Wood SU588637 (JL)  
 30/6/12 One at Sulhampstead SU635696 (JL)  
 1.8/12 One at Warburg reserve SU722878 (GC)  
 21/9/12 Four at Burghfield SU685694 (JL)  
 16/10/12 Three at Hermitage SU5073 (JL)  
 17/10/12 One in Mongewell Woods near Hailey SU655869 (RB)  
 21/11/12 One in Upper Hailey Wood, Binfield Heath SU789659 (SH)  
 1/12/12 One at Binfield Heath SU743788 (GC)

**RABBITS & HARES*****Lepus europaeus* Brown Hare**

3/2/12 One at Chieveley SU465744 (JL)  
 18/2/12 Four at Cholsey near Caps Lane SU6086 (EN)  
 27/2/12 One at Beenham Wolf Trust SU591690 (JL)  
 7/5/12 One at Stanford Dingley SU573718 (JL)  
 25/5/12 One on Aston Upthorpe Downs SU540833 (TR)  
 27/5/12 Two at Hampstead Norreys SU573718 (JL)  
 6/6/12 One in Cholsey field SU594868 (TR)

***Oryctolagus cuniculus* Rabbit**

No specific records received, but the impression is that Buzzards are now keeping the number of Rabbits in check. (TR)

**RODENTS*****Sciurus carolinensis* Grey Squirrel**

No specific records kept/received, but now common in many places. (TR)

***Apodemus sylvaticus* Wood Mouse**

11/2/12 & 29/3/12 One in Tilehurst garden SU665743 (JL)  
19/4/12 to 23/8/12 Total of 6 sightings at Cholsey site (TR)  
5/5/12 Two under Hosehill LNR refuge SU648694 (JL)  
31/5/12 One at Pingewood SU691708 (GC)  
2/6/12 One under Hosehill LNR refuge SU651696 (JL)  
9/6/12 & 20/6/12 One under Hosehill LNR refuge SU651696 (JL)  
13/6/12 One under Bradfield refuge SU581727 (JL)  
15/6/12 One under Tilehurst garden bird feeders SU665743 (JL)  
17/9/12 Two in Tilehurst allotment compost SU672748 (JL)  
4/10/12 & 18/10/12 One on Tilehurst garden patio/bird feeder SU665743 (JL)

***Microtus agrestis* Field Vole**

7/1/12 & 21/1/12 One under Hosehill LNR refuge SU649694 (JL)  
11/1/12 to 30/9/12 Total of 50 sightings at Cholsey site (TR)

1/5/12 One under Hosehill LNR refuge SU652697 (JL)  
6/10/12 One under Hosehill LNR refuge SU651697 (JL)

***Clethrionomys glareolus* Bank Vole**

7/1/12 Two under refuge at Hosehill LNR SU649694 (JL)  
23/3/12 Two under refuge at Decoy Heath SU612633 (JL)  
14/4/12 Three under refuge at Hosehill LNR SU648694 (JL)  
15/4/12 One at Clayfield Copse SU724772 (JL)  
23/4/12 One running around under bird feeder (RR)  
29/4/12 Two fighting beneath bird feeder in Cholsey garden (RR)  
13/6/12 One under refuge at Bradfield SU581727 (JL)  
24/10/12 One on nut bird feeder in Cholsey garden (RR)  
28/2/12 to 21/11/12 Total of 49 sightings at Cholsey site (TR)

CONTRIBUTORS

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## THE WEATHER IN READING DURING 2012

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(Averages and anomalies mentioned in this report refer to the climatological period 1981-2010.)

(Temperatures are formatted as °C, temperature differences are formatted as degC)

2012 was a year in which precipitation and its impacts were uppermost in the minds of most people. With 821 mm of rain falling at the University of Reading, it was the wettest year since 2000 when 852 mm fell. The only other wetter years since 1917 at the University were in 1951 (when 896 mm fell), 1927 (858 mm) and 1960 (with 841 mm). After a dry end to 2011 and following a dry start to 2012, no sooner had drought orders been implemented than the rains started – seemingly continuing for most of the year. Overall, temperatures were slightly lower than normal (by 0.2 degC) making it the coldest year since 2010 (which was 0.7 degC colder). Sunshine totals came out at just above average – largely thanks to the sunny months of March and September. In fact there was little to choose, sunshine-wise, between any of these seven months.

### **January**

This was the first of three consecutive dry months. The 3<sup>rd</sup> and the 5<sup>th</sup> were rather windy with some damage to trees and fences as winds gusted to almost 50 kn. There was only one day when snow was seen to fall. It was the warmest January since 2008 with 13.2 °C being recorded on the 21<sup>st</sup>, the driest January since 2006 and the sunniest since 2003 with a remarkable 72.3 h of bright sunshine.

### **February**

February was slightly cooler than average. The air temperature fell to -10.1 °C on the 11<sup>th</sup> – the lowest February air temperature since 1986; the grass minimum temperature fell to -11.6 °C and then to -11.0 °C the next morning. In records from 1919 the lowest temperature ever recorded at the University in February was -12.8 °C in 1929. Snow fell on the 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> and on the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> leading to five mornings with lying snow – to a depth of 7 cm on the 5<sup>th</sup>. On the 23<sup>rd</sup> the air temperature rose to 16.4 °C – the highest February temperature since 1998 and not far below the highest February temperature on record, 17.2 °C in 1959. It was the driest February since 1998 with about three-quarters of the precipitation falling as snow.

### **March**

March was another dry month, although slightly wetter than in 2012. High pressure dominated for much of the month, leading to sunny conditions which, coupled with light winds, gave some very warm afternoons from the 22<sup>nd</sup> onwards. Of particular note were the 23<sup>rd</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> (when 20.1 °C was reached each day) and the 28<sup>th</sup> (when 21.4 °C was recorded. The latter date came close to passing the highest March temperature on record at the University in 1965, when a reading of 22.8 °C was noted. The same clear skies that gave us long sunny spells also allowed the temperature to drop sharply overnight; the daily range in temperature of 22.7 degC on the 28<sup>th</sup> was remarkable – the greatest daily temperature range in March since before 1960. With 176 h of bright sunshine this was also the sunniest March since 2007 and the third sunniest March since sunshine records began at the University in 1939. There were 8 mornings with fog at 9 a.m. during the month – the average figure for March is about one morning with fog, while since 1960 only the seven days with fog in March 1969 came close to this month's total.

### **April**

Reading experienced more than double the normal rainfall for April, with 119.9 mm of rain falling, making it the wettest April since 2000, which in turn was the wettest April since 1918 in Reading. After a mild March, April turned out to be rather cool; cooler than March by about 0.6 degC. However, such a reversal in temperature between these two months is not so unusual – at the University in 1989 March was remarkably 1.2 degC warmer than April. The highest temperature of the month, 18.9 °C on the 30<sup>th</sup>, was lower than the highest in March. There was also less sunshine



in April than in March.

## **May**

May was a month of two halves for weather in Berkshire. The month began with sporadic rainfall, with 21.3 mm falling during the first 15 days and just 15.2 h of sunshine in total by the 10<sup>th</sup>. Some chilly weather also persisted into May, with below-average temperatures right up until the 20<sup>th</sup>. On the 12<sup>th</sup> we recorded the highest pressure in May for 60 years, with the barometer rising to just over 1038 mb thanks to an anticyclone off the south-west coast of Ireland. After a cold 20<sup>th</sup> May, temperatures shot up, reaching 24.4 °C on the 22<sup>nd</sup> and peaking at 26.6 °C on the 27<sup>th</sup>, with temperatures staying high even at night. Despite the chilly start, overall temperatures across the month were 0.6 degC above average and there were more days reaching above 25 °C this May than in any May in the past 50 years. A distinct lack of rainfall in later weeks meant rainfall was below average for the month, with just 22.4 mm of rain falling in total by the morning of the 31<sup>st</sup> compared to the normal May total of 46 mm, making for the fourth successive dry May.

## **June**

A southerly displacement of the jet stream led to a rather dreary start to June. By the 15<sup>th</sup> Reading had experienced nearly twice the average monthly rainfall for the whole of June; the 14<sup>th</sup> was the twelfth consecutive day that temperatures failed to reach average highs for June in Reading with only 35 h of sunshine recorded by then. June ended wet with 123 mm of rain falling, making it the wettest June in the town since 1971 with the longest rainless spell lasting just two days. In fact all the cloud in June made it duller than March – only 130 h of sunshine were recorded, the duller June since those of 1990 and 1991.

## **July**

July was quite cool and also wetter than average. It was the equal coolest July since 2000 and the wettest since 2007. There were no very wet days, but measureable (0.2 mm or more) rain was recorded on 20 days. With 180 h of sunshine it was the sunniest July for four years – but it was still only four hours sunnier than in March. July was the only month this year without a ground frost.

## **August**

August was slightly drier than normal. But, again, the perception was of a poor, dull summer month. August, despite temperatures being close to average, was the sunniest month of 2012 (with 193 hours of sunshine) – meaning that 2012 was the first year locally since 1988 in which no month recorded 200 hours of sunshine.

## **September**

September brought close to normal rainfall amounts – but it was still the wettest September for six years. September was the seventh consecutive month with a similar sunshine total – and the sunniest September since those of 2003 and 2004. Some cool nights led to nine ground frosts during the month – the most in September since the 10 recorded in 2003. In the past 50 years only 2003 and 1986 (with 12 ground frosts) have had more.

## **October**

The final three months of the year were rather on the wet side – with 128 mm of rain falling. October was the wettest month of the year with falls of 0.2 mm or more being recorded on 25 days. It was the coldest October for nine years but the daytime maximum temperatures averaged out as the lowest for 19 years in October.

## **November**

Another wet month led to some minor local flooding. It was warmer overall than the November of 2010 but almost 3 degC colder than November 2011. The highest temperature of the month was just 14.2 °C – the coolest ‘hottest November day’ (along with 2008) since 1995. Despite it being a wet month, there have been many wetter Novembers in recent years – November can sometimes be a very wet month.

## **December**

Early December brought a hint of winter when the maximum temperature on the 12<sup>th</sup> rose to just -1.6 °C, the coldest December day since 1991. Then the wet weather returned – 118 mm of rain

fell by the end of the month, making it the wettest December since 2002 (which was just 0.5 mm wetter) and, before that, 1989. Falls of 0.2mm or more in a day occurred on 22 days – the most December rain days since 1993. Some local areas suffered slight flooding on several occasions during the month as rain continued to fall on saturated ground. Snow fell on two days during the month – both slight falls.

This report was compiled using the daily weather observations made at the University of Reading climatological station – almost all of these being made by our observer, Mike Stroud.

#### SUMMARY WEATHER RECORDS:2012 - UNIVERSITY OF READING (WHITEKNIGHTS)

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	2012
Total sunshine (h)	72.3	85.9	176.0	150.8	182.3	130.0	180.1	193.5	177.0	88.4	58.0	49.7	<b>1544.0</b>
Percentage of average sunshine (%)	128	113	161	94	97	69	91	101	128	83	92	108	<b>101</b>
Greatest daily sunshine total (h)	5.9	7.8	11.4	10.9	13.6	11.0	14.2	12.8	11.4	9.0	6.3	5.1	<b>14.2</b>
Date	27	26	28	1	22	30	23	18	5	16	5	10	
Number of sunless days	6	10	4	4	5	4	5	0	2	9	9	12	<b>70</b>
Mean 10cm soil temperature °C	4.4	2.9	6.5	8.1	13.3	15.2	17.6	17.8	13.7	9.9	5.9	3.7	<b>9.9</b>
Mean 30cm soil temperature °C	6.6	4.8	8.1	9.3	12.8	15.1	17.4	18.0	15.3	12.3	8.6	5.6	<b>11.2</b>
Mean 100cm soil temperature °C	8.2	6.3	8.2	9.5	11.4	14.0	15.9	17.1	15.9	13.6	10.7	7.7	<b>11.5</b>

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	2012
Mean maximum temperature °C	9.6	7.5	14.5	12.7	17.3	18.2	20.2	22.0	18.8	13.4	10.3	8.8	<b>14.4</b>
Mean maximum anomaly degC	1.9	-0.5	3.7	-0.8	0.3	-1.8	-2.2	-0.1	-0.2	-1.5	-0.4	0.9	<b>-0.7</b>
Mean minimum temperature °C	2.7	0.7	3.3	3.8	8.6	10.6	12.1	13.0	8.9	7.3	3.9	2.1	<b>6.4</b>
Mean minimum anomaly degC	0.8	-1.0	-0.2	-0.9	0.9	0.0	-0.6	0.5	-1.4	-0.3	-0.5	-0.1	<b>-0.2</b>
Mean temperature °C	6.2	4.1	8.9	8.3	13.0	14.4	16.2	17.5	13.9	10.4	7.1	5.5	<b>10.4</b>
Mean temperature anomaly degC	+1.4	-0.8	+1.8	-0.9	+0.6	-0.9	-1.4	+0.2	-0.8	-0.9	-0.5	0.4	<b>-0.9</b>
Highest temperature °C	13.2	16.4	21.4	18.9	26.6	26.3	28.5	28.5	26.9	17.4	14.2	13.1	<b>28.5</b>
Date	21	23	28	30	27	28	25	19	9	1	13	22	
Lowest maximum temperature °C	3.0	0.1	8.6	8.9	9.0	11.7	11.2	18.0	14.6	8.0	5.5	-1.6	<b>-1.6</b>
Date	31	8	13	28	3	11	30	31	23	27	29	12	
Highest minimum temperature °C	11.1	9.0	8.3	8.5	15.3	16.1	15.4	17.0	13.9	12.7	10.5	8.9	<b>17.0</b>
Date	1	24	10	27	25	27	4	17	10	1	14	29	
Lowest temperature °C	-4.4	-10.1	-1.3	-2.7	0.8	5.1	8.6	5.0	3.4	0.0	-2.9	-5.0	<b>-10.1</b>
Date	17	11	28	6	7	13	12	31	22	28	30	12	
Lowest grass minimum temperature °C	-8.4	-11.6	-7.1	-7.3	-4.4	-1.8	4.1	-2.0	-2.1	-5.2	-9.4	-10.0	<b>-11.6</b>
Date	31	11	19	6	7	13	29	31	22	28	30	11,13	

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	2012
Total precipitation mm	39.4	11.7	20.6	119.9	22.4	123.2	79.3	34.0	46.1	128.1	79.0	118.0	<b>821.7</b>
Percentage of the average precipitation	65	29	46	250	48	276	173	65	92	177	119	187	<b>129</b>
Number days with 0.2mm or more	14	6	5	23	11	17	20	14	12	25	15	21	<b>183</b>
Number of days with 1.0mm or more	9	3	4	20	8	12	17	8	7	19	10	16	<b>133</b>
Greatest fall in 24 hours mm	7.5	4.1	13.0	18.8	5.4	23.2	10.9	9.8	23.0	21.4	15.2	21.8	<b>23.2</b>
Date	24	4	4	30	9	10	12	13	23	31	24	19	
Number of days with air frost	9	13	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	10	<b>42</b>
Number of days with ground frost	17	16	24	13	4	4	0	1	9	9	16	18	<b>131</b>
Number of days with snow/sleet falling	1	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	<b>8</b>
Number of days with 50% ground snow cover at 0900GMT	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>5</b>
Number of days with thunder	0	0	0	2	0	0	2	3	0	1	0	0	<b>8</b>
Number of days with ice pellets/small hail	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Number of days with hail over 5mm diameter	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	<b>4</b>
Number of days with fog at 0900GMT	1	2	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	4	3	2	<b>20</b>

	J	F	M	A	M	J	J	A	S	O	N	D	2012
Number of days with gale	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Number of days with N'ly winds	1	2	3	1	3	1	0	0	2	3	2	1	<b>19</b>
Number of days with NE'ly winds	2	3	3	4	4	3	3	2	0	7	2	1	<b>34</b>
Number of days with E'ly winds	1	2	7	4	7	6	1	3	4	5	5	2	<b>47</b>
Number of days with SE'ly winds	0	1	0	4	2	2	2	4	1	0	2	0	<b>18</b>
Number of days with S'ly winds	5	2	5	4	1	9	5	8	3	2	9	6	<b>59</b>
Number of days with SW'ly winds	8	6	7	3	2	6	9	7	8	7	7	8	<b>78</b>
Number of days with W'ly winds	7	7	4	5	9	2	6	6	8	3	1	10	<b>68</b>
Number of days with NW'ly winds	5	3	1	5	3	1	5	1	4	3	0	2	<b>33</b>
Number of days with calm winds at 0900GMT	2	3	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	2	1	<b>10</b>
Mean wind speed mph	6.0	4.7	4.3	7.2	6.4	7.6	5.9	6.2	5.9	5.6	5.4	7.1	<b>6.0</b>
Mean cloud cover at 0900GMT %	65	76	69	75	67	86	74	77	64	73	67	79	<b>72</b>





