

RALPH HOLLINS WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS 1997 - WEEKS 39-52

WEEK 52

DEC 29 1997 – JAN 4 1998

BIRDS:

SUN 4 JAN

REDWING were back in the Wade Lane pony fields east of the Lymbourne stream – I saw at least 10 with another 10 Blackbirds and the two resident Mistle Thrushes. Below the footbridge one EGRET was fishing in the Lymbourne and the second was seen perched in a tree within the safety of the grounds.

SNIPE would have found their usual haunts on the South Moors well under water this afternoon (see the Habitat section below) but I put up two as I crossed to Budds Farm where the usual selection of duck were sheltering in the lee of the dividing banks (nothing new – one female GOLDENEYE was there last time I visited)

STARLING and SKYLARK both showed they are creatures of habit, not changing their daily routine despite the storm force winds. On the top of Budds Mound the usual group of half a dozen Skylark stuck to their patch despite winds against which I could hardly stand, and as the afternoon closed in the usual flocks of Starlings were heading into the wind, determined to get to their regular evening roost.

FRI 2 JAN

MALE BULLFINCH sitting in one of the garden apple trees was the only interesting bird which I saw on a day of rest after yesterday's efforts, but I did have an interesting e-mail message telling me of a genuine RING OUZEL seen in the Langstone Mill Lane area by a resident at Harbourside some couple of months ago – this was in response to my note of a possible (but very unlikely) sighting of one by myself on Dec 19th.

BAR TAILED GODWIT. During a brief visit to the Kench a flock of about 30 flew over and one looked as if it had a black body but I guess it was the individual bird which has kept its summer plumage throughout the past couple of winters and been regularly seen in the Kench.

KNOT & SANDERLING were both present at Black Point as the tide began to fall this afternoon. Around 60 Knot and just 3 Sanderling gave close views among Dunlin and Ringed Plover on the sand immediately west of the sailing club.

THU 1 JAN

RAZORBILL. News from Alistair Martin of one seen today on Seagull Island (the shingle bank west of Black Point). The bird may have been oiled as it was hauled out of the water and looked a bit unhappy according to Alistair.

NEW YEAR'S DAY. A few days ago the weather forecast seemed to predict a complete wash-out for any attempts at birding, with lashing rain and gale force winds throughout the day, but some kind fate (or butterfly wing) delayed the rain until daylight was fading so we only had gale force winds to contend with and those were sweetened with plenty of sunshine until after midday. My plan was to cycle through Bedhampton to Broadmarsh, then follow the coast east to Nutbourne, head inland through Westbourne to Stansted Forest (which I did) and then cycle to Chichester gravel pits, returning along the coast road into the teeth of the gale (which I thought better off, and achieved using the car after cycling home from

Stansted Forest). My bird list totalled 77 species (including the dreaded Feral Pigeon, but excluding one, probably Siskin, of which a large flock took flight from larches above my head before I could identify them).

NEW YEAR'S DAY HIGHLIGHTS. A Robin was singing at 3.45am when my dog barked to be let out, and at dawn a WOOD PIGEON sang with the Song Thrushes. At Bedhampton a GOLDCREST was singing its heart out, and between A27 and Harts Farm Way I saw KINGFISHER on the buttress of the A27 bridge, GOOSANDER a few yards downstream from the A27 (where a drain empties into the stream on the east bank), and my first Egret and Merganser of the day. At Budds Farm I had difficulty in tracking down a Chiff Chaff (but succeeded) and at the South Moors the first thing I saw was the GREEN SANDPIPER (which was later seen by Alistair Martin at Langstone by the 'puddle' in the field east of Wade Lane near the shore). In Langstone Mill Lane a Mistle Thrush sang its true 'storm cock'song and east of the village I saw a LESSER BLACKBACK and about 50 GOLDEN PLOVER. At Emsworth Mill Pond a male GOLDENEYE and the EMPEROR GOOSE were unexpected and at the Great Deeps a birder with a scope confirmed my guess that half a dozen birds at the bend were Greenshank, though we could not spot the Common Sandpiper which Barry Collins had seen a little while earlier. Nothing much more until I reached Stansted Forest where a calling Nuthatch drew my eye to the spot where a male BULLFINCH was displaying its beautiful colours. A walk in the Forest gave me the frustration of rounding a corner to find many finches in the larches above me, only to see them all whirl away on the wind before I could identify them (up to 50, probably SISKIN). After disturbing a couple of Roe Deer and recrossing the road I came on another flock of small birds which included COAL and MARSH TIT, and as I headed south after this a JAY flew across my path. Back at home I parked my bike and took the car to Chichester where I had little difficulty in adding the male and female SMEW on Runcton Lake, plus Great Crested Grebe and Gadwall, but could not find a Ruddy Duck. To make up for this, driving back on the A27 past the Fishbourne Roman Palace, a SPARROWHAWK flew close in front of me.

WED 31 DEC

VELVET SCOTER. One seen in Langstone Harbour just west of the Oysterbeds by Brian Fellows today. He tells me the white wing patches and a white patch on the face (indicating a female or juvenile male, though young males lose the patch as their first winter progresses)

BIRDS AT GOSPORT. I made a brief midday visit to Gosport and Titchfield Haven seafront today but have no news for you other than that a gang of PIRATES in full costume were jumping from the old rail bridge which separates Anglesey Lake from the main Stoke Lake into which the Pirates were jumping (for charity in support of a Rose Road Appeal to fund a Southampton home for mentally disabled children). I have not heard of Mandarin duck in Fort Brockhurst moat this year and none was to be seen today, nor was there anything in Alver Lake other than two Swans and a bunch of gulls. Anglesey Lake did have a single EGRET, a single BRENT, and five MERGANSER but no Long Tailed Duck that I could see. At Titchfield Haven I scanned the reserve quickly from the seafront, saw nothing worth reporting, and decided that a muddy walk up the canal path would take me long past my lunch time so returned home (coming in the door just as the phone was ringing with Brian

Fellows news of the Velvet Scoter)

WOOD PIGEON song heard again briefly in the early afternoon from my garden.

Mistle Thrush also heard again today.

TUE 30 DEC

MISTLE THRUSH again singing among the Song Thrushes and Blue Tits and one burst of Dunnock song heard in Havant.

SMEW and RUDDY DUCK both seen at Chichester GP, and two noisy WATER RAILS heard but not seen. One female Ruddy Duck was seen very clearly on New Lake where the Rails were heard, and a pair of SMEW (male and female) were on Runcton Lake with another possible Ruddy Duck. A rough count (certainly an underestimate of the totals) of the lakes as a whole gave me 1048 Coot, 317 Tufted Duck, 97 Pochard, 49 Canada Geese, 54 Gadwall, 28 Swans and 16 Great Crested Grebe with more than 30 Cormorant (mainly roosting on the tree on the Ivy Lake islands but some on the West Trout Lake power lines)

SUN 28 DEC

SNOW BUNTING. Peter Morrison tells me that one is in the Hook/Warsash area but 'moves about a lot'. More likely to be seen is the RED NECKED GREBE which Peter saw today in the shipping channel at the mouth of the Hamble where he also saw a BEARDED TIT in the reeds around Hook Lake. In pursuit of Plover in that area Peter counted 500 GOLDEN PLOVER in the Bunny Meadows area and 750 Lapwing near the 'Universal Boatyard' (I don't know where that is but I guess most people you meet in the Warsash/Bursledon area of the Hamble could point you to it.

BIRD SONG. This morning a MISTLE THRUSH joined the regular SONG THRUSH for my breakfast chorus at home, and in Havant Thicket several BLUE TITS sang as strongly as if it were April. ROBIN and WREN are no longer the front runners though both are heard from time to time but COLLARED DOVES are if anything getting more thoughts of spring with regular song and towering display flights. The continuous chattering heard from flocks of STARLINGS is a form of song, but has more of the feel of gossip than seduction of females or defiance of other males. I have heard GREAT and COAL TIT sing this week but not Dunnock nor Wood Pigeon.

REDWING. A small flock of between ten and twenty birds seen this morning on the outskirts of Horndean near Pyle Farm (713127)

LAPWING. Today being the HOS county wide count of these birds I started checking my SU 70/71 patch with a walk across the Gipsies Plain (running west from the Staunton Arms south of Havant Thicket), then drove to Butser Hill, scanning fields around Clanfield, and came back via Chalton and Finchdean with a final loop back to the Horndean area. I did not expect, and did not find, any Lapwing and saw remarkable little else though there were 200 Wood Pigeon on the Gipsies Plain with flocks of 70 Starling, 40 Meadow Pipit and 11 Skylark. After a coffee at home I cycled to North Hayling with the tide just beginning to fall though it was not low enough to bring either Golden Plover or Lapwing back to their Langstone shore sites even on my return journey around 1pm. I did find 50 LAPWING on the Northney shore immediately east of Langstone Bridge and another 22 with 30 GOLDEN PLOVER on the slatings north of the marina. 67 Lapwing in Northney Marina may have been additional but may have been mainly the 50 which I flushed

from the shore near the bridge. There were no more on the North Hayling fields, nor on the shore at and around the Oysterbeds. To cheer myself up with knowledge that there were some Lapwing around I ventured out of my SU 70 patch into SU 69 far enough to check that there were at least 117 Lapwing roosting on the north shore of Chalk Dock late this afternoon, and yesterday I made a short expedition at low tide to see what was in Tipner Lake, finding a flock of at least 64 Lapwing there with the expected Brent, Curlew and Redshank – two surprises were to be greeted by a Little Egret and to find that the MOD site south of the allotments is now a Wimpey housing estate with several houses already completed.

LITTLE EGRET. Three seen together on the 'Southmere' field on the west side of the main road to Hayling south of The Mallards and north of Langstone Mill Lane.

Later two of these birds were in the Lymbourne stream at Wade Court (first time I have seen any there this winter).

WHITE WINGED BLACK CROWS. This my own name for the increasing number of Carrion Crows which show more or less white in their wings in flight. Over the past 10 (or 20?) years these have become more and more frequently seen in our area, and I am reminded of them now both by the fact that one of four which currently visit my garden most mornings has this characteristic, and by the sighting of one on the 'Gipsies Plain' this morning which had so much white that I had difficulty in deciding that it was not a Magpie. I have heard that this 'variant' of the standard Carrion Crow plumage started to appear in the Channel Islands in the 1960s, has become dominant there, and is rapidly spreading north across Britain.. Although it looks like a plumage colour variation the only bird with this feature which I have handled was one that I found dead at the IBM North Harbour site a good many years back and which had been seen alive for some time before its death. The corpse showed that the feathers were not partially coloured white, but many of the wing feathers were still partially enclosed in the 'plastic covering' which surrounds the barbs of growing feathers and which normally splits and drops off when the feathers are ready for use – these had remained as seals, holding in the barbs and giving the impression of white feather patches in flight.

SAT 27 DEC

BEAN & BARNACLE GOOSE reported from Titchfield Haven by Peter Morrison (presumably one Bean Goose and several Barnacle). Also to be seen at the Haven on both 27th and 28th according to Peter were a RED CRESTED POCHARD and the half-pint sized 'Minima' CANADA GOOSE. On New Year's day Steve Hooper told me that he had heard that the BEAN GOOSE might well be a genuine 'Tundra bird' and was apparently very exhausted when first seen (see Top Ten section below for more info on the Tundra species).

CROSSBILL. Two encounters with these in Stansted Forest this morning. One heard flying over north west end of the Rough Avenue (746115) then a party of approx 15 seen and heard flying north at 757112

LESSER REDPOLL. My first clear sight of these this winter in Stansted Forest on Larches at 759118. I saw at least four in trees where many Tits and Goldcrests were also feeding

SISKIN. A few heard and seen flying in Stansted Forest but no substantial flock.

REDWING. One flew over my garden in Havant at breakfast time and two later seen in Stansted Forest moving north.

“RED KITE”. Last night Dave Mead told me he had been told by someone in the Forestside area that Red Kite had been seen (and had nested) in the Watergate area this year – there was even some reference to a dead juvenile being found under the nest. Dave and I agreed that without further evidence these might all be references to the Buzzards known to be in the area and to have bred – these also have mainly been seen in the Watergate area. This morning, as I was passing the Forestside Farm stables, I was hailed by a man mending the roof (who I gather owns the farm and has another farm in the area) and he told me the same story – but began by saying that he was well aware of the Buzzards and that these were different, and he went on to describe their distinctive angled wings. A man in horse-riding costume joined in, saying he had also seen them (and this man went on to describe how in early summer he always went to a certain spot in Stansted Forest to hear ‘dozens of Nightingales’ singing – that spot must be somewhere in Withy Piece around 766118 and he described it as being south of the very deep pit near the path to Broadreed Farm with the Nightingales in or near a dense conifer clump. I seem to remember hearing of this site from others and believe is is a Nightingale haunt. PS – on New Year’s Day a chance meeting with Steve Hooper elicited the information that he had had a Red Kite over his garden in 1997.

ALBINO BLACKBIRD. On Dec 8th I noted a report of an albino Blackbird seen near the New Lane level crossing in Havant and today I met the person who told me of it – she says the bird is still resident in the garden of one Bill Dridge whose house is on the north side of Waterloo Road backing onto the railway line. I am going to see if I can spot it from the east end of the railway carpark south of the railway.

LAPWING IN TIPNER LAKE – comments on a short visit here late in the afternoon are recorded above with Sunday’s Lapwing count details.

FRI 26 DEC

ALDSWORTH POND had 26 Mallard and a couple of Coot with a Heron perched on a tree above when I paid a short visit this morning, but no Gadwall have yet returned. Brick-kiln pond had 9 Coot, 7 Mallard and its pair of Swans.

KNOT in Emsworth Harbour. 140 seen there recently by Brian Fellows, roughly three times the largest flock I saw in that area last winter. Brian had also seen, for the second time in the past week, a large flock of Golden Plover lining the Hampshire bank of the Emsworth Channel near Fowley Island.

PLANTS:

SUN 4 JAN

LESSER CELANDINE. My first lone flower of the year was fully open, nestling under the west bank of the Lymbourne stream in the section from the A27 to the footbridge

HEDGEROW CRANESBILL was a much more exciting find in Southmoor Lane where at least seven plants were in full flower under the hedge on the west side of the road between the southernmost entrance to Budds Farm (where the Pallets are stored) and the next entrance north of it.

WILD PLUM. A little further south one of the wild plum trees had many flower buds showing much white and apparently just about to open – this spring I must determine the proper species name of these trees which some people confuse with Blackthorn and which I have in the past named as *Prunus domestica* (Wild Plum) but which I now believe to be *Prunus cerasifera* (Cherry Plum), though some may

be other species.

FRI 2 JAN

HEDGE BINDWEED does not often get the credit that it deserves for all its tenacity and hard work but I must give it a mention today as the lovely male Bullfinch which landed in one of my apple trees drew my eye to a single white trumpet flower which had managed to evade my attentions and was flowering at the top of the tree weeks after all others had given up their efforts for the winter. P S A day after this observation the flower had vanished.

THU 1 JAN

THE FIRST YELLOW CROCUS was the surprise flower of my New Year's Day outing (just one in a Prinsted garden), but I also saw a second HAZEL tree with open catkins and several GREATER PERIWINKLE flowers. In Stansted Forest one clump of WAVY BITTERCRESS was in flower and near Budds Farm I found a single flower on a BRAMBLE bush. Over in the Meon Valley wild VIOLETS are blooming in Gwynne Johnson's garden.

TUE 30 DEC

GARLIC MUSTARD showing a couple of tiny white flowers was a surprise found at Chichester GP where I found a NOOTKA CYPRESS glistening with masses of tiny yellow flowers (on the bank of the East Trout Lake just across the road from the newly restored cottage which I see is now inhabited).

SUN 28 DEC

HAZEL CATKINS. My first sight of fully expanded catkins showing their bright yellow flowers was on a tree immediately behind the northbound bus stop in the big layby almost opposite Langstone High Street. On the Oysterbeds the Black Horehound still has one flower on show and Hawkweed Oxtongue is still in flower as well as Bristly Oxtongue.

SMALL NETTLE was still in flower among the Strawberry plants on the North Hayling fields near Northwood Farm

SAT 27 DEC

THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL is one of four plants flowering in my garden today – the others are Creeping Buttercup, Smooth Hawkbit and Daisy.

SPURGE LAUREL. This will soon be in flower if the weather remains mild and as I was in the north west of Stansted Forest today I went to check out the many plants that can normally be found near the path leading out of the Forest to Warren Down. On more than one of the plants that I found the buds were beginning to open (but I do not count it as flowering until I can look down the tube of the flower and see its yellow anthers). Of more significance was the fact that I could see very few bushes where I remain seeing many, and those that I did see had most of their leaves stripped, presumably by deer. I hope the deer will not destroy this rather unusual woodland plant.

OTHER:

WED 31 DEC

LADYBIRDS are probably hibernating in hundreds in every garden but it was a surprise when one fell out of my hair onto the table! I decided the nearest refuge was the Christmas Poinsettia, where it happily settled down under one of the leaves – so that's how they get the colour into them!

SUN 21 DEC

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY. One tempted to fly (probably to its death) by warm sun at the Fountain Inn at Rowlands Castle.

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

SUN 4 JAN

SOUTH MOORS UNDER WATER. I remember being told by George Hedley that winter high tides will flood the South Moors as far up as the southern boundary of the new AUTOLIV factory, and myself seeing tidelines in that area, so I walked down there to meet the Sunday afternoon tide at 15.14 when it was predicted to be a 'low' 4.4 metre peak. Before I set out the weather men on the TV were saying that the wind and low pressure would be making the tides up to a metre above expectation, but I was not prepared to find that (more than half an hour before high tide) the path crossing the Lavant at the west end of Mill Lane was already under two feet of water above the path. By climbing onto the metal rails around the tiny bridge I managed to get to the stile and onto the Moors where I could see huge waves breaking on the seawall and showering tons of water onto the southernmost fringe of the moors. Right beside me the water from the stream was flooding into the moors over the concrete pipe casing which carries the path north, but I was able to get across the path going west and reach Budds Mound (from which there was no sign of the islands in the harbour other than the copse on North Binness – I think I could still see the seawall of Farlington Marshes, but will not be surprised to hear that much of those marshes were flooded). I tried to come back across the South Moors, but by that time it was clearly impossible to get back to Mill Lane without thigh-boot waders, so I went back up Southmoor Lane. We were lucky that the predicted tide for today was not one of the 5 metre ones we have been having at 'Springs' recently!

FRI 2 JAN

EROSION AT BLACK POINT. Rain, wind and tide have combined to eat away more of the sand dunes west and south of the Sailing Club and the wire mesh baskets of stones placed at the western point of the promontory, and then covered with sand to look like a natural extension of the dunes, are now revealed for what they are with all the sand washed away, and all along the edge of the dunes bare earth and roots of plants have been exposed. Looking west to the Tournerbury sea wall what was once a gentle grassy bank is now reminiscent of a crumbling Maginot line – stark, immense and probably appropriate to the task of keeping the world's oceans from using the golf course without paying green fees. Back on the Black Point causeway three large piles of similar concrete rubble have recently appeared ready for deploying into similar defences, and the realities of global warming will I imagine acquire even more warlike qualities as time marches its troops onwards.

WED 31 DEC

SOUTH MOORS FACTORY DEVELOPMENT. A copy of the response by the Havant Bosmere 100 group to the new proposal (which I welcomed in these notes on Dec 11th) shares my welcome to the revised southern boundary of the site but comments that although the southern boundary has been moved back by some 100 metres the planning application is still for the same 9.66 hectare area and the same 7 factory units with the same 32,140 sq metres of space. What is going on, they ask? and I am sure they are right to be wary.

WARBLINGTON SHORE seawall steps. Bosmere 100 echo my comments on the siting of the steps and with their support maybe some changes will be made!

SUN 28 DEC

HAYLING OYSTERBEDS. Cycling up the Billy Line at midday I was saddened to see that a few anglers had used their waders to cross the gaps created in the Oysterbed outer bund walls and had set up their umbrellas on the newly created outer islands.

WEEK 51
DEC 22 - 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 DEC

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TUE 23 DEC

SONG THRUSH SONG is now strong and often heard at daybreak but I heard one in full blast at 5.30am this morning thanks to the well lit Post Office yard at the end of our road. Robins can be heard there through the night at almost any time of year.

MON 22 DEC

KINGFISHER and GOOSANDER. Having seen these in close proximity at Langstone old rail bridge yesterday I saw them together today in the Hermitage stream immediately south of the A27. I was not surprised to see Kingfisher here in one of its regular fishing places but I was surprised to find the Goosander so far upstream with the tide low (I doubt it could swim on open water back to the sea past the weir below Harts Farm Way). I have heard of others seeing it in this section of the stream in past winters but it is the first time I have done so.

PINTAIL. A tight flock of 11 right under the seawall at Broadmarsh was a pleasing sight – all but one seemed to be paired and the males were in their full glory.

TURNSTONE and RINGED PLOVER. Numbers of the former are at a low point – only half a dozen seen by me on the Broadmarsh/South Moors shore – while Ringed Plover seem to be increasing with a flock of at least 45 on the South Moors shore.

LITTLE EGRET. They have not all left the harbours – I think I had four at the South Moors today (I only saw two together but am pretty certain that three were present and maybe four – two on the shore at low tide, one in the Tamarisk Pool and one in the Lavant stream)

WIGEON. I know these can be seen in large numbers in many places but a count of 50 at the mouth of the Lavant stream was double the number I expect there.

MAGPIE. Flocks of up to 30 are not uncommon on the South Moors in winter though I am not sure what attracts them there. Today 15 were in a single tree at Southmoor Lane and 11 in a tree at the west end of Mill Lane (possibly part of the same group but quite likely in addition)

PURPLE SANDPIPER. One back at the mouth of the Meon where it runs out of Titchfield Haven seen by Peter Morrison. Dave Mead tells me that he saw this same bird about two weeks earlier.

BITTERN. One reported back at Titchfield Haven during the past week according to news from Peter Morrison who also reported a RED NECKED GREBE on the sea at Hill Head last Friday (19th)

SUN 21 DEC

CROSSBILL. Dave Mead found 15 near the Middle Lodge at Stansted – some in South Coopers wood over the road from the avenue carpark and others on the driveway to the house apparently feeding on Beechmast

PURPLE SANDPIPER. One seen at Southsea Castle by Ian Thirlwell

SLAVONIAN GREBE and GADWALL are not often seen together but today they were both on the flat calm, sunlit water of Langstone Harbour in the Langstone Channel west of Round Nap and Long Island, and were just one of the highlights of an excellent walk led by Kevin Stouse from Warblington Church to Hayling Oysterbeds. The Gadwall were seven in number, just floating on the sea in a way that is technically described as 'loafing', but the grebes (at least two Slavonian) were actively diving with a large widespread flock of at least 20 BLACK NECKED GREBE with Great Crested and Little Grebe. The redhead GOOSANDER was with a small group of Merganser close to the old rail bridge and was last seen perched on a ledge at the foot of one of the old pillars at the north end of the bridge just below the perch of a KINGFISHER which we had seen when crossing the road bridge. To the east of the road bridge a SPARROWHAWK flew lazily north from Northney Marina to Wade Court and a LITTLE EGRET (the only one seen this morning) flew west from the same area to the Oysterbeds and then back. Some 120 GOLDEN PLOVER were seen in their usual roost area with a similar number of Lapwing. At Langstone Pond REED BUNTING were heard and a couple of REDWING seen, plus Grey Wagtail, but we did not see the Green Sandpiper in Wade Court Park

WOOD PIGEON song was again heard briefly by me in my garden at dawn when at least two SONG THRUSH were singing with the Robins.

SAT 20 DEC

PALE BELLIED BRENT. A message from Ian Thirlwell today tells me that he has seen one in the Brent flocks off Milton Common a couple of times in the last few days. Last winter one was seen here from time to time and may have been a different bird from that seen on the Forty Acres farm at Bedhampton/Farlington. I assume that these birds became separated from their own race, overshooting their Irish winter stop-off, and have thrown in their lot with the Dark bellied birds that they found down here, migrating to Siberia with them rather than going back to Greenland.

PEREGRINE. Ian Thirlwell also reports recent sightings of one hunting over the Milton shore recently.

LITTLE OWLS were heard by me at dusk in the Funtington and Walderton areas.

One called from somewhere near Stanes Farm, at SU 792087 west of Funtington, and the other from a territory better known to me at 785101 close to the road south of Walderton

FRI 19 DEC

EMPEROR GOOSE. Our local émigré Tzar seen with Canada Geese at Eames Farm on Thorney Island by Brian Fellows

LITTLE OWL. One seen by Dave Mead on the west side of Oak Copse at Stansted by the track running south to meet Woodlands Lane where it enters the East Park.

BUZZARD. Two seen in the Watergate area by Dave Mead today

MEDITERRANEAN GULL. A second winter bird seen in Emsworth Harbour by Barry

Collins today

PLANTS:

SUN 28 DEC

HAZEL CATKINS. My first sight of fully expanded catkins showing their bright yellow flowers was on a tree immediately behind the northbound bus stop in the big layby almost opposite Langstone High Street. On the Oysterbeds the Black Horehound still has one flower on show and Hawkweed Oxtongue is still in flower as well as Bristly Oxtongue.

SMALL NETTLE was still in flower among the Strawberry plants on the North Hayling fields near Northwood Farm

SAT 27 DEC

THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL is one of four plants flowering in my garden today – the others are Creeping Buttercup, Smooth Hawkbit and Daisy.

SPURGE LAUREL. This will soon be in flower if the weather remains mild and as I was in the north west of Stansted Forest today I went to check out the many plants that can normally be found near the path leading out of the Forest to Warren Down. On more than one of the plants that I found the buds were beginning to open (but I do not count it as flowering until I can look down the tube of the flower and see its yellow anthers). Of more significance was the fact that I could see very few bushes where I remain seeing many, and those that I did see had most of their leaves stripped, presumably by deer. I hope the deer will not destroy this rather unusual woodland plant.

WED 24 DEC

CREEPING BUTTERCUP is staging a resurgence with three flowers to be found in my garden (and seen elsewhere)

TUE 23 DEC

CANADIAN FLEABANE still in a healthy state flowering by Havant Tourist Info office as I distributed this weeks posters

MON 22 DEC

HYBRID WATER SPEEDWELL still in flower in the Harts Farm Way pond (has anyone got a succinct name for the pond in the cul de sac south of the A27 where it cuts off what was Brockhampton Road?). Water Cress has ceased to flower there since my last visit but at Broadmarsh Slipway the Hemlock is still flowering with Common and Oxford Ragwort and Hawkweed Oxtongue. On the South Moors Sea Aster is flourishing but the single plant of Celery Leaved Buttercup has vanished.

SUN 21 DEC

CREEPING BUTTERCUP and **BLACK HORE HOUND** were both in flower at the Hayling Oysterbeds today.

OTHER:

SUN 21 DEC

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY. One tempted to fly (probably to its death) by warm sun at the Fountain Inn at Rowlands Castle.

FRI 19 DEC

HARES. 2 on north west Thorney by Brian Fellows are the first I have heard of for some time

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

SUN 28 DEC

HAYLING OYSTERBEDS. Cycling up the Billy Line at midday I was saddened to see that a few anglers had used their waders to cross the gaps created in the Oysterbed outer bund walls and had set up their umbrellas on the newly created outer islands.

SAT 20 DEC

MILTON COMMON. Ian Tirlwell tells me that Portsmouth workers have cleared most of the bramble from the common in their war against the Brown Tail moth and he fears that next summer there will be fewer Whitethroat and Sedge Warbler there. Not having been to see for myself I can't comment, but I do know that more paths have been created across the common (more precisely, tidal inlet turned rubbish tip turned 'waste land') and expect 'creeping urbanisation' to continue with rubbish bins, seats, and 'street lights', though the lakes and foreshore will continue to attract wildlife.

WEEK 50

DEC 15 - 21

BIRDS:

SUN 21 DEC

SLAVONIAN GREBE and GADWALL are not often seen together but today they were both on the flat calm, sunlit water of Langstone Harbour in the Langstone Channel west of Round Nap and Long Island, and were just one of the highlights of an excellent walk led by Kevin Stouse from Warblington Church to Hayling Oysterbeds. The Gadwall were seven in number, just floating on the sea in a way that is technically described as 'loafing', but the grebes (at least two Slavonian) were actively diving with a large widespread flock of at least 20 BLACK NECKED GREBE with Great Crested and Little Grebe. The redhead GOOSANDER was with a small group of Merganser close to the old rail bridge and was last seen perched on a ledge at the foot of one of the old pillars at the north end of the bridge just below the perch of a KINGFISHER which we had seen when crossing the road bridge. To the east of the road bridge a SPARROWHAWK flew lazily north from Northney Marina to Wade Court and a LITTLE EGRET (the only one seen this morning) flew west from the same area to the Oysterbeds and then back. Some 120 GOLDEN PLOVER were seen in their usual roost area with a similar number of Lapwing. At Langstone Pond REED BUNTING were heard and a couple of REDWING seen, plus Grey Wagtail, but we did not see the Green Sandpiper in Wade Court Park

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One called from somewhere near Stanes Farm, at SU 792087 west of Funtington, and the other from a territory better known to me at 785101 close to the road south of Walderton

FRI 19 DEC

BIRD SONG. Mild weather encouraged several Great and Blue Tits into bursts of song on Hayling Island, and at West Town station I heard both WOOD PIGEON and MISTLE THRUSH song. Other birds heard by me during the week were Song

Thrush, Dunnock, Starling and the regular Collared Dove, Robin and Wren.
RING OUZEL ??? I am not claiming to have seen one, but a Blackbird with a faint white crescent on its breast and with various other oddities to its plumage and behaviour seen in Noel Pyecroft's brick field at the north end of the Hayling Coastal Path did make me recall having once seen a wintering Ring Ouzel in the New Forest many years ago. I reckon the chances of this bird being a Ring Ouzel rather than a Blackbird were less than 1 in 10

BRENT GEESE on Hayling fields. I hope everyone who sees Brent on farmland in Hampshire is recording the details for inclusion in the survey organised by the Solent Shorebird Study Group to assist the County Council and Hampshire Wildlife Trust in advising local authorities on the best ways of resolving conflict between the needs of the geese and those of the farmers and landowners. This morning I watched a flock estimated at 250 geese take off from field H34C (on the west coast between North Shore Road and the Saltmarsh Lane Copse) and noted that a large area of H48C and H48D (on the seaward side of those fields next the Hayling Coastal path) has been trampled to bare mud while the rest of those fields has a healthy Kale (?) crop growing. I also noted that the field just south of Daw Lane (H49A) had some 35 Curlew feeding in it despite it being low tide time – last time I passed this field the Curlew were also in it and I wonder what attracts them to this field rather than others? Above both these fields (on either side of West Lane) a flock of 18 Skylark fluttered as I went by.

MON 15 DEC

GREEN SANDPIPER. Being near Bedhampton Station I looked for this bird down the Hermitage stream from the West Street bridge but did not see it, then looked at the same stream from the wall by the water works entrance and again could not see it until a Magpie flew down and chased it from its hideout, both birds being highly vociferous in their annoyance at the presence of the other. I suspect that this is the same bird also shows at the South Moors and Wade Court

KINGFISHER. I also looked for this bird on the Brockhampton stream but did not see it – my reason for mentioning it is that since my last visit to this stream one of the Kingfisher's favourite perches (the wreck of the Freya) has vanished from the stream and is now aground on the shore just north of Budds Farm outfall.

GOOSANDER. The local redhead was off Budds Farm outfall at high tide with 5 Merganser, 5 Goldeneye and 7 Little Grebe

TEAL. The number now on the Budds Farm pools is in excess of 150 but we numbers of other duck (Tufted, Pochard and Shoveler) have not increased in the same measure. A single female Goldeneye was an addition to the usual cast of performers.

GADWALL. Kevin Stouse found a pair on the lake at Farlington Marshes last Friday (Dec 12th) and Brian Fellows found 58 at Chichester on Dec 11th

REDWING. Just three in the pony paddocks beside Wade Lane south of the A27 Havant bypass.

SUN 14 DEC

SONG THRUSH SONG. A winter dawn with clear sky provoked the local Thrushes into song again after their silence during recent wind and rain and a DUNNOCK joined them from the garden next door in addition to the regular Robins and Wrens.
MERLIN hunting Dunlin east of Pilsey Island was the high spot of a walk round

Cobnor Point on a glorious winter day. When I reached the hut at the southern point of the peninsula and looked west along Stakes Island I could see a falcon perched on a tall post at the highest point of Stakes Island some 500 metres from me. I rested my binoculars against the hut to get the clearest possible view but could not pick out any colour or features, just a silhouette. After watching for several minutes with the bird motionless on its perch I moved on and soon met a couple of people to whom I was pointing out where the falcon was when it took off and flew south with pointed wings and a flight action that was definitely not Kestrel or Peregrine. It gained height over the Wittering shore, turned, then dived to sea level and drove into Dunlin which took off from a small promontory (possibly Ella Nore). Presumably it did not catch any of them as it continued for some time to chase the Dunlin flocks across the sea towards Pilsay. Unlike a Peregrine that would hunt by stooping from above this bird hunted by low level pursuit, occasionally towering in order to turn after a failed pass through the flock. Earlier in my walk I had watched a Kestrel perched on a tree top at 789042, and a female Sparrowhawk, seemingly disturbed by gas guns, flew from one perch low along a field edge to perch in another tree at 784038.

FIELDFARE and REDWING had a token presence on Cobnor peninsula. Just one FIELDFARE and two REDWING

ROCK PIPIT FLOCK. On the west shore of Cobnor a flock of ten Pipits were all Rock to judge by their calls and overall dark plumage – not a single Meadow Pipit note and none of the birds had light underparts.

BRAMBLING. Several seen at Stansted Forest (extreme west end of main avenue) by Maureen Coleman in a flock of around 40 Chaffinch

TAWNY OWL After delivering last weeks notes to Brian Fellows I was in the Long Copse Lane area of Emsworth and heard a screeching, snoring call which I would have thought was bound to come from a Barn Owl had it not been followed by a selection of Tawny Owl notes from nearby trees

SAT 13 DEC

BLACK REDSTART. After my count of birds on the IBM Lake I took my figures as usual to Dennis Bill (who collates all the Portsmouth Harbour counts) in Portchester. Being close to the Castle I dropped in, though with little hope of seeing the Black Redstart as it was midday and most birds indulge in a siesta between early morning and late afternoon feeding. No sign of the bird when I arrived, and it was only after I had walked to the church, found Wild Clary flowering among the tombstones, and was returning to the gate that I saw a movement above the main entrance tunnel. There was the Redstart, flitting around the large window and gargoyles on the inside of the entrance tower. I watched it for a couple of minutes before the bird and I went our separate ways.

IBM LAKE COUNT. Nothing spectacular, but things move on into winter mode and the majority of COOT had gathered into a single flock of 40 birds, at least seven CORMORANT were present (though only 1 HERON), and a single OYSTERCATCHER was back in residence on the lakeside grass. I assumed at first it was an individual adult returning to its favourite winter haunt (we quite often have a single bird in the winter) but then saw it was a juvenile with dull bill and hardly any colour in its legs. We also had 10 CURLEW which flew off when they saw me and 16 CANADA GEESE which unfortunately did not! A single MUTE

SWAN was also an addition since last month but otherwise things were much as in November with 5 SNIPE, 7 POCHARD, 16 TUFTED DUCK, 10 TEAL and 7 DABCHICK. I could not see the WOOD DUCK and only counted 37 MALLARD and 39 MOORHEN with some 300 Gulls which I did not count (no Lesser Blackback, but Greater, Herring, Common and Black Headed all present). A CHIFF CHAFF moved around lakeside willows and a DUNNOCK sang briefly from the buildings (which reminds me that, in the carpark both on this visit and last month, a BLACKBIRD was making a sort of subsong). A male KESTREL flew over me and perched on one of the very tall carpark light towers, a pair of REED BUNTINGS was on the islands, and four STOCK DOVE were feeding on the open grass.

RED CRESTED POCHARD. Brian Fellows reports that the regular winter visiting female to Baffins Pond and Milton Lakes was back at the pond last Tuesday (9th) and a walk led by Pete Durnell in the Hayling Ferry area today saw one at the harbour mouth (which I understood to be a male)

RUDDY DUCK. More late and secondhand info! I hear that Dave Mead saw two back on Ivy Lake at Chichester last Monday (8th)

PLANTS:

SUN 21 DEC

CREEPING BUTTERCUP and BLACK HORE HOUND were both in flower at the Hayling Oysterbeds today.

FRI 19 DEC

PRIMROSE – not wild but flowering in a Hayling garden, nevertheless indicating that conditions allow this species to flower. Other unusual plants seen on Hayling were one of Large Flowered EVENING PRIMROSE at the west end of Ferry Road (north of the bus turn round) and a superb plant of COW PARSLEY with many flowering branches seen among prolific Winter Heliotrope also on Ferry Road just west of its junction with St Catherine's Road. SWEET ALISON was flowering both in gardens and in wild places where its seeds have landed, and on the Oyster Beds one plant of WHITE MELILOT still has flowers. Cow Parsley was also flowering in Wade Lane when I returned to Havant

MON 15 DEC

HYBRID WATER SPEEDWELL still flowering in the pool just south of the A27 beside the now cut off section of Brockhampton Road

MARSH MARIGOLD. Having found this in flower at North Harbour on Saturday I checked the South Moors site and found just two flowers on a rather scraggy plant – though not quite as scraggy as the Celery Leaved Buttercup plant near the South Moors Tamarisk pool which also has about two flowers left.

SUN 14 DEC

KNAPWEED in fresh flower was the surprise item during my walk round Cobnor during which I found two dozen plants still flowering. I also found a patch of Primrose plants with leaves so spring like that I felt compelled to search among them for flower buds though I did not find any!

SAT 13 DEC

MARSH MARIGOLD. One plant with three or four large and perfect flowers in one of the IBM ditches at a sunny point where the water flow is strong (not stagnant). This

was just one of 28 plant species flowering on the site and among them those worth a mention were THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL and BLUE FLEABANE, WINTER HELIOTROPE, MEADOW BUTTERCUP, WHITE MELILOT and some 'left over' HAWKWEED OXTONGUE.. Not in flower, but plants with healthy fresh leaves, were many BEE ORCHIDS and two or three CORN PARSLEY.

WILD CLARY – well, possibly not quite wild. At Portchester Castle in pursuit of Black Redstart I walked in through the main gate to the church from the road through the castle grounds and turned left to go south down the inside of the wall. After a short distance (20 yards or less?) I noticed a strange flower spike on which the flowers were over, then a yard or so further on found a couple more plants looking much fresher and one in flower. It was obviously a Salvia species with small blue flowers and palmate leaves with deeply cut and sharply pointed segments making an intricate geometrical shape that was symmetrical along the line of the main vein. I suspect the plants had once been planted on a grave but they gave the impression of having spread and become 'established' where they wanted to grow (there were no maintained graves nearby), and if there is a chance that they were wild the castle walls and grounds bear plenty of precedent for the making of unusual botanic finds. What is more there is a record of this species being found on the banks Nelson Lane on Portsdown above Portchester as recently as 1985 (found by Jonathan Stokes who lived nearby in Anson Grove and told me about the find but did not show me the plants – some of you may know Jonathan in his more recent role as national secretary of the Tree Society which oversees all Tree Wardens). Even better, the Flora also records the species as being in the Tetrad which includes Portchester Castle in the post 1930 period. Unfortunately I did not look up the nose of this plant to inspect the hairs within the flower tube so I may be confusing Wild Clary with some garden species, but there is a chance of it being the genuine article.

LESSER CELANDINE reported to be in flower at Purbrook Heath (seen by the Saturday walk group)

GOAT WILLOW. The same group also saw 'Pussy Paws', the flowers of Goat Willow or Sallow. I do not know if these were fully open with the golden anthers extended or had just 'broken the seal' to reveal the white fluffy 'petals'

OTHER:

FRI 19 DEC

TOADSTOOLS. On Hayling I today found my first clumps of VELVET SHANK on gorse stumps at Sinah GP and I hear from Tonyt Gutteridge that he found a good crop of AGARICUS MACROSPORUS worth carrying home from Thorney Island for a meal

MON 15 DEC

WEASEL. One streaked across the path just in front of me in Stansted Forest while I was searching for Brambling (which I did not find).

SUN 14 DEC

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY. One seen by Rosemary Web feeding on Ivy in Head Down Plantation today and 2 seen on Hayling by Mike Valentine who also found a PEACOCK on the wing. Butterflies which interrupt their hibernation to come out on warm winter days usual lose more energy than they gain and fail to survive the winter. Red Admirals are notorious 'comers out' in winter and hardly ever survive

the winter in hibernation. Peacocks are usual better at staying put, but if they have chosen to hibernate in a spare bedroom that is not heated until a visitor is expected at Christmas they do become over heated and active, usually flying out to their death.

RHODOTUS PALMATUS. A large toadstool which grows on dead Elm wood and has an apricot colour to its cap was also found by Rosemary Webb today. Not only is this a rarity but also, according to Rosemary, a very pleasant sight.

SAT 13 DEC

SEAL. A lady rang this evening to tell me that her husband had been rowing near Langstone Bridge this morning and had had a close encounter with a Seal. Julian Howard reported one at the Langstone end of the Wadeway on Nov 16th and I wonder if one or more have been present over the intervening month, unknown to myself and most of the village. In 1996, when I saw one off the South Moors in August, I was told by Andy Polkey that one had been regularly seen around the RSPB islands all that summer, reminding me how much wildlife around us escapes my notice.

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

FRI 19 DEC

THE KENCH. Cycling up the east side of the bay on the main track I noticed the shore looked more natural than usual, then realised that a line of fence posts and wire has been removed, presumably by the County Council. Congratulations to them.

SINAH GRAVEL PIT. This week I sent my letter of comment to Havant Borough Council objecting to the retention of the carparks on Sinah Common north of the gravel pit on the grounds that their creation, plus the siting of picnic benches in the gorse to the west and the planting of shrubs to screen the brick structure to the east of the grass, were unsympathetic to the nature of the Common, and indicated a wish to turn natural habitat into urban parkland on the part of the Borough staff responsible – I suggested that the Borough would benefit from acquiring people with skill in the management of the large amount of natural habitat to be found in the Borough if they are to achieve their duty of preserving our natural heritage (and meet the requirements of Local Agenda 21). Today I see that the new stake line driven into the grass south of the long established 'lay by' opposite the latest line of new houses has had several grey metal posts added to it indicating the imminent arrival of another parking meter and noticeboards, and an extension (rather than retention) of the carparking. One very simple way of reducing the impact of these parking bays would be to use natural materials – the ones near the entrance into the gravel pits have been made with black stone when there is an ample supply of natural gravel lying on the surface within 100 yards.

THU 18 DEC

WARBLINGTON CHURCH-POOK LANE SHORELINE. A new planning application (97/52604/1/HBC) issued by Havant Borough this week is one which I welcome. If you take the footpath through Warblington cemetery to the shore you come out on a raised path running along a well built seawall. Most people turn right and come to the end of the wall at Pook Lane where recent erosion by the stream in the Pook Lane ditch has made it difficult to get down or up onto the seawall path. Similarly, if

you turned left and headed back to Emsworth the seawall path comes to a dead end, leaving you to make a difficult descent of the steep seawall. The Borough are planning to make this descent easy by constructing two sets of wooden steps, one at the Pook Lane end (on the side facing the sea, leaving you to jump the streamlet when it is flowing) and the other at the point where the path emerges from the field. I welcome the steps and see nothing to object to in their appearance but will comment that both could be better sited – at the Pook Lane end they should take you over the streamlet onto the firm ground of Pook Lane, and at the east end the steps should be at the far end of the seawall so that people can take maximum advantage of the existing dry, firm seawall path rather than going down onto mud and rocks where it is difficult to walk (and this evening I arrived at the spot to find that the exact point where the steps would come down was the only place between Langstone and Warblington still under water as the tide dropped!)

SUN 14 DEC

CHIDMERE POND. On my last visit to Chidham at the beginning of November I remarked that Chidmere Pond was bone dry for the first time in my memory. Today it is full again, with two Swans on it. Aldsworth Pond remains empty

WEEK 49
DEC 8 - 14

BIRDS:

SUN 14 DEC

SONG THRUSH SONG. A winter dawn with clear sky provoked the local Thrushes into song again after their silence during recent wind and rain and a DUNNOCK joined them from the garden next door in addition to the regular Robins and Wrens. MERLIN hunting Dunlin east of Pilsey Island was the high spot of a walk round Cobnor Poinr on a glorious winter day. When I reached the hut at the southern point of the peninsula and looked west along Stakes Island I could see a falcon perched on a tall post at the highest point of Stakes Island some 500 metres from me. I rested my binoculars against the hut to get the clearest possible view but could not pick out any colour or features, just a silhouette. After watching for several minutes with the bird motionless on its perch I moved on and soon met a couple of people to whom I was pointing out where the falcon was when it took off and flew south with pointed wings and a flight action that was definitely not Kestrel or Peregrine. It gained height over the Wittering shore, turned, then dived to sea level and drove into Dunlin which took off from a small promontory (possibly Ella Nore). Presumably it did not catch any of them as it continued for some time to chase the Dunlin flocks across the sea towards Pilsey. Unlike a Peregrine that would hunt by stooping from above this bird hunted by low level pursuit, occasionally towering in order to turn after a failed pass through the flock. Earlier in my walk I had watched a Kestrel perched on a tree top at 789042, and a female Sparrowhawk, seemingly disturbed by gas guns, flew from one perch low along a field edge to perch in another tree at 784038.

FIELDFARE and REDWING had a token presence on Cobnor peninsula. Just one FIELDFARE seen and heard in the old (abandoned?) orchards at 793035 and just two REDWING seen with Starlings and Blackbirds at 793026.

ROCK PIPIT FLOCK. On the west shore of Cobnor a flock of ten Pipits were all Rock to judge by their calls and overall dark plumage – not a single Meadow Pipit note and none of the birds had light underparts.

MERGANSER and GOLDENEYE both present in the Nutbourne Channel. A close packed flotilla of 36 Merganser was the largest group I have seen so far.

SAT 13 DEC

BLACK REDSTART. After my count of birds on the IBM Lake I took my figures as usual to Dennis Bill (who collates all the Portsmouth Harbour counts) in Portchester. Being close to the Castle I dropped in, though with little hope of seeing the Black Redstart as it was midday and most birds indulge in a siesta between early morning and late afternoon feeding. No sign of the bird when I arrived, and it was only after I had walked to the church, found Wild Clary flowering among the tombstones, and was returning to the gate that I saw a movement above the main entrance tunnel. There was the Redstart, flitting around the large window and gargoyles on the inside of the entrance tower. I watched it for a couple of minutes before the bird and I went our separate ways.

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FAST MOVING GREENSHANK. An item of local interest that I should have passed on a couple of weeks ago when the latest issue of BTO News arrived is the record set by a Greenshank ringed at Farlington Marshes (by Peter Potts and his group) at 11.50am on 8th Aug 1994 which was seen at 10.45am next morning at St Agnes on the Isles of Scilly where it stayed for at least a week (it was not seen again until back at Christchurch and Pagham Harbours next summer)

NUMBER OF BIRD SPECIES SEEN BY ME IN WEEK DEC 6 – 12 WAS 69. BIRD SONG has been sparse but I have heard Collared Dove, Starling, Robin, Wren, Blue Tit, Coal Tit and one burst of Dunnock song.

FRI 12 DEC

REDWING. Here on the coast in most years I see one or two parties of Redwing when they first arrive in October and then see nothing of them until hard weather sets in after Christmas. This year has been different and I saw them on 24 occasions from Oct 12th to Nov 16th after which they have become more elusive and a party of 15 that I saw by Woodberry Lane today was the first I had seen since Dec 1st.

COAL TIT song. I suspect these have been fairly regular songsters through the late autumn but I have not heard them until today when several were singing in sunshine from conifers in The Holt at Rowlands Castle.

WED 10 DEC

NEWS FROM MARK CUTTS WEBSITE. He reports a BITTERN at Fleet Pond late this afternoon and also tells us that both the GREAT NORTHERN DIVER and the LONG TAILED DUCK are still present with the passing bonus of a KINGFISHER seen at the west (church) end of Anglesey Lake

HERON HAS TEAL FOR ITS CHRISTMAS DINNER. Well, a goose would be a bit of a mouthful for it. For this item I am indebted to Sid Wright who asks (in a message on a Christmas Card received this morning) if I believe the story (of a Heron eating a Teal) that he heard at Titchfield Haven. Having watched (from the office window at IBM in a past year) a Heron spend a whole morning trying to swallow a whole Moorhen I can well believe one would kill and try to eat a Teal – whether either bird was digested, or choked the Heron to death, is another matter. What I do know is that a Heron will kill and try to eat anything that moves within range of its bill. The red legs of the Moorhen were still protruding from the Heron's bill at the end of the morning.

TUE 9 DEC

SKYLARK FLOCK. My first recordable winter flock had at least 111 birds and was in a large open stubble field close to Ladyholt at SU 756165. I usually find Skylarks here at any time of year and I was not surprised to hear one or two chirruping, but as I walked on the path along the south east side of this field the ground erupted with previously unseen birds which formed a compact flock high in the air and headed north west. There were at least 67 birds in this flock, and as I walked on two more smaller eruptions took place, each with just over twenty birds.

MON 8 DEC

SMEW. Dave Mead saw one redhead at Chichester GP today (possibly on Ivy Lake, though I have not had this confirmed and last winter the birds were on New Lake in the nature reserve)

GOLDFINCH. Three on my lawn feeding on seeds scattered for the birds was an unusual sight. Has anyone else seen them taking 'wild bird food' on the ground?

BLUE TIT song heard twice in gardens along Cooks Lane at Southbourne and another Chiff Chaff heard calling from an Inhams Lane garden

ALBINO BLACKBIRD. A lady living close to the New Lane level crossing told me today that she had just seen a Blackbird that was more white than black in the Hayling Billy line close to its New Lane end

THE BIGGEST ROOKERY IN SUSSEX. When handing in my completed Low Tide Count form for last Saturday to Anne de Potier I found her at home and asked her (as Square Steward for SU 70) if she knew the answer to the question I posed recently (Why did the Sussex Bird Report give a grid reference for the biggest rookery found in the whole of Sussex during the 1996 national rookery census as SU 797070 when there was no sign of a rookery or many trees at that point?). Anne had the completed forms for the survey and told me that as the Hambrook House rookery was hidden from public gaze on private land a resident with access to the land had been asked to make the count, and presumably this person gave a grid reference that was some 500 to 700 metres too far east. Anne also told me (maybe I misheard her) that this person had recorded over 100 of the 154 nests as being in Chestnut trees, which I find odd as the overall figures for Sussex show less than 3% of nests being in Chestnut (Horse and Sweet combined). I have the feeling that a recount by someone with more experience might give different results!

PLANTS:

SUN 14 DEC

KNAPWEED in fresh flower was the surprise item during my walk round Cobnor during which I found two dozen plants still flowering. I also found a patch of Primrose plants with leaves so spring like that I felt compelled to search among them for flower buds though I did not find any!

SAT 13 DEC

MARSH MARIGOLD. One plant with three or four large and perfect flowers in one of the IBM ditches at a sunny point where the water flow is strong (not stagnant). This was just one of 28 plant species flowering on the site and among them those worth a mention were THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL and BLUE FLEABANE, WINTER HELIOTROPE, MEADOW BUTTERCUP, WHITE MELILOT and some 'left over'

HAWKWEED OXTONGUE.. Not in flower, but plants with healthy fresh leaves, were many BEE ORCHIDS and two or three CORN PARSLEY.

WILD CLARY – well, possibly not quite wild. At Portchester Castle in pursuit of Black Redstart I walked in through the main gate to the church from the road through the castle grounds and turned left to go south down the inside of the wall. After a short distance (20 yards or less?) I noticed a strange flower spike on which the flowers were over, then a yard or so further on found a couple more plants looking much fresher and one in flower. It was obviously a Salvia species with small blue flowers and palmate leaves with deeply cut and sharply pointed segments making an intricate geometrical shape that was symmetrical along the line of the main vein. I suspect the plants had once been planted on a grave but they gave the impression of having spread and become ‘established’ where they wanted to grow (there were no maintained graves nearby), and if there is a chance that they were wild the castle walls and grounds bear plenty of precedent for the making of unusual botanic finds. What is more there is a record of this species being found on the banks Nelson Lane on Portsdown above Portchester as recently as 1985 (found by Jonathan Stokes who lived nearby in Anson Grove and told me about the find but did not show me the plants – some of you may know Jonathan in his more recent role as national secretary of the Tree Society which oversees all Tree Wardens). Even better, the Flora also records the species as being in the Tetrad which includes Portchester Castle in the post 1930 period. Unfortunately I did not look up the nose of this plant to inspect the hairs within the flower tube so I may be confusing Wild Clary with some garden species, but there is a chance of it being the genuine article.

PLANT SPECIES FOUND IN FLOWER BY ME THIS WEEK (DEC 6 –12) WAS ONLY 45

WED 10 DEC

HEMLOCK. Quite a lot of this is flowering at the moment and today I found a bank of plants all in flower by the Broadmarsh slipway. Unlike most plants that are taking advantage of the mild weather to flower ‘normally’ all the Hemlock that I have seen has minature flowers, much smaller than those that bloom in the spring. Do other plants show a different type of bloom in the winter?

TUE 9 DEC

TREACLE MUSTARD?? This species is one I have not previously identified and which I had expected to be a tall, erect plant up to a metre tall. What I found this morning was a small (25 cm) erect yellow flowered crucifer in the stubble of an arable field at Ladyholt (plant found at SU 75701665). At first glance I thought it might be Creeping Yellow Cress, but the leaves were all slim, elliptic, and entire averaging up to 20mm long by 4mm wide with very short (2mm) stalks. These leave were alternate up the stem and arranged in two ranks at right angles to each other (very slightly like Caper Spurge). The stem and leaves were hairless to the naked eye and the stem was not large enough for it to be obviously round or square (as I could see only one plant I did not pull it up to examine it, and did not wish to get down on hands and knees in a soggy field in the rain!). The flower head was circular with a ring of bright yellow small flowers around a centre of unopened buds. Below the flowers a few seeds were forming and these pointed up

at 45° (slightly curved).

RED CAMPION and DOVES FOOT CRANESBILL both had plants in full fresh flower in this area (three examples of the Campion in a woodland edge)

SPINDLE. Magnificently coloured arils still on show in Huckswood Lane.

MON 8 DEC

PERFORATE ST JOHN'S WORT was flowering by the roadside bus stop on the Emsworth relief road just east of the roundabout

WINTER HELIOTROPE. Now becoming too common to be worth comment – two more colonies starting to flower today, at Nutbourne and at Havant

PELLITORY OF THE WALL may be of more interest, especially as it was still flowering – seen at the foot of a garden wall in School Lane at Nutbourne

OTHER:

SUN 14 DEC

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY. One seen by Rosemary Web feeding on Ivy in Head Down Plantation today

RHODOTUS PALMATUS. A large toadstool which grows on dead Elm wood and has an apricot colour to its cap was also found by Rosemary Webb today. Not only is this a rarity but also, according to Rosemary, a very pleasant sight.

SAT 13 DEC

SEAL. A lady rang this evening to tell me that her husband had been rowing near Langstone Bridge this morning and had had a close encounter with a Seal. Julian Howard reported one at the Langstone end of the Wadeway on Nov 16th and I wonder if one or more have been present over the intervening month, unknown to myself and most of the village. In 1996, when I saw one off the South Moors in August, I was told by Andy Polkey that one had been regularly seen around the RSPB islands all that summer, reminding me how much wildlife around us escapes my notice.

WED 10 DEC

EXTINCT TORTOISE WAS ONLY KILLING TIME IN A SEYCHELLES BAR. A fascinating fact gleaned from Radio 4 'Wildbrain' quiz at 6.30pm on Wed evenings. It seems the giant tortoise species, listed as extinct, was found by naturalists visiting a bar behind which the tortoise was being kept as an attraction.

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

SUN 14 DEC

CHIDMERE POND. On my last visit to Chidham at the beginning of November I remarked that Chidmere Pond was bone dry for the first time in my memory. Today it is full again, with two Swans on it. Aldsworth Pond remains empty.

THU 11 DEC

FACTORY DEVELOPMENT ON THE SOUTH MOORS. In April agents acting for IBM put forward a proposal for an industrial park on the IBM land on the South Moors. That proposal involved three items to which I and many others objected. First was the extension of building south of the line zoned for industrial use in the Havant Borough plan (two of the factory units were to be built on the old IBM tennis courts and playing fields alongside Southmoor Lane south of the old IBM clubhouse site and extending a little further south than the roadway up onto Budds

Mound). Second was the damage that would be caused to the South Moors SSSI by diverting the existing footpath (from Mill Lane to Southmoor Lane) south-east across the SSSI and then west along the southern boundary of the southernmost factory. Third was the proposal to screen the development from the harbour by a large earth bank along the eastern and southern boundary of the development – no doubt this bank would have been planted with standard issue ‘native shrubs’ to make it look like any other motorway verge, but it would replace the existing north-south Blackthorn and Oak hedge which separates the South Moors from the IBM Playing Fields south of the public path, and which is a highly important wildlife feature of the South Moors This week a revised application has been submitted which omits all three of these items. The two southern factory units (F & G on the original proposal) have been eliminated and the southern boundary of the development is now in line with the Borough Plan zoning, running east-west close to the line of the existing path at the Southmoor Lane end (the scrubby hedges on either side of that path will be lost but I am not aware of any special wildlife interest in them other than an extensive Rabbit warren). The existing path from Mill Lane will retain its present line until well beyond the stile into the IBM Playing Fields and will then run along the new southern boundary of the site parallel to and less than 50 yards from its old line. Furthermore, both the ‘orchid meadow’ of the South Moors and all of the IBM playing fields south of the new development will be declared a Nature Reserve and should the application be allowed then IBM will give its management to the Hampshire Wildlife Trust with sufficient endowment to enable them to manage it in perpetuity – such management will of course have close co-operation from English Nature who are currently guardians of the South Moors SSSI (south of the existing path). I personally welcome this proposal which will (if approved) not only secure proper management for and protection of this important coastal wildlife site but will also increase the contact between Hampshire Wildlife Trust and Havant Borough, and hopefully that contact will in future extend to have a greater influence of the Borough’s management of wildlife places and issues.

OTHER PLANNING APPLICATIONS published this week include one which may give some slight mitigation of the Ham Field housing development at Hayling West Town – a small pond is to be created just behind the new carpark off the extreme southern end of West Lane, and while this is provided as a balancing pond to prevent other flooding or boggy patches within the site it may introduce some new wildlife interest. Nearby I see that a staunch Wildlife Trust member is applying to extend her house in North Shore Lane – I wish her success in this! Vodafone are planning to put up one of their masts in Havant Railway Station carpark and St John’s Ambulance are planning a new building in the Hooks Lane area of Bedhampton (south of Fraser Road). None of these have a detrimental effect on wildlife as far as I can see.

MON 8 DEC

Water is now present in excess quantities everywhere and it brought me three observations of interest today. First, cycling past Peter Pond up Lumley Road, I found a substantial stream flowing into the pond between two houses named Rivulet Cottage and Brookside – here, in a place I thought I knew well, was a

previously undiscovered natural feature. Secondly, and not previously unknown to me, the high water level reminded me of the size of the pond east of the 'towpath' along the streamside below Westbourne Church and just south of houses in New Road. Thirdly, the water had turned the wet meadows between Nutbourne Farm Lane and the shore into an extensive lake in which Teal thronged and around which a flock of 91 Black Tailed Godwit were feeding openly and at least 3 Snipe doing so secretively. A new fence now encloses a small part of the field close to the gate from Farm Lane, and this made me wonder if perhaps the rest of the field has been acquired by the Friends of Chichester Harbour to further extend the domain of wildlife around the harbour (as they have done at Thornham Point).

WEEK 48
DEC 1 - 7

BIRDS:

HOS CHRISTMAS COUNT. HOS members will have received their winter newsletter in the last few days and will have found with it a recording slip for what I think is a good way of getting some fresh air at Christmas and contributing to knowledge of the county's birds. The object is to record all the LAPWING and GOLDEN PLOVER flocks in the county, preferably by a count on Dec 28th, but if records for any day from Dec 24th to 31st will be acceptable. If anyone wants to join in and has not got a form I can tell you what is wanted (not supply forms – I only have one!). Don't forget the Winter SKYLARK survey while you are out, but for that they only want flocks of 50 or more larks.

SUN 7 DEC

CHIFF CHAFF. Plenty of these around in gardens and elsewhere now. Today I added one more place to look for them when I heard one in the Nore Barn copse at Emsworth.

YELLOWHAMMER. Also at Nore Barn, along the north side of the copse where it borders some rough stubble fields, I found at least half a dozen Yellowhammer in the hedge and suspect there were more of them.

SAT 6 DEC

KNOT. My first sighting of these this winter was of ten that appeared in my scope view while I was counting the Golden Plover on the Langstone/Warblington shore for the Chichester Harbour Low Tide count. Last winter I saw small flocks in Emsworth Harbour and off Northney marina but otherwise I do not remember ever seeing them north of Hayling Island. There may possibly have been an influx in the past few days as Brian Fellows tells me he found a good number off Tournurbury while making the same count and someone else said they had seen some at the Kench.

GOLDEN PLOVER. The Pook Lane shore flock at Langstone numbered around 464 – I only counted 164 when I got to them but a little earlier, while still at Langstone Bridge, I had seen around 300 flying south east to Hayling

GREENSHANK. One in the channel running east from the south east field of Warblington Castle Farm south of Nore Barn. At any low tide there is a good chance of seeing it there if you stand where the stream runs out under the repaired sea wall and look along the channel to where it bends to the right – expect the bird

near the bend.

SPOTTED REDSHANK. While counting the Emsworth Western Parade shore I heard a brief 'Chew-it' but could not see the bird and disregarded it. A little later, just after passing the end of Kings Road, a pale bird running fast across the mud caught my eye, and when I put my bins on it I saw it was a Spotshank – pale, with long legs and bill and having a prominent pale eye-stripe. It's speedy progress across the mud reminded me of the cartoon road-runner!

LESSER BLACK-BACK. Two were resting on the mud south of Emsworth Mill Pond and later one was on the pond where I recorded a single female Goldeneye, 33 Swans, 102 Mallard, 24 Tufted Duck, 2 Coot, 1 Greylag and 1 Cormorant

FRI 5 DEC

NEWCOMERS TO THE BIRD TABLE. This morning I noticed a ROBIN was on the hanging nut-feeder apparently copying the feeding habits of the Tits and Greenfinches. Even stranger was news from Tony Gutteridge of a GREY WAGTAIL visiting his bird table recently and pecking at the scraps of bread (possibly small insects had been attracted to the table).

BIRD SONG during the past week has been subdued but did include my first Mistle Thrush as well as the Collared Doves, Starlings, Robins and Wrens

GREEN SANDPIPER, SNIPE & POSSIBLE JACK SNIPE on the South Moors at dusk. No doubt about the first two very vocal birds. The third looked smaller than a Snipe and behaved like a Jack Snipe in getting up when I was close to it, flying low and pitching less than 100 yards away (repeating this behaviour when I went to look where it landed the first time) but it did make a noticeable 'skaap' call though not as strong as the call of the first Common Snipe. My 'Popular Handbook' (Hollom's compression of Whitherby) says of Jack Snipe 'It is normally silent when flushed but does occasionally utter a feeble Snipe-like 'Skaap''

NEWS FROM NIGEL CROOK (Jason's brother) when I met him on Budds Mound today was of a MED GULL and KINGFISHER he had just seen off Langstone Pond and of WATER PIPIT seen near Budds Farm outfall a few day's ago.

THU 4 DEC

AVOCET. Alistair Martin and I saw 9 together at Pagham Harbour (about an hour before high tide) at SZ 864967 where the channel running from the Ferry Pool meets one coming more or less directly from the reserve hut. We walked along the southern shore of the channel from the Ferry Pool, leaving the Long Pool on our right, until we could go no further and from there saw the Avocets about 200 metres north east of us. On the way there a Water Rail, hidden in reeds by the Long Pool, gave us its impression of a piglet in pain.

SLAVONIAN GREBE. Five seen together off the Church Norton beach about 500 metres out making the distinction between Slavonian and Black Necked impossible to make. A nearby Great Crested Grebe made us sure of the size. Three Wigeon on the sea also gave me an identification problem – the light made them appear jet black and I spent some time trying to convince myself they were Scoter before they turned to show their true colours.

NO GLAUCOUS GULL at Selsey that we could see – and none heard of there so far this winter. Other birds that we did not see were a LITTLE STINT reported to have been at the Ferry Pool last weekend and a WHEATEAR seen at Church Norton in late November. The reserve notice board did not mention any Great

White Egret!

WED 3 DEC

FIELDFARE. After yesterday's reports of snow falling within a few miles of us it was perhaps not unexpected to be greeted at dawn by the 'Chack, chack' of Fieldfare from trees at the end of my garden and then to see 10 Woodpigeon and the local tribe of 4 Crows helping to clear food put out on the lawn for the smaller birds.

SPOTTED REDSHANK. One flew over making its 'Chew-it' call as I headed south onto Thorney from Emsworth Marina. On the way there I saw my first Goldeneye in the Slipper Mill Pond. Very little on the Little Deeps only two or three each of Tufted Duck and Pochard plus the odd Coot and Dabchick and no Common Sandpiper in the 'canal'. A dozen Canada Geese were on Eames Farm fields and a single Stonechat was glimpsed (a second seen better on the airfield later)

KINGFISHER on its usual barbed wire fence perch below the military fence at the Great Deeps west end on Thorney with 15 Little Grebe fishing in the open water. Just four Egrets and two Heron with relatively few ducks or waders (five Pintail seen).

TURNSTONE are thin on the ground at the moment and I saw only one in my circuit of Thorney today. Shelduck numbers also still low.

GOLDEN PLOVER. I counted 182 on the airfield with Lapwing everywhere. Many Curlew and Brent feeding on the airfield from which there was one mass disturbance indicating a probable Peregrine visit.

EIDER. Arriving at the the Thorney Channel with Pilsey Island on my right I saw five female Eider close to the shore and half way north from there to the village I came on another group of four, this time with one male.

SHORT EARED OWL – not seen by me but as I was leaving the seawall at the east end of Thornham Lane I had a few words with one of two wildfowlers and heard his lament that all the duck now went to Pulborough Brooks (blame the RSPB for everything, I say) and also his report of having seen a single Short Eared Owl on a post near the Emsworth Channel seawall within the past week.

TUE 2 DEC

THE BIGGEST ROOKERY IN SUSSEX. A national survey of rookeries took place in 1996 and a report on what was found in Sussex is printed in the recently published Sussex Bird Report for 1996. This told me that the biggest rookery in Sussex, with 154 nests, was at SU 797070 within my SU 70 stamping gound. Today I went to the spot given by the grid reference and found it was in pony fields with no site for a rookery within 100 metre circle of that spot (and the report (and the definition of a rookery implies that all the nests must be within a 100 metre circle). There is what seems to be a relatively small rookery about 500 metres west (in the grounds of Hambrook House) and a few more nests in Funtington village) but the 'big one' has so far eluded me. Can you help?

(Since writing the above I have seen Anne de Potier who collected the data for that survey in SU70 – she did not know that the map reference was wrong and had taken the data from a resident (probably not a birder) having access to the private land around Hambrook House who had counted the nests. It seems that the map reference should be something like 791071)

GREEN SANDPIPER. Just upstream from the large pond in West Ashling, and south of Northbrook Farm, I saw a Green Sandpiper at SU 808075.

LITTLE EGRET. In the Ems valley south of Westbourne and north of the A27 I could not see a Green Sandpiper at the watercress beds but did find tow Little Egrets there – is this normal or have they started their winter move inland?

BRENT GEESE FEEDING. The only large flock I have seen feeding inland so far was just outside the Hampshire area for which we have been asked to record details. From the Lumley Mill Lane bridge over the A27 I saw 700 geese feeding on young corn in the large field south of the A27 and west of Southbourne.

PURPLE SANDPIPER. Brian Fellows saw one back at Southsea Castle today – the first I have heard of this winter

MON 1 DEC

MISTLE THRUSH SONG. Although I have thought/imagined that I heard Mistle Thrush song on several occasions recently the first proof that they are singing came as I cycled up Prospect Lane (just south of Wakefords Way and close to the Staunton Community School) and passed directly below an Oak on which one was giving a very poor and repetitive performance (but definitely not a Song Thrush).

SUN 30 NOV

BRENT GEESE. During a brief evening walk I came on 51 Brent feeding on young corn on Warblington Castle Farm when the majority of the geese were on the exposed mud and water. If you see Brent feeding please note the date, time, place (exact field) and number of geese. Although the report form does not ask for it I think it is worth noting the crop or vegetation on which they were feeding and also if they were ignoring any deterrents (gas guns, posts with ribbons between them, etc). I can let you have report forms or will pass on your information if it contains the above data.

SAT 29 NOV

GOOSANDER. A redhead seen off Budds Farm outfall at high tide was presumably the same bird that is often seen at the Oysterbeds (last winter it also alternated between the Oysterbeds and the Hermitage Stream).

MERLIN. As I arrived at the Oysterbeds the sky was full of Dunlin and shortly afterwards I met someone who had seen the cause of the disturbance – a Merlin taking a Dunlin and heading east with it.

SPARROWHAWK. After the Dunlin had settled following the Merlin Jason Crook pointed out a young male Sparrowhawk sitting on the outer islands of the Oysterbeds causing no disturbance to the other birds

OYSTERBEDS DUNLIN ROOST. In past winters Dunlin have always roosted in the main pool area and on the north end of the bar across Stoke Bay, but I do not think I have ever seen more than 5000 of them. Today I estimated there might have been 9000 of them, and at a conservative estimate there were 7500. I regard this as further proof of the success of what has been done there.

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. The person who saw the Merlin also told me that the Great Northern Diver had been seen again at Anglesey Lake, Gosport over the past two days and he thought it used the sheltered inland water to escape rough seas. Later Brian Fellows told me that he had seen the Diver and two Goosander in an even more unlikely place than Anglesey Lake, namely the dammed off end section of Workhouse Lake which forms a northern spur to Stoke Lake of which Anglesey Lake is the western spur.

GREAT WHITE EGRET. I hear that there are rumours of one having turned up at Pagham, but have no details.

LITTLE AUK. Mark Cutts tells me that he had heard from an Ian Calderwood that a Little Auk had been on the lake near Fort Gilkicker today, but he could not locate it when he visited after 15.30

SPEEDIER REPORTING OF RINGED SHOREBIRDS IS NOW POSSIBLE – Peter Potts is on the Internet. This evening I had an e-mail from him replying to my report of ringed Brent. His address is PPotts@Compuserve.com

REPORT FROM KEVIN STOUSE OF TODAY'S WALK AT PAGHAM included sightings of 2 AVOCET and 1 female EIDER as highlights among 65 species seen by a group of 24 people led by Kevin. They also heard CHIFF CHAFF calling and saw GOLDCREST, GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER and TREECREEPER. 1000+ WIGEON flying over were an impressive sight before they landed among a large number of PINTAIL. Four SNIPE and a couple of SHOVELER were also seen

PLANTS:

FRI 5 DEC

GREATER PERIWINKLE and CREEPING THISTLE both flowering by the Lavant stream where it passes Tescos in Havant, and the CELERY LEAVED BUTTERCUP and SEA ASTER still flowering on the South Moors

WED 3 DEC

CORN SPURRY was the best plant in flower on Thorney Island today. At the southern tip leading to Pilsey a mass of Sea Radish was still flowering and among other plants on the island I found Lesser Burdock, Spear Thistle and Field Pansy. On the way home I found Winter Heliotrope flowering on the south side of the relief road and again just west of the roundabout.

TUE 2 DEC

MONKEY FLOWER (*Mimulus guttatus* I think) was flowering in a tiny roadside stream at SU 806077 or thereabouts. Masses of plants and many flowers.

MISTLETOE. Another find of a big old Lime tree in a walled garden with at least 12 bunches of Mistletoe on it was in Funtington opposite the carpark for Hallidays restaurant on the minor road to West Ashling

MON 1 DEC

WINTER HELIOTROPE. My second find of flowering plants was beside the Horndean Road as I passed Rowlands Castle church, just north of the double mini-roundabout on the left of the road.

BUSH VETCH. Not an isolated plant, but a colony of half a dozen plants all in fresh flower at the crossroads just north of Pyle Farm at Horndean (SU 71351265 on the east side of the road south of the crossroads)

SUN 30 NOV

COW PARSLEY flowering in Pook Lane and by the 'Selangor Avenue' path leading from the A259 to Nore Barn

CREEPING BUTTERCUP – at least 50 flowers in a small sheltered patch between the Hayling Billy Danewort site and Lymbourne springs

SAT 29 NOV

CELERY LEAVED CROWFOOT (or Buttercup) was the most unexpected plant found flowering today – on in full flower in the tiny stream running into the Tamarisk Pool

at the South Moors. In the pool where the Brockhampton stream emerges on the south side of the A27 Water Speedwell was still in flower

INSECTS: Nil **OTHER:** Nil

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

FRI 5 DEC

SINAH COMMON. Last year we saw the Gorse of Sinah Common north of the Gravel Pit partially cleared (and we cannot object to the removal of old Gorse to let new Gorse grow – that is a vital part of habitat management) but we have also seen that the clearance appears to have been planned by someone with a mind to turning the area into a public convenience (not of the lavatorial, but of the urban park/rural picnic place type) with a pattern of walks focussing on picnic benches. This year more of the gorse has been removed to create extra revenue for the Borough as a Pay and Display carpark, and most recently we have seen further urbanisation through the creation of flower beds around the easternmost concrete bunker on the close mown grass area. To my mind this style of management of the Borough's heritage of natural habitat is a reflection of the absence of any 'nature conservation' expertise within the Borough staff and is inevitably leading to loss of natural habitat throughout the Borough, replacing it with what can best be described as 'gentle urbanisation'. (Plans for the Hayling Billy cycleway are a prime example of this and I fully support the County Council in refusing their consent to allowing that sort of urbanisation on the Hayling Coastal Path which they own and manage as a natural place through their Countryside Service). Should you wish to comment on this you know have a rare opportunity to do so as the Borough is applying to itself for planning permission to retain the new carparks at what they call the Sinah Common Gunsite (Reference: 97/62554/HBC to be quoted in writing the Head of Planning and Development at the Council offices) – in my letter of objection to retaining the carparks as they now are I will feel free to make comments similar to the above about other aspects of the Borough's land management.

TUE 2 DEC

RIVER EMS CANAL CLEARANCE. At Westbourne today Environment Agency workers were giving the canalised stream beside the footpath south of the church a thorough cleanout. No doubt necessary but I hope we do not lose our Skullcap or Branched Bur Reed plants, nor the dragonfly larva from the mud under the workers feet.

WEEK 47
NOV 24 - 30

BIRDS:

SAT 29 NOV

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SPEEDIER REPORTING OF RINGED SHOREBIRDS IS NOW POSSIBLE – Peter Potts is on the Internet. This evening I had an e-mail from him replying to my report of ringed Brent. His address is “PPotts@Compuserve.com”

FRI 28 NOV

LITTLE OWL. News from Sonias Bolton of one seen at the Marlpit Lane ‘Nightingale site’, i.e. where footpath goes east from the lane near its lowest point. At dusk last night I made an unsuccessful foray from the A259 near the A27 junction into the field at Warblington Castle Farm – no sign of an owl in any of the usual trees there. Other news from Sonia this week includes advanced notice of new stamps going on sale in January and depicting the endangered species in Britain, including *Turdus philomelos*, *Cypripedium calceolus* and *Gryllotalpa gryllotalpa* (Bird, plant and insect, buy the stamps for the English names!)

THU 27 NOV

BLACK REDSTART. A super male at Portchester Castle this morning was my first bird delivered by E-mail! I received the news late on Tuesday evening but did not go to look on Wednesday (Dave Mead, who had heard about the bird from other sources, spent an hour at the Castle that morning without seeing it) and when Alistair Martin took me there this morning and parked in the small carpark near the castle entrance the bird was perched on the wall in front of us (just to the right of the main gate) as we got out of the car. It was fairly restless (probable hungry and searching for food) but not in the least shy, and we watched it for twenty minutes or so from outside and inside the castle walls as it flitted backwards and forwards along the length of the west wall, usually perching against the skyline to give us good but brief views of its sooty plumage, prominent white wing patches, and orange tail (very bright when spread in flight). The young lady in charge of the

castle for English Nature enjoyed a good view of it through Alistair's scope and has guaranteed it full protection,

MAGPIE COURTING. Also at Portchester Castle Alistair spotted a Magpie carrying a large stick in its bill and seemingly offering it to another Magpie – presumably courting rather than actual nest building. On the ground nearby a flock of 30 Collared Dove were definitely in non-breeding (flocking) mood

GOLDEN PLOVER. An evening visit to the Langstone shore gave me an estimated 400 Golden Plover – flock is growing rapidly.

WED 26 NOV

FIELDFARE. At East Harting I first heard a group of four flying towards South Harting, then found a flock of around 30 in a small orchard. A few Redwing also heard in the area.

SKYLARK. This winter we have been asked to record all Skylark flocks with more than 50 birds, and this morning I saw around 30 fly up from a field of young Kale – has anyone seen bigger flocks yet?

A BARN OWL BARN? I started my walk at South Harting today going west past the church to Church Farm (SU 783195) from which I headed north and was able to look back on a barn with three large, old windows with no glass to restrict an owl's entry – through one window I thought I could see old hay bales and had the impression that the inside of the barn would have all the facilities a Barn Owl would need for its nursery.

TUE 25 NOV

BIRD SONG. Around 7.15am the 'dawn chorus' of Robin and Wren was perhaps not deafening but certainly strong. This died away within ten minutes as the light strengthened and a Song Thrush then started to shout from a tree in my garden at another some 200 yards off. After breakfast, with full daylight, two or three Starlings made it known which chimney each owned. Later in the morning song was intermittent but I did hear another Song Thrush in the Q E Park where several Marsh Tits added themselves to my weeklist.

MON 24 NOV

GOLDEN PLOVER. The flock on mud east of Langstone Pond today numbered around 250 with another 30 or so south of the mill

MUTE SWAN. Also off Langstone Pond were three cygnets on their own and with more white than brown in their plumage – presumably their parents have now driven them off to fend for themselves as the adults begin to think about next spring.

GOLDENEYE. Two females back in the Oysterbeds pools which retain water, along with Mergansers

WOOD PIGEON. A group of five were on my lawn 'hoovering' up the bird seed this morning – so far this autumn we have just had one local pair.

PLANTS:

SUN 30 NOV

COW PARSLEY flowering in Pook Lane and by the 'Selangor Avenue' path leading from the A259 to Nore Barn

CREEPING BUTTERCUP – at least 50 flowers in a small sheltered patch between the Hayling Billy Danewort site and Lymbourne springs

SAT 29 NOV

CELERY LEAVED CROWFOOT (or Buttercup) was the most unexpected plant found flowering today – on in full flower in the tiny stream running into the Tamarisk Pool at the South Moors. In the pool where the Brockhampton stream emerges on the south side of the A27 Water Speedwell was still in flower

FRI 28 NOV

COMMON CENTAURY. One or two plants on the Rosamund's Hill field at Stansted still covered with a mass of tiny pink buds, and where the soil had been turned to plant a block of Kale for the pheasants in that field many plants of Sharp Leaved Fluellen had tight closed buds plus empty calyces but nothing that I could claim represented current flowering – there was one flowering plant of Thyme Leaved Speedwell among them.

WED 26 NOV

FERNS AT EAST HARTING. On a previous visit in the summer I had been impressed by the wealth of Harts Tongue fern along the banks of the minor road past Hollist Farm, and today I walked the other parallel road through the main part of East Harting, finding both Polypody and Maidenhair Spleenwort on old walls at roughly SU 800197 (i.e. right on the edge of my SU 71 territory). It seems that Maidenhair Spleenwort is an unusual find for our area.

COW PARSLEY. Yet another single plant in flower, technically just outside my recording area at SU 787202 on the northern outskirts of South Harting. Nettle Leaved Bellflower and Honeysuckle were in flower nearby

TUE 25 NOV

SMALL SCABIOUS and COMMON KNAPWEED were two flowering surprises high on War Down in the Q E Park (at Brow Barrows picnic site). On the edge of the wood above Buriton a GREAT MULLEIN had a fresh spike with two flowers open and on the northern tip of the hill (half way down the hill and in square 7220 just outside my territory!) I discovered the thickest Spurge Laurel 'forest' that I know of – one solid patch around 15 by 10 yards and several scattered outstations.

MON 24 NOV

HAWKWEED OXTONGUE and BLACK HOREHOUND both flowering at Hayling Oysterbeds where Milk Thistle plants continue to grow their basal rosettes

INSECTS:

FRI 28 NOV

RED ADMIRAL BUTTERFLY. One flew from me, driven by the wind, at Stansted. Later I saw another (maybe the same one), downwind of the first. Sonia Bolton tells me they have been nectaring on ivy near her house at Stansted on my days recently.

OTHER:

FRI 28 NOV

STOAT and WEASEL both seen hunting today. In Stansted woodland a Weasel crossed my path less than 20 yards ahead, stopping to have a good look at me with customary arrogance before continuing its hunt for mice under the bramble bushes. The Stoat was seen by Sonia Bolton somewhere in the Racton/Hambrook/Woodmancote area where she also saw a HARE.

DEER. During my visit to Stansted today I passed one bunch of half a dozen Fallow does, and Sonia Bolton tells me she has recently seen a full-antlered buck near her house. Another item which interested me this week was an account from Alistair Martin of seeing a Muntjac come to drink at a pool when he was birding at Minsmere – it was presumably a buck as he remarked on the prominent fang teeth which protrude from the mouth and are used for fighting, and he presumably saw it in the summer when it would still be growing its antlers (cast in May/June). What particularly interested me was his statement that it was nearly as big as a Roe whereas I had imagined them to be smaller, not much bigger than a Hare – checking the measurements given in my Readers Digest Animal book I see that a Muntjac buck is around 19 inches high at the shoulder (and its rounded back makes the back end taller) where a Roe buck is about 25 inches at the shoulder. A Hare is less than a foot high at the shoulder (its ears are only 4 inches long) and the length of a buck Hare from nose to tail is only 22 inches (half way between the heights of the two deer species).

TOADSTOOLS. Still plentiful this week with large troops of Clouded Agaric everywhere (some of the larger ones may well be the similar *Clitocybe geotropa*) and Wood Blewit now common. A new find today was a troop of WRINKLED CLUB – whitish spindles standing a few inches high on the woodland floor.

THU 27 NOV

FISH don't get much publicity in these notes but this morning at Portchester Castle we asked one of the anglers if he had caught anything and he replied "Just one" with a smile on his face before removing the sacking over a very large plastic barrel in which a huge Bass that must have been over 3 feet long and bulky with it was gradually fading from this life – the angler estimated it at just under 10 pounds in weight which I would have thought was a conservative estimate. My interest was mainly in the fact that fish as large as that can be swimming close to the shore at high tide.

TUE 25 NOV

Many more toadstools to be seen in the northern tip of the Q E Park this morning. Two which caught my attention were a colony of EARTH STARS in the beech leaf litter and my first fresh JEWS EARS of the winter on Elder wood.

MON 24 NOV

TOADSTOOLS at the HAYLING OYSTERBEDS. The area between the pools and the Billy Trail was recently a rubbish tip landfill site and the process by which this was turned into a green open space must have involved the import of various soils plus the planting of trees and shrubs using wood chippings as a mulch around their stems. This combination is likely to result in a variety of fungi that are not native to the site, and cycling along the diversion path (the one put in this year while lorries were using the main track) I passed a number of dense clusters of various species – most of them well past their best. The freshest which I saw was a woodland species, the Soap Tricholoma – named on account of its smell of soap. It attracted my attention because most of the toadstools in that clump were deformed (possibly confused by the chemical residue of the rubbish tip).

LOCAL ISSUES & HABITAT:

FRI 28 NOV

Today's website update will introduce an attempt to start recording the topographical data about our area that I have felt from the start should be one of the major contributions that I could make to knowledge of local habitat. Previous attempts have been unsatisfactory – we will see how this attempt fares! The new element is the separation of basic data about each square from the accounts of my visits to the square, and I now hope to build up two separate files – one of basic data, the other of walks – having a format like the examples below. I will not publish them in these weekly notes but they will be available on the website.

Sample of data for each 1km square:

SU 7911 S (=Sussex) PIG LEG

Topography:

- The minor road to Up Marden runs north through the centre of the square in a valley between two ridges which have their southern ends in this square, sloping down to the valley of the source of the River Ems which is on the southern boundary of the square. The eastern ridge, with Inholme Wood on it, is around 100 metres at the north of the square while the western ridge with Woodbarn on it is lower at around 85 metres. At the southern end of the square these ridges have fallen to the valley height of around 40 metres. The soil is shallow and stony everywhere with chalk not far below the surface.
- On the map the small copse along the west of the Up Marden road is marked as Pig Legged Row but a local resident told me that they call the field on the east of the road 'Pig Leg' (centre SU 794112) and that the name may be taken from the zig-zag shaped hedge with many tall trees running from 795111 north to 796116.

Land use:

- Arable – 83%; Woodland – 15% (Broadleaved – Beech, Oak, Hazel); Roads and tracks – 2%
- On the west side of the road game rearing is important and a block of arable land is planted with mustard and maize with feeding drums around it.

Wildlife features:

- The north west corner of the square along the public path west from the road towards Watergate is a good place for birds (possible Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest tree at SU 79141192) and an interesting selection of chalk arable plants can be found in the field edge here (Dwarf Spurge)

Changes:

- The path route shown on the map from 796112 follows the field edge but in fact it is now routed across the field, not making the dog-leg to follow the hedge.

Visits:

- 23 Nov 97

Walks:

- 4 (i.e. see Walk number four for details of route)

(Sample of walk data on next page)

Sample of data for each walk:

4. Walderton, Pig Leg and Watergate (SU 7811 and 7911)

Start: Roadside carpark at junction of B2146 with road to Stoughton in Walderton (SU 788105). Distance: 5.5km

Walk east towards Walderton but turn left before first house to skirt the west edge of the village. When you emerge on a village road turn right for 100 yards, then left on a narrow path between houses. Over stile in fields turn right. Continue in a line north east uphill to edge of Inholme Wood where you turn left downhill to cross the Up Marden road and climb a broad, old track through trees that are usually good for small birds. At fork in path go left, emerging on a field edge rich in chalk plants, and with several dead trees in open (re-planted) woodland on your right (a big dead tree at SU 79151190 near an established Holly tree here was thought to have a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker nest). Continue west passing Watergate House on your left (in winter look for much Mistletoe in lime trees here). At main road turn left along it (alternatively go across road and turn left along woodland path, but get back on road before path turns away from it). Very soon after woodland on left gives way to a rough open field turn left off road over stile with finger post and follow a straight line south east across fields back to Walderton, rejoining your outward path through the village.

THU 27 NOV

Two public meetings in the Havant area tonight marked further steps towards the loss or degradation of open space used by wildlife within Havant. One was a Langstone Residents Association meeting (the separate Langstone Village association were having their AGM separately at the sailing club that same night!) to hear County Council plans **to build a school for disabled children on the Bosmere School playing fields** between the Langstone Roundabout and the Xyratex factory (here the loss would be mainly of an open space though Little Egrets have been known to rest on it in winter). The other was the Havant Town Residents Association which heard of two schemes affecting the Hayling Billy line – **the proposed cycleway and the very recently revived plan for an inner relief road connecting Emsworth Road to Fairfield Road**. The road would remove much of the habitat which brings migrant Chiff Chaff and winter Blackcap to my garden, and from which I hear much bird song through the year, but would not preclude the cycleway (which would be routed along a wide pavement at the side of the road). Although there is a possibility that funds to build the road might be extorted from developers of other sites in Havant (principally Potash Terrace) the plans shown to us seemed ludicrous for various reasons – mainly with the road ending at a roundabout just south of the New Lane level crossing from which traffic would have great difficulty in moving on and would be gridlocked on most occasions when the level crossing gates closed. The absence of any progress on the cycle route seems to be due to total non-cooperation from the County Council who own much of the land (on Hayling where they own the whole Billy Trail they are refusing to turn it into a cycle way, and say that any cycle way should be routed along the main road). Maybe this is good news – we will still be able to cycle down the Billy Way but with none of the urbanisation of the route.

TUE 25 NOV

DOWNLAND SCRUB CLEARANCE. It has recently become the latest fashion to replace our declining Rabbit population with Conservation Volunteers in order to keep downland free of scrub, and this morning I saw that one of the two (or perhaps machines) had completely removed large patches of brambles and hawthorn on the steep slope of Chalton Down where the line of Huckswood Lane continues west along a short stretch of road over the railway and then straight on up the down heading for Chalton village. Probably done with the intention of getting more grazing for horses, but it should extend the already good butterfly population on this slope (Chalkhill Blues, etc)

WEEK 46 NOV 17 - 23

BIRDS:

SUN 23 NOV

FIELDFARE. A group of at least three in the Walderton area and a separate single bird in the Watergate area. Also a couple of Redwing flying south over Walderton.
SONG THRUSH song heard again at daybreak (when there was quite a strong 'dawn chorus' of Robins and Wrens). I believe I heard a distant Mistle Thrush for the first time.
CARRION CROW 'SONG'. For the first time this winter I heard a Crow announcing its presence with the 'motor horn' sound that serves to defend its territory (and for all I know to charm a mate)
BRENT GEESE FEEDING INLAND. Last February I was in Walderton and astonished to see 600 Brent fly overhead and land on fields near Watergate House. Today I spoke to a dog walker in that area and asked if it was a regular happening. He said that he had seen the geese and been equally surprised – they had appeared there on just two or three days, so it was neither a regular practice nor a 'one off'.

SAT 22 NOV

SONG THRUSH SONG. From my garden at daybreak I heard this for the first time this winter, and another bird was singing strongly from a garden at Harbourside (Langstone) at dusk. Sonia Bolton tells me they have been singing since Tuesday (18th) in Stansted and also in Winchester this week.
DUNNOCK SONG. Also revived by the cool night and sunny day – one heard in my garden in the morning and another in the Q E Park later in the day.
COLLARED DOVE FLOCK. In past years it has been their habit to leave many gardens and flock in stubble fields during the autumn, but not this year. Today I came on the first flock (40+ birds flying, later I counted 32 on the ground with others out of sight) at a farm at Chalton.
FIELDFARE. Another sighting of a small flock of six detected first by call. These were on the ground in a large field of autumn sown cereal just north of Chalton on the west of North Lane. Sonia Bolton had another single bird at Stansted today.
BRAMBLING. In the Q E Park I heard the distinctive 'tsweek' note and looked up to see a single male on the very tip of a Beech tree above my head. I had an

excellent view of its bright white underparts but could also just see the orange upper breast and black head, and when it flew away from me the white rump showed clearly. (Note that Coal Tits can make a similar note, though you should not mistake the two calls)

GOLDENEYE & BLACK NECKED GREBE were both at the Budds Farm outfall at high tide late in the afternoon. I counted five grebes and twenty Goldeneye with six males among them – the first of these smart male duck I have seen this winter.

GREEN SANDPIPER. At dusk on the South Moors I had just given up the search for this by the stream flowing through the Tamarisk pool when it came flying south over my head, calling loudly, before it turned east along the line of Mill Lane

FRI 21 NOV

GREAT NORTHERN DIVER. Alistair Martin went to Anglesey Lake today in search of the **LONG TAILED DUCK** which I saw last Saturday – he saw it and agrees with Brian Fellows in thinking it is a young male (based on various factors, but mainly because he saw it fly a short way and when it settled back on the water it showed white feathers from its mantle covering the inner edges of its closed wings), but he also found a juvenile **GREAT NORTHERN DIVER** present in this pool.

WED 19 NOV

GOOSANDER. The regular redhead seen in the outer of the two Oysterbed pools which retain water at low tide. Size was clearly greater than the half dozen Merganser in the same pool, as was cut off between head and body colour. Although just swimming around this bird displayed bold white wing patches that are normally only seen in flight.

POCHARD. I counted 42 on the west end of Sinah Lake (probably more Pochard than Tufted Duck, but not as many as the mass of Coot now present). One pair of Shoveler also on the lake.

ROCK PIPIT. One seen very clearly in the old brick works field across the Billy Track from the Oysterbeds

MON 17 NOV

MAGPIES. At Langstone Pond near dusk I counted 17 Magpies seemingly coming to roost in trees around the pond but they then seemed to disperse.

HERON ROOST. While trying to see if there was a roost of Little Egrets in the Yew tree in the north west corner of the Wade Court wet meadow I disturbed 9 Grey Herons which flew onto the saltings off the pond (the tide was just starting to fall)

SUN 16 NOV

TITCHFIELD HAVEN. Today's walk led by Kevin Stouse was enjoyed by about 20 people who heard two **CETTI'S WARBLERS**, saw a flock of 100 **BLACK TAILED GODWIT**, a **STONECHAT** and two **REDWING**. A young **KESTREL**, shouting from its perch, made its hunger known to an adult that was hunting nearby and Kevin himself was closely buzzed by a **SPAROWHAWK**. Kevin also told me that he had seen a late **SWALLOW** in the Horsham area on Nov 8th.

Mark Cutt's Birding News

Mark, living in Gosport, has a website giving news of birds in that area and when I looked at it on the 21st I noted two items that could be of interest to readers of these notes. One is a report of two SABINES GULLS seen around an Isle of Wight Ferry on Nov 11th, the other is of a YELLOW BROWED WARBLER seen at Alum Bay on Nov 13th and still there on the 15th (possibly wintering?). One other item which he selects is of a GREAT GREY SHRIKE in Tottenham Marshes, London (feeding on football fans?) – perhaps he mentions it because we have no local ones so far this winter.

PLANTS:

SUN 23 NOV

COW PARSLEY found in flower again at Watergate – this was a more substantial plant with an erect flower stem and several flowerheads. Also in the Walderton/Watergate area I found more plants in flower to bring my count for this week (starting yesterday) to 51 already. The best two today were FIELD MADDER and DWARF SPURGE, both flowering at Pig Legged Row.

MISTLETOE. Walking past Watergate House today with the leaves off the trees I checked on the Mistletoe which grows high on several Lime trees there. I counted 9 trees with the plant on them, and one tree had at least 14 clusters on it – some are huge and have probably been there since the house was built and the trees planted, but there are quite a few smaller bunches which I assume have their origin in birds which, having eaten fruit from the older bunches, wipe their bills on other parts of the tree. Similar huge bunches can be seen on trees around the original site of Idsworth House by the ‘walled garden’ south of Idsworth Chapel – these are also Lime trees, as is the one site I know for this plant in Emsworth on the south side of the A259 opposite Highland Road (the tree is at the west end of a bus stop layby). As Mistletoe berries appear at this time of year I assumed it flowered in the autumn, but I see that it has the strange habit of flowering in early spring and then ‘holding fire’ throughout the summer with the berries not developing until late autumn – I can see the logic of flowering before the leaves appear on the trees and fruiting after they have fallen when the berries are more easily spotted by passing birds, but the mind boggles at the process of natural selection leading to this biological rhythm.

SAT 22 NOV

COW PARSLEY was one of 42 plants I found in flower on this lovely ‘first day of winter’. I have seen plenty of Hemlock in flower recently but this was definitely Cow parsley. Other unexpected plants found in flower today included OPIUM and COMMON POPPY, DOVES’S FOOT CRANESBILL, BURNET SAXIFRAGE & STICKY MOUSE-EAR

VALERIANELLA DENTATA. Most of us are familiar with the small, bushy, blue/pink flowered Cornsalad (*Valerianella locusta*) that can occasionally be found growing in stony places in profusion, and this summer on Idsworth Down I was introduced to a second species which is described in the Hants Flora as ‘locally frequent’ (the same status as *V. locusta*) to be found ‘in cornfields and other arable, widespread and locally frequent on the chalk, occasional on other fertile soils, but rare in the south’ of the county. The distribution map in the Flora shows only two sites in our area, one at the west end of Portsdown and the other on Idsworth Down where I

found if earlier this year. Today I found a single plant at SU 735162, just within the next Tetrad north of the one in which it has been recorded in the Flora, and even more surprisingly it was in flower. To be truthful I did not recognize it in the field and at first thought it was a plant of Dwarf Spurge but as it did not look right for that I took a piece home, and it was only when I was looking at it under the microscope that I found two fresh flowers hiding among the leaves!

SPINDLE BERRIES. On some bushes these are still very colourful with delicate pink 'flesh' surrounding the orange 'seeds'

FRI 21 NOV

THE BRISTLE-GRASS SAGA CONTINUES. Way back in August I found a strange grass on Idsworth Down and came to the conclusion that it was a Bristle-Grass species (*Setaria*) with *Setaria viridis* as my first stab at identifying it. I sent it to Paul Bowman who replied that it was definitely not that species and his identification was *Setaria parviflora* (a species so unusual that it is not mentioned in Francis Rose's 'big book of grasses'). Paul sent the specimen on to Eric Clement, the local expert in alien plants, and this morning I have a card from Paul saying that the species is now *Setaria pumila*

THU 20 NOV

PERFORATE ST JOHN'S WORT still flowering on a farm tip at Broadreed Farm with a last Common Poppy and several plants of Fennel and Black Horehound among more common winter flowers. A little east of the farm the field north of the track had more weeds in flower including some huge Sun Spurge plants and the remains (seeds only) of Field Pennycress.

WED 19 NOV

WINTER HELIOTROPE out on South Hayling – first flowers of this winter. There were about half a dozen flowerheads along the south side of Sea Front/Ferry Road between St Catherine's Road and Links Road.

WHITE MELILOT was still flowering at the Oyster Beds and the MILK THISTLE plants had grown from flat, ground hugging leaf rosettes to bushy rosettes – no flower stems arising yet.

SEA ROCKET. One plant flowering on Sinah Common close to the houses just east of Staunton Avenue. Many plants of Large Flowered Evening Primrose still in flower here.

VIPERS BUGLOSS still flowering by Ferry Road (north side just east of the Sinah Warren entrance).

TUE 18 NOV

DOVES FOOT CRANESBILL. A single flower in grass at Juniper Square, Havant, was unexpected.

INSECTS:

SUN 23 NOV

SPIDERS AND FLIES. The black 'wolf spiders' (*Pardosa* species) which hunt in the leaf litter of woodland floors are still active though I think the ones I am now seeing are young from this year as they are all small. At home there is still one orb-web spider stationed outside one of our windows and this is I am sure a surviving adult by its size – I suspect this is a *Meta segmentata* which Dick Jones says is active

from late summer to autumn and occasionally in spring (implying winter survival). There are still quite a few flies around when the sun shines and today I was surprised to find what must have been a type of Mosquito resting on a wall.

FRI 21 NOV

1997 BUTTERFLY REPORTS. Today I completed the job of extracting my butterfly sightings for the year and began to fill in the report forms to help with the compilation of the Hampshire Butterfly Report – have you done yours yet?

OTHER:

SUN 23 NOV

LAND SEAWEED. Clumps of algae growing on the land are not uncommon but easily overlooked and probably (to judge by my own mistake) assumed to be fungi. I used to come on these rubbery lumps quite often on the IBM North Harbour site but have not seen any for a long time until I came on a single isolated clump in a field edge at Pig Legged Row near Watergate House

WHITE FALLOW DEER. From the Walderton road junction carpark I had a good view of one in Lordington Copse but at that distance could not see anything more

SUN 16 NOV

COMMON SEAL. At lunch time today Julian Howard rang me to say that he had just been watching a Seal's head bobbing in the water (at high tide) less than 200 yards from his window in the Green Cottage at Langstone. He estimated the Seal was floating above where the post which mark the Wadeway would have been visible at low tide. When I commented that the Seal had probably been following a shoal of fish Julian said that he had also noticed what might have been a 'feeding frenzy' among gulls nearby.

WEEK 45

NOV 10 - 16

BIRDS:

SUN 16 NOV

GREEN SANDPIPER. While at the mouth of the Lavant Stream I heard the bird's loud calling as it came south from the moors and headed east over 'The Ship' towards its alternative accommodation in the Langstone Pond/Wade Lane area. A little later I found two people with two large dogs walking south down the 'fairway' of the South Moors, one of the people driving a Golf Ball down it (I have not yet told George Hedley!) and assume they had put it up.

KINGFISHER. Two glimpses of one in the Brockhampton Stream pitching onto and later leaving a perch on the rudder of the 'Good Wreck FREYA'. Other birds seen during an afternoon ride from Broadmarsh to Langstone along the shore included Black Necked Grebe and Goldeneye off shore, and a male POCHARD on Budds Farm pools

STOP PRESS/LATE NEWS. On arriving home this evening I found more press cuttings in my letter box and was interested in what the Daily Telegraph for Sat 1st Nov had to say about the result of a long running experiment to establish the impact of raptors on grouse. For five years (1992-96) the Langholm Grouse Moor was studied by the Game Conservancy and the Institute for Terrestrial Ecology

while the owners and gamekeepers took no action against the raptors present. During the period Hen Harriers increased from 2 to 14 breeding females and Peregrines from 3 to 6 pairs. At the start 2,000 Grouse were being shot a year, by the end only 100 were shot. The article does not say what other factors may have reduced the grouse but it does say the Harriers (and Peregrines) killed 30% of the breeding grouse each spring, 37% of the chicks each summer and 30% of the survivors during the autumn. The report also shows that grouse moors on which the foxes are shot make breeding success much greater for the ground nesting harriers. The Game Conservancy are proposing as a solution to the problem of allowing both Harriers and Grouse to survive that Harriers should be introduced to all grouse moors at a rate of one breeding female harrier per 6,000 acres of moor and their numbers controlled by removal of eggs (no adults to be shot). The article is very anti-RSPB who have always said that raptors do not effect the economics of grouse shooting – I await developments!

SAT 15 NOV

LONG TAILED DUCK. The bird which Dave Mead had seen at Anglesey Lake, Alverstoke, on Thursday was still there this morning near the road at the west end of the water. It had lots of white on its head but no 'tail' and was presumably an 'autumn female'. I found a single Egret on the small piece of 'saltings' on the south side of the water, but no Goosander. I then went to Fort Gilkicker but did not see the Black Redstart.

JACK SNIPE. During the high tide count at the IBM Lake I had an unusually prolonged view of one. I had just put up a Common Snipe from a favourite roost place (large, long billed, noisy, and going off like a rocket with a somewhat zig zag flight) when a much smaller bird got up about ten yards from me (probably already alarmed by the departing Snipe) and flew silently up to about 50 feet with much weaker flight, then made a lengthy circuit over the lake during which I could see the shorter bill, before dropping behind reeds on the far side of the lake about 50 yards from me.

IBM LAKE BIRDS. Other birds seen during my count included the handsome WOOD DUCK, a single SHOVELER and 8 POCHARD plus 22 TEAL but only 9 TUFTED DUCK. Only four HERONS and 2 CORMORANT, but at least 6 LITTLE GREBE, 38 COOT (if it turns cold the numbers will at least double next month) and 36 MOORHEN. I was slightly surprised to find 4 CANADA GEESE – I would expect them all to be in larger flocks by now.

FRI 14 NOV

BRITAIN'S OLDEST BIRD? Today Anne Hearn passed me two press cuttings, one reporting the failure of a FULMAR to return to the Orkney nest site it has used continuously for 46 years since it was first ringed (then an adult, so more than 46 years old and still laying an egg last year). The bird may still be alive somewhere – have you seen it? The other cutting revives thoughts of the possibility that PENDULINE TITS will colonise southern England – report based on a recent report from Kent.

THU 13 NOV

STANSTED FOREST - A walk through Lyels Wood and around Pond Copse (carrying my permit from Michael Prior!) gave me no exciting birds but plenty of interest. Two LESSER REDPOLL flew over Lyels; 16 SKYLARK flew north over the

field south of the avenue carpark, crossing the path of 10 REDWING (elsewhere I saw a group of 4 Redwing and two loners); TREE CREEPER and male BULLFINCH showed well; the SWAN pair with their single 'Polish' cygnet were on the Brick Kiln Pond (with nothing other than 8 Coot, 1 Mallard and 2 Moorhens); a GREEN SANDPIPER was heard calling as it flew around but was not seen; and there was a flock of perhaps 20 GOLDCREST with a few SISKIN in conifers in Southleigh Forest

LONG TAILED DUCK & GOOSANDER. Dave Mead rang to say that today he had been watching a single Long Tailed Duck with a redhead Goosander in Anglesey Lake at Alverstoke (the extreme western tip of the Haslar and Stoke Lake channel at Gosport – this end section is dammed under the old railway bridge from which Dave was watching the birds and retains water at all states of tide, but is topped up at high tides which overtop the dam and flood Little Anglesey Road alongside the lake). Because of the dam and the topping up process a lot of fish get trapped in the water and this is what probably attracts the regular winter party of Goosander here. Today there were also two Little Egret.

BLACK REDSTART. The first which I have heard of this winter was a male seen by Dave Mead on buildings at the back of Fort Gilkicker as he was walking the path between the fort and the golf course

WED 12 NOV

BARRED WARBLER. With Alistair Martin I went to look for this bird in Victoria Park but did not see it. We did see BLACKCAPS feeding in a well berried Holly Tree (I was told up to half a dozen were in the same tree) and watched a male SPARROWHAWK eating its prey in full view on a tree overhanging Edinburgh Road (from a large pale feather which floated down we think the prey was a Collared Dove but someone who saw the hawk carrying it though it was smaller). Also in the bird cages in the park we saw LADY AMHERST & GOLDEN PHEASANT, RING NECKED PARAKEET, and a well dressed male MANDARIN among many other exotic species. We also visited Southsea Castle and the Canoe Lake but saw neither Purple Sandpiper nor Med Gull.

TUE 11 NOV

SANDERLING. Around 60 on Seagull Island west of Black Point in the high tide roost with perhaps 200 Dunlin, 40 Ringed Plover and a few Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Redshank which were joined by 8 Turnstone.

RINGED BRENT GOOSE. Among a flock of 130 Brent in the creek on the landward side of Black Point was one adult with large rings on each leg. The rings were a pale yellow with a single green letter on each – the left leg definitely had an "H" and I think the right leg had the same letter though my first impression (seeing one side of it) was of an "I" so that the bird appeared to be saying "HI" to whoever saw it.

DARTFORD WARBLER. While watching a STONECHAT at Sandy Point flying to and perching on the top of a bramble bush I witnessed a very aggressive attack on it by a Dartford Warbler which came out of the cover of the bush and drove the Stonechat off, then tried to go for a Wren that had flown into the bush (but the Wren disappeared within the bush and the Warbler did the same). Anyone wishing to get good views of the Warbler should bring along a stuffed Stonechat and put it on top of the Warblers favourite bush.

SPARROWHAWK – at midday a male made a high soaring flight over my garden

almost identical to the one I described on Oct 29th. On both occasions the hawk was closely accompanied by a Crow and their interactions resulted in a sort of slow waltz across the sky with the two birds coming together and moving apart as they continually changed direction but never moved far in any one direction.

KINGFISHER. A good view of one near the mouth of the Lavant stream, seen perched on a Hawthorn after flying south from the bridge south of Mill Lane.

BRENT on the South Moors are relatively unusual. John Gowen saw a family of four there today and I saw a group of five flying off. (Also two Common Snipe)

GOLDENEYE. My first sight of these this winter was of 11 swimming up to Budds Farm outfall in tight formation. Presumably they have arrived here in strength today as both Brian Fellows and Dave Mead saw some today both at Budds Farm and by the Eastern Road (off the Great Salterns area). There were also more Pintail (perhaps 20 off the outfall) and Shoveler (2 dozen or more on the pools)

BARRED WARBLER. When I got home I found a message from Peter Strangeman to say that he had been watching one of these vagrants in Victoria Park, Portsmouth, at 2pm this afternoon. He described it as a 'huge grey Whitethroat' and said it was feeding on black berries from an unidentified bush alongside Edinburgh Road. I passed on the news to Dave Mead who also saw it as dusk was falling.

CROSSBILL. This morning Dave Mead saw 9 in Havant Thicket conifers somewhere north of the 'yellow brick road'

MON 10 NOV

BRENT GOOSE STRATEGY. The Solent Shorebird Study Group is continuing its recording of Brent onshore feeding areas and this morning I received a package of maps which give code letters/numbers to every field in which it is thought that Brent might feed and everyone is invited to help recording when and where they do (and do not) feed. If anyone wants to join in I have the maps with the field codes and the reporting forms —there is no obligatory part of this exercise, you just record what you see when you see them (though anyone prepared to monitor an area regularly will produce much more valuable data). Records of the fact that Brent do not feed in some of the fields are as important as counts of those that do feed in other fields.

GREEN SANDPIPER. One seeming to settle in for the night beside a transient pool in the field south of the old farm (now stables) at the end of Wade Court Road. The bird was on the east side of Wade Lane, not in the 'Wade Court meadow' with the big pool on the west of the Lane

TREE PIPIT & BREEDING STONECHAT are mentioned as highlights in the annual report by Horndean Parish Council's Countryside Ranger (Alan Williams). He does not specify a location but I guess both were on Hazleton Common (south of Dell Piece West which connects Catherington Lane to the A3M)

SUN 9 NOV

FIELDFARE. A flock of a dozen flew south over Oxford where we spent the day, and a GREYLAG GOOSE on the Thames was an addition to my year list.

SAT 8 NOV

LEACH'S PETREL. News from Dave Mead of one having been seen fluttering near the shore off Hill Head, then gradually moving east to Lee on the Solent, all the time being attacked by Herring Gulls. Probably weak or ill at the start it is unlikely to have survived.

PLANTS:

SUN 16 NOV

NETTLE LEAVED BELLFLOWER (just one perfect flower) and an unidentified WILLOWHERB species were among a long list of plants still in flower in the Clanfield area

SAT 15 NOV

THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL flowering at the IBM site

THU 13 NOV

DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS. A single, complete flower head made a pretty sight on the carpet of decaying leaves at the edge of the old Boating Lake west of Brick Kiln Pond at Stansted today. In Lyels Wood I noted one flower of TORMENTIL and many fresh Primrose leaves

TUE 11 NOV

SEA SPURGE, LARGE FLOWERED EVENING PRIMROSE, and a few flowers of BUGLOSS were still to be seen in the Black Point/Sandy Point area and the rare SHARP RUSH within the reserve had a display of shiny, rich brown seeds which looked as if they had been varnished

INSECTS:

WED 12 NOV

RED ADMIRAL. While in Victoria Park, Portsmouth one flew past and I later heard that Theo Roberts had three together on ivy in his garden today.

TUE 11 NOV

Three or more COMMON DARTERS still on the wing at Sandy Point in warm sunshine today but no butterflies seen.

SAT 8 NOV

RED ADMIRAL and BRIMSTONE seen in Havant Thicket by the 'Evening Class' group walk

OTHER:

SUN 16 NOV

COMMON SEAL. At lunch time today Julian Howard rang me to say that he had just been watching a Seal's head bobbing in the water (at high tide) less than 200 yards from his window in the Green Cottage at Langstone. He estimated the Seal was floating above where the post which marked the Wadeway would have been visible at low tide. When I commented that the Seal had probably been following a shoal of fish Julian said that he had also noticed what might have been a 'feeding frenzy' among gulls nearby.

MON 10 NOV

FOX & RABBITS. Crossing the pony fields north of Wade Court from the Billy Line to Wade Lane I could see several Rabbits out in the field next to Wade Court and under the fence on the west side of this field (nearest the Lymbourne stream) I saw a Fox with its back to the Rabbits, patiently watching a track through the bramble bushes outside the field from which another Rabbit might emerge. My patience was

not as great as that of the Fox, and I left him to it. Seeing the Fox did remind me of an incident that I forgot to include in last week's notes – this was the story of the Fox who chose our garden to die in. Early in the morning one of my dogs started yapping and drew me down to the end of the garden, expecting to find a Hedgehog but actually finding a Fox with its back and back legs apparently paralysed. I could not figure out how it had got into the garden in such a state but the immediate problem was to get it out and to a vet. After a number of phone calls (including one to the RSPCA at Stubbington which produced an answerphone message saying "We are not available", but not including one to the RSPCA national number which might well have brought one of their inspectors but at some unpredictable time the day after tomorrow!) I found out that there was a Fox rescue man in Fareham but he was out at work for the day, so I summoned help from the Animal Ambulance run by Martin Hunt at Rowlands Castle who said he could take the Fox to a vet who would treat it at no charge. The Ambulance arrived within half an hour, the Fox was given a towel to bite on (rather than biting us) and we slid an old blanket beneath it and lifted the body in this hammock into a strong metal cage which went into the ambulance. Before he left Martin put in an appeal for volunteers to help with his work – giving 24 hour coverage for incidents anywhere between Gatwick and Fareham. The only requirements besides being able to drive are to have a clean police record (much of the work is done with the police) and to honour any commitment made to be available at agreed times of day and night!

HABITAT & LOCAL ISSUES:

TUE 11 NOV

Today I became aware of Havant Borough Council's preparation to meet its obligation to have a 'Local Agenda 21' programme (part of the British commitment given at the Rio environmental summit). A project set up to propose a plan for Havant is called **SHAPE** (for **Sustainable Havant Action Plan Environment** – not the greatest of acronyms!) and HBC has commissioned an organisation called the **EARTHWORKS TRUST** to collect opinions on what needs to be done and put them into a plan to be launched in July 1998. They will collect input in the period Oct-Dec 97, sort out priorities and develop a draft plan in Jan-Mar 98, and discuss the draft plan with interested parties in Apr-June 98 prior to the launch in July. As the title SHAPE implies the intention is that each community should become more 'Sustainable' and this covers a wide range of activities from Resource, Energy and Waste Management to things like less Crime and more Health, but in the thirteen major strands which the Earthworks Trust say make for a Sustainable Community is one which says "A sustainable community is one in which wildlife is valued and protected", offering those like us who fully support that statement to make some of our ideas known to, and hopefully adopted by, the Borough

The Earthworks Trust is funded by East Hampshire District Council and is based at the 'Sustainability Centre' within Mercury Park (the replacement for the Navy on the hill between Clanfield and East Meon). In addition to the 'consultancy role' under which they are working for Havant they provide education, training and public awareness on environmental matters – I see that the BTCV were running part of their training there in September.

MON 10 NOV

BRENT GOOSE FEEDING SURVEY. Today I received a large packet containing huge (A1 size) maps of Portsmouth, Fareham and Havant Boroughs, together with a list of field names relating to the field numbers shown on the maps, and forms for recording observations of feeding Brent on inland fields. This is the second year of this survey organised by the Solent Shorebird Study Group and is set up to provide base information for the local authorities to plan for the geese (under pressure from the RSPB, Wildlife Trust, etc who have established the concept of a Brent Goose Strategy in the thinking of the local authorities). All data will be gratefully received and if anyone wants to provide occasional casual records of Brent feeding (or regular daily counts of fields in their area) I can tell them how to set about it (though I am not involved in organising the project!)

HORNDEAN/WATERLOOVILLE WILDLIFE & CONSERVATION ACTIVITIES.

Another item in today's post was a combined newsletter reflecting the activities of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust South Down district group; Catherington Lith Conservation Group; Friends of Catherington Down; Hazleton Common Conservation Volunteers; Hurstwood Community Project and Merchistoun Park Pond Project. Lots of good things happening up there and if you want to know more about their walks, talks and/or conservation tasks I suggest you contact John Vigay on 01705-592383 as he seems to be the editor of the newsletter and should know what's going on (I have the published details, but there may be more to know!) I am putting lots of contact names and addresses/phone numbers on the Wildlife Organisations page of my website

WEEK 44

NOV 3 - 9

BIRDS:

SAT 8 NOV

LOW TIDE COUNTS. In addition to the monthly high tide counts of roosting shorebirds that have produced statistics about these birds for over 30 years (and which are now merged with the Wildfowl Counts started by Peter Scott in 1947 under the general title of 'Wetland Birds Survey' or WeBS) many estuaries now undertake low tide counts to establish where the birds feed – vital information for their conservation. This winter low tide counts are being made in both Portsmouth and Chichester Harbours and today was the first. I count from Langstone Bridge to Emsworth Mill Pond, taking about three hours to do the counting and almost as long to fill in the forms when I get home, but it is not all drudgery and this morning the first thing I saw was a PEREGRINE hunting the area south of Pook Lane. When the birds settled I recorded 471 BRENT (plus one dead bird at Conigar Point – another case of pollution like the poisoned bird I took to Brent Lodge?), 229 DUNLIN, 118 LAPWING and 114 GOLDEN PLOVER among other species. Off Langstone Mill Pond 12 HERON were roosting and off Nore Barn there were 46 WIGEON (with one GREENSHANK). Surprisingly I only saw 8 SHELDUCK and 2 RINGED PLOVER

HALF SIZE CANADA GOOSE. Last year there was a tiny version of an adult among the flock on the IBM Lake on several occasions, and this week one of several E-

Mails which I received in response to a piece in THE NEWS (which I have not yet seen) about the new Farlington Notice Board and my website was from a Mark Cutts of Gosport who is also setting up a website to give Birding News of Titchfield Haven and the Gosport area. His website mentions a Canada Goose of 'the minima race' and I see that there are ten different races of this breed to be found in America – the bird he has seen, which I suspect is the one I have seen on the IBM Lake last year, could be a vagrant that has reached us naturally from America (raising the appalling possibility that the American birds will all re-route their migration to this country). For those wanting news from Titchfield I will include a link to Mark's website in my own.

PAGHAM HARBOUR DARTFORD WARBLER. Mark Cutts' news includes a report of a recent Gilkicker Group visit to Pagham where they saw 5 AVOCET and a DARTFORD WARBLER half way down the south-west shore (usual place)

POLISH SWAN. Brian Fellows has also, in his notes for last week, solved a mystery that has been puzzling me about the cygnet hatched to a pair of Swans on the Stansted Brick Kiln pond this year which had seemingly become adult before its time – presumably through suffering the same genetic defect which he describes for one of the Peter Pond cygnets.

BIRD SONG (Week 1 – 7 Nov)

On Nov 7th more than one COLLARED DOVE sang near my garden in which a DUNNOCK sang repeatedly, outdoing the local ROBINS and WRENS. Later in the morning I heard two or three SKYLARK singing at Chidham and several STARLING at various places. I still have not heard Mistle or Song Thrush.

FRI 7 NOV

FIELDFARE. My first winter flock of 20 birds heading south onto Thorney Island as I went along Thornham Lane, then another three perching on Hawthorns close to me as I followed the minor road to Prinsted and a couple more at the orchards east of Prinsted.

THU 6 NOV

REDWING. A small flock of seven flew over me at the junction of Prospect Lane and Whichers Gate Road and a single bird perched above me at Links Lane where I was about to turn onto the path across the Golf Course into the Holt.

LESSER REDPOLL. Also at Links Lane I heard the calls of Redpoll and saw a line of 13 birds heading west towards the Holt

SPARROW HAWK. A brief glimpse of one apparently chasing a Jay in Havant Thicket (though I suspect the Jay was just getting out of the way).

WED 5 NOV

WOODCOCK. A walk in Hollybank gave me no special birds (3 REDWING and the usual Tits, Bullfinch, Goldcrest and Tree Creeper) but in Southleigh Forest north of the road I came on an interesting damp clearing from which I put up the first Woodcock I have seen for months.

GOLDENEYE. Kevin Stouse saw the first of these that I have had a first hand report of in Budds Farm pools.

MON 3 NOV

BRENT GOOSE. Sitting in the tideline at the mouth of the Lavant stream at Langstone I noticed a Brent Goose behaving very strangely – its neck writhing like a very active snake. I assumed it was caught in fishing tackle and went to try to

release it, but when I reached the bird I could see no external problem yet the head and neck continued their violent motion, so I decided that the problem must be internal and that the bird needed to get to hospital as soon as possible. I had little difficulty in capturing the goose though it did tumble and roll about as if it had no control of its nervous system. It was soon in my old haversack which I put in my bicycle basket and placed my folded raincoat on top to restrict the bird's movement. Back at home I transferred the goose into a cardboard box and took it by car to Brent Lodge, and the last I saw of it after it was taken out of the box it was standing more or less normally and without the uncontrollable neck movement, so I think it had a chance of recovery. I assume it had swallowed some poison affecting its nervous system.

PAGHAM HARBOUR SIGHTINGS. After leaving the Brent at Brent Lodge I went on to the nature reserve to see what was on the notice board. The most exciting current sighting was of a **YELLOW BROWED WARBLER**, making me wonder if our wintering bird(s) at Budds Farm will come back this year. Interesting birds which I could almost certainly have seen had I gone on to the beach at Church Norton were a party of 11 Eider and the first three or four **SLAVONIAN GREBE** (plus one **RED NECKED**). From the harbour 8 **AVOCET** were reported and will presumably be staying the winter. Recent one-off sightings were listed for **BARRED WARBLER**, **LESSER GREY SHRIKE** and a **RAVEN** flying east. Kevin Stouse also visited Pagham today, seeing 2 **AVOCET**, 6+ **EIDER**, 4 **SLAV GREBES**, 150 **PINTAIL** & 1 **KNOT**.

CHICHESTER GRAVEL PITS. A quick look at Ivy, Copse and Trout Lakes revealed a roost of 135 **CORMORANT** on the power lines over the west Trout Lake (with more birds arriving as I left) and a total of 40 **GADWALL** on these lakes (I expect there were more on the Nature Reserve lake). I could only spot four **POCHARD** and heard a similar number of **CHIFF CHAFF** in the willows round the lakes.

SUN 2 NOV

THORNEY ISLAND WALK. **REDWING** were seen at Marina Farm and a **CETTI'S WARBLER** was heard where the path debouched onto the seawall (in the bushes around the pond by the 'stilt houses'). One **BEARDED TIT** was heard and seen at the Little Deeps on which were around 30 **POCHARD**. Six **GREY PARTRIDGE** flew and ran over the field by Eames Farm and one **KINGFISHER** perched close to us at the Great Deeps where there was a good selection of birds including a dozen **LITTLE EGRET**, several **GREENSHANK** and a few **PINTAIL** (we did not see a Little Stint which Maureen Coleman, who we met there, told us she had seen before we arrived). **ROCK PIPIT** were seen all around the shore but a small flock of half a dozen in the bay north of Marker Point was unusual, and before reaching the point we saw four **REED BUNTING** on a blackberry bush. Along the edge of the airfield those at the front saw a single **SWALLOW** and those at the back watched a **SPARROWHAWK** hunting. What we could see of the wader roost was disappointing (Grey Plover and Dunlin) but it was clear that there were many more birds out of sight behind the ridge of sand – we did eventually see three or four **SANDERLING** running along the tideline but Kevin Stouse picked out the best birds, two **SANDWICH TERN**. Looking back over the airfield we saw about 80 **GOLDEN PLOVER** and a carpet of **RINGED PLOVER** on the grass. On the way

home the only birds of interest were one STONECHAT seen briefly flying past and perching momentarily on dead Mugwort and a PEREGRINE (seen, I think, only by Kevin Stouse at the back of the party).

SAT 1 NOV

GOLDEN PLOVER. Cycling north along Mill Lane from Lumley in Emsworth I found 130 Golden Plover in the large cereal field immediately south of the A27 and east of the bridge taking Mill Lane over it (around SU 759065). Emerging from the north end of Mill Lane onto Old Farm Lane and heading towards Woodmancote I saw another 8 Golden Plover in the first field north of Old Farm Lane and then another 100 in the large field north of the junction with Stein Road. All were actively feeding, well separated from each other and making short 'run and grab' dashes as they spotted worms or insects. In the same fields were many Lapwing and quite a few Skylarks.

GREY PARTRIDGE. Four rose close to me at Racton Park Farm and joined another dozen or so further away on the north side of the isolated brick barn. I assume they were all Grey (the four that I saw closely were) and that they were locally raised game birds.

TAWNY OWL. One hooting near my garden at night – the second time I have heard them here this autumn.

PLANTS:

FRI 7 NOV

CREEPING CINQUEFOIL still flowering near Emsworth Marina and CHINESE MUGWORT was flowering on the east bank of Nutbourne Bay

THU 6 NOV

One last (?) flower seen on WEASELS SNOOT in the New Lane allotments, where COMMON FUMITORY was still flowering strongly, and in Havant Thicket I came on one plant of GOLDEN ROD in full flower.

WED 5 NOV

TANSY was still flowering in the abandoned garden of Holly Lodge in the Hollybank Woods where BITTERCRESS was freshly re-flowering in the damp rides

SAT 1 NOV

TUFTED FORGET ME NOT (*Myosotis laxa* = *caespitosa*). Among the plants found in flower today I came on this small flowered species of Water Forget me not in the tributary of the Ems which flows under the east end of Commonsides at Westbourne (the large flowered *Myosotis scorpioides* is much commoner)

INSECTS:

FRI 7 NOV

Three RED ADMIRALS and one SPECKLED WOOD seen in the Southbourne/Chidham area

WED 5 NOV

COMMON DARTER still flying in Hollybank Woods

SUN 2 NOV

Three RED ADMIRALS were seen during the walk around Thorney, and four COMMON DARTER dragonflies including two still mating, flying in tandem over the Great Deeps.

OTHER:

Plenty of toadstools seen this week but not recorded in detail. Troops of CLOUDED AGARIC began to appear in woods and lemon coloured EARTH BALLS (*Scleroderma citrinum*) were common. At Chichester Gravel Pits there was the usual troop of FLEECY MILKCAPS beside the path near Ivy Lake and in Havant Thicket I saw the bright red of a couple of FLY AGARIC. On a scar on the trunk of an old Beech near Pyle Farm I found an eye-catching cluster of large, greasy, yellow toadstools coming sideways out of the crevice – I don't know what they were but *Pholiota alnicola* was one of the candidate species.

HABITAT:

None of this week's Havant Borough planning applications seemed likely to have much effect on wildlife but I was interested to see two applications affecting local churches – a Yew in St Faith's churchyard is to have its crown reduced (hopefully not becoming too much of an eyesore) and a new church hall is to be built adjoining St Peter's Church in Northney and occupying part of the churchyard.

Richard Williamson (in his talk on Wed evening) mentioned Chidmere Pond at Chidham as a possible haunt of Bittern in winter, probably unaware that at the moment the whole pond is totally dry and looks as if it had been so all summer. Ignorance of another sign of the low water table was revealed by a Radio Solent reporter on Friday who claimed to be standing by the bubbling Homewell spring, full of the clearest water, whereas the pool that is normally full has been almost totally dry for weeks and you will be lucky to see a single bubble from the remains of the spring which keeps a tiny pool in one corner.

WEEK 43 OCT 27 – NOV 2

BIRDS:

SUN 2 NOV

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FRI 31 OCT

DARTFORD WARBLER. Cycling along Ferry Road past the Kench I saw a small bird flying over the heather of the Golf Course and into a bush. Although I thought it was probably a Dunnock something about it made me wait for it to show itself and I was delighted when it flew to a nearby wild lupin bush and perched on top showing the perfect silhouette of a Dartford Warbler with tail cocked and breast flushed with rusty red to offset the dark bluish grey back. It flew again with a second bird which turned out to be a female STONECHAT.

GREENFINCH. During the first half of this year I would have listed Greenfinch as possibly the comonest bird of all in this area but since August they have apparently vanished so I was pleased to see a flock of around 100 on the beach and grass of Gunner Point. I am still concerned that the decline in numbers which I have observed is more than the usual effect of moult and then movement from a widespread distribution during the breeding season into a few large compact winter flocks.

POCHARD. The flock which has been building up (as usual at this time of year) on Sinah Lake numbered around 40 this morning

MERGANSER are present in Langstone Harbour in large numbers now (I must have seen half a dozen 'flotillas' each of up to 30 birds as I cycled down the Billy Line and visited the Kench. I was looking hard for Goldeneye but saw none (so far I

have only heard one third hand report of two in the Harbour last week-end).

WED 29 OCT

SPARROWHAWK. A small male flew slowly over my garden at breakfast time, perhaps 150 feet up and seemingly enjoying the beautifully clear and sunny (but frosty) morning. With it came a Crow almost twice its size, accompanying the hawk as if it felt duty bound to see it off its territory but without any active aggression. As a result both birds stayed close together, the hawk apparently taking no notice of the Crow but continually changing direction and making turns which kept it almost overhead for several minutes.

BRAMBLING. One heard but not seen with Chaffinches on Beechmast at the Rowlands Castle end of Stansted main avenue. The loud harsh 'tsweek' call is unlike that of any other birds that I know. A note from Dave Mead tells me came on some last week in the New Forest and during last Sunday's walk round Farlington Peter Gardner told me he had seen a small flock near his home in the Froxfield area.

DUNNOCK. No song heard today but a group of three at Stansted were indulging in the wing flicking which is a major part of their courtship.

MARSH TIT. One in an isolated clump of trees at SU 748119 just outside Stansted Forest (west of Warren Down) and another heard on re-entering the Forest at SU 737108. Also seen in and around Stansted on this lovely morning were one or two Siskin with Goldfinch (one singing), a good few Nuthatch and Goldcrest, several Jays and a party of 6 Yellhammer near Andrews Farm. Just one Redwing seen over the Forest and another over my garden. One of the first birds I saw was a male Bullfinch and others were heard in several places

MON 27 OCT

JACK SNIPE. One seen by John Gowen on the South Moors. Normally these manifest themselves by getting up when you are just about to tread on them, then flying silently (and with relatively weak flight compared to the rapid getaway made by Common Snipe) perhaps fifty yards before pitching again but such rules of thumb cannot be relied on and it seems this one made a low circular flight before disappearing and revealed its identity mainly by size (the 'half size' bill of a Jack Snipe is a giveaway if seen in profile).

GREEN SANDPIPER. One on the remaining pool on the Wade Court wet meadow seen soon after 11am. Later John Gowen told me he had recently seen one back at the South Moors.

GOLDEN PLOVER. The low tide flock east of Langstone Pond numbered around 120 today.

LESSER BLACKBACK GULL. Looking from Mill Rythe I saw what I think is a regular flock of more than 30 on the saltmarsh at the tip of Gutner Point

ROCK PIPIT. One making its asthmatic call at Mill Rythe as it flew over

STOCK DOVE. Flock of more than 45 on North Hayling fields with Wood Pigeons and Rooks on newly ploughed (and sown?) ground.

LESSER REDPOLL. One flying over my garden in the morning – also over the garden were four REDWING and two GREY WAGTAIL (seemingly a pair with the male making a selection of calls that almost amounted to his full 'song')

SUN 26 OCT

BEARDED TITS and a possible DARTFORD WARBLER were highlights of my

sightings on a mass pilgrimage to Farlington Marshes led by Kevin Stouse. At a guess there were nearly forty people at Broadmarsh for a combined HWT and HOS walk on a glorious day and I heard that a STONECHAT had been seen at Broadmarsh before I arrived but my first sighting there was of two SWALLOWS while a DUNNOCK sang strongly (first of two heard singing). Bearded Tits were seen by the Reserve Building and again by the lake, and REDWING were seen in the Bushes with GOLDCREST. GREENSHANK were heard from the stream and over 40 PINTAIL were on the lake with SHOVELER though a single SNIPE was the only wader by the lake. Four EGRET flew over the main marsh and the start of the SHELDUCK build-up was to be seen with 30 birds between the reserve and Kendalls Wharf. At the Point, where Fieldfare and Blackcap were reported to have been recently seen (no Short Eared Owls yet), there had been several sightings of Dartford Warbler and I was lucky enough to glimpse what was probably the bird flying from a bramble bush into gorse – I was dubious as it did not look dark enough, but Chris Cockburn told me it was a juvenile and that I saw it in the same place as everyone else (bushes by the fence line in the north east corner of the Point field).

BARN OWL. Driving to Soberton after dark I passed within a yard or so of a Barn Owl perched on a roadside fence post and facing me. I was worried that it would take off and fly into the path of the car but it remained transfixed in the headlights giving me a perfect view of a genuine wild bird. The place was approx SU 625173 on Long Road running west from its junction with the Hambledon to Droxford road at Race Course Cottage.

SAT 25 OCT

TREE CREEPER. Now that the leaves are falling it is becoming easier to see these birds that are so often heard without being seen. I had good views of two separate birds and one Great Spotted Woodpecker in Barton's Copse this morning

BLACK NECKED GREBE. Off the mouth of the Lavant Stream I had relatively close views of 11 (possibly 12) Black Necked among 20+ Great Crested. Also seen here were one GOOSANDER, three MERGANSER (including the first male I have seen), and 20 or more WIGEON. Although it was sleeping and I could not see the clear cut off between red head and grey body I am pretty sure it was a Goosander – not only was this a regular spot for one to hang out in the winter but the body shape (with a small cocked up tail) was characteristic and this bird was clearly not associating with the distant party of 3 Merganser.

ROCK PIPIT. My first definite sightings – one in Chalk Dock close below the seawall and one on the South Moors shore with a small group of Linnet.

COLLARED DOVE SONG. Last night I published the internet version of these notes (which I aim to make available for anyone to see from each Saturday morning) and commented that I had not heard Collared Dove song once this week – first thing this morning one or more could be heard several times from my garden. I had also commented that MISTLE THRUSH should soon be singing and this morning while straining my ears to pick out what I thought was distant Thrush song (more like Song Thrush) a rattling Mistle Thrush flew to a typical tree top song post – maybe these possibilities will soon become fact.

PLANTS:

SAT 1 NOV

TUFTED FORGET ME NOT (*Myosotis laxa* = *caespitosa*). Among the plants found in flower today I came on this small flowered species of Water Forget me not in the tributary of the Ems which flows under the east end of Commonsides at Westbourne (the large flowered *Myosotis scorpioides* is much commoner)

FRI 31 OCT

VIPER'S BUGLOSS was the most colourful and least expected plant flowering on Hayling seen by me this morning. Among other plants flowering were EVENING PRIMROSE, THRIFT & SEA CAMPION.

WINTER HELIOTROPE. Keep your eyes open for this to start flowering. It seems to start very soon after the first frost has touched it – in some years this is in November, in milder winters we have to wait until January. This year I have already seen many fresh leaves but no sign of flowers yet. Gorse is well into its winter outburst of golden blossom already.

WED 29 OCT

FIELD PENNYCRESS A lot of this flowering (and starting to hold up its 'penny shaped' seeds like Honesty) in a turnip field at SU 741117 north of the path which runs east west in front of Drews Farm near Dean Lane End

THISTLES. On this morning's walk from Rowlands Castle (Woodberry Lane) to South Holt Farm and back I found five species of Thistle in flower (Creeping, Spear, Watted, Musk and Marsh). Other plants found flowering included Musk Mallow, Sharp Leaved Fluellen, Ox Eye Daisy, Large Evening Primrose and Italian Rye Grass.

MON 27 OCT

CHICORY and FLAX (the species sown for Linseed Oil) both supplied beautiful bright blue flowers along the edge of Mill Rythe. With them Lucerne was still in flower.

WHITE MELILOT was flowering at the Oyster Beds near two more interesting but much less eye-catching plants. One was CHINESE MUGWORT and the other was 16 ground hugging leaf rosettes of what must surely be MILK THISTLE plants. If the latter grow into full plants they will make a spectacular sight but the Chinese Mugwort is never impressive – what was interesting about it was that it had been flowering and still had some colour left in its tiny flowers. In a normal year this plant never gets a chance to flower as its flowering season does not arrive until October.

HAIRY BUTTERCUP Many plants flowering in two areas of North Hayling and one flowering plant of Tansy seen by the roadside.

SUN 26 OCT

TUFTED VETCH, YELLOW-WORT, COMMON CENTAURY and TEAZEL were all in flower beside the route taken by Kevin Stouse's walk from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marsh. LUCERNE was flowering by Broadmarsh Slipway and PINK WATER SPEEDWELL in the pond where the Brockhampton Stream emerges from underpassing the A27 (No Kingfisher on that pool).

SAT 25 OCT

GOLDEN SAMPHIRE and ROCK SAMPHIRE were both in flower at Broadmarsh and South Moors respectively and there were a few white flowers on Sea Campion Inland I was slightly surprised to record COMMON VETCH in flower.

SPURGE LAUREL was plentiful in Barton's Copse and had many tight buds – no flowers expected until after Christmas.

INSECTS:

SUN 2 NOV

Three RED ADMIRALS were seen during the walk around Thorney, and four COMMON DARTER dragonflies including two still mating, flying in tandem over the Great Deeps.

FRI 31 OCT

RED ADMIRAL, SMALL WHITE and COMMON DARTER all seen on Hayling in warm sunshine despite another frost.

WED 29 OCT

Despite a frost overnight a COMMON DARTER was on the wing in Stansted Main Avenue before 9.30am

MON 27 OCT

A PEACOCK butterfly came into our house, no doubt seeking somewhere to hibernate, but was re-directed to a cooler place such as the garden shed. One COMMON DARTER was also seen, choosing to fly just in front of me (above my bicycle basket) as I was cycling along the Hayling Billy line.

CLOUDED YELLOW. John Gowen rang to tell me he had seen one on the South Moors last Friday (the same day that one was seen at Farlington Marshes by Chris Cockburn – reported in last week's notes)

SUN 26 OCT

RED ADMIRAL seen at Farlington but much more interesting news from Chris Cockburn of a **CLOUDED YELLOW** seen by him there last Friday (Only his second of the year)

OTHER:

WED 29 OCT

FOX. One seen in The Sling area of Stansted at around 9.15am where many people are normally walking their dogs – the fox was coming from Michael Prior's garden.

SAT 25 OCT

HEDGEHOG. On Thursday this week Maureen Coleman rang me to ask if I had heard of any disease affecting Hedgehogs as she was aware of several being found dead on South Hayling for no apparent reason. Today I came on a small one (probably this year's youngster) sitting like a Hare in its form in a small hollow nest of leaves (totally exposed on top) and it did not move away even when my foot was almost touching it. It may have been sun-bathing and was still there when I returned after more than an hour, though this time it did move away.

HABITAT:

HERMITAGE STREAM. A joint project by Havant Borough and the Environment Agency to remove the concrete channel in which the stream runs through Leigh Park and to restore the natural course of the stream and the natural vegetation of its banks has been under way for several years. A good deal has been done in that time to improve the look of the land around the stream but before the concrete could be safely removed careful calculations had to be made about the flow of the stream and the possibilities of flooding the nearby houses. These have now been completed and

a planning application has been submitted by the Borough on Oct 14th for the removal of concrete and restoration of a meandering stream with natural vegetation surrounding it in the short section between Middle Park Way and Purbrook Way. The section between Park House Way and Middle Park Way will not be changed but the longer section from Purbrook Way to Barncroft Way will hopefully be given the same treatment but 'not yet'.

The application describes the species to be planted both on the banks and on the surrounding 'meadow land', and the plans show that close mowing will only apply to the edges of the paths, the rest of the grassland is to be subject to appropriate mowing regimes. The flower list includes Cowslips, Lady's Bedstraw, Ox-eye Daisies, Musk Mallow, Knapweed (Black & Greater), Yellow Rattle, Self Heal and Devils Bit Scabious. Along the wet margins of the stream planting would include Common Reed and Reedmace, Water Plantain and Arrowhead, plus Yellow Iris. If implemented as proposed, and not vandalised after implementation, this scheme will transform this part of the stream from an unpleasant drain into an attractive natural feature. The proposal has my full personal support.

HAYLING BILLY LINE CYCLEWAY. The proposal for which a planning application was submitted in September has not yet come before the Planning Committee.

75 NEW HOUSES AT WESTBOURNE. The 'waste land' between Foxbury Lane and River Street through which a footpath continues the line of Cemetery Lane has a notice on it saying that a planning application has been submitted for the building of 75 houses. In my opinion this is a pity, but one that cannot really be resisted (if more houses have to be built this is an obvious site and far better than a genuine 'green field' site elsewhere)

WEEK 42 OCT 20 - 26

BIRDS:

SUN 26 OCT

BEARDED TITS and a possible DARTFORD WARBLER were highlights of my sightings on a mass pilgrimage to Farlington Marshes led by Kevin Stouse. At a guess there were nearly forty people at Broadmarsh for a combined HWT and HOS walk on a glorious day and I heard that a STONECHAT had been seen at Broadmarsh before I arrived but my first sighting there was of two SWALLOWS while a DUNNOCK sang strongly (first of two heard singing). Bearded Tits were seen by the Reserve Building and again by the lake, and REDWING were seen in the Bushes with GOLDCREST. GREENSHANK were heard from the stream and over 40 PINTAIL were on the lake with SHOVELER though a single SNIPE was the only wader by the lake. Four EGRET flew over the main marsh and the start of the SHELDUCK build-up was to be seen with 30 birds between the reserve and Kendalls Wharf. At the Point, where Fieldfare and Blackcap were reported to have been recently seen (no Short Eared Owls yet), there had been several sightings of Dartford Warbler and I was lucky enough to glimpse what was probably the bird flying from a bramble bush into gorse – I was dubious as it did not look dark enough, but Chris Cockburn told me it was a juvenile and that I saw it in the same place as everyone else (bushes by the fence line in the north east corner of the Point field).

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FRI 24 OCT

REDWING. Another seven over my garden this morning. There seem to be a lot more of these in our area this autumn than usual

HOUSE MARTIN & SWALLOW. Tony Gutteridge saw 2 Martins and 1 Swallow on north Hayling and also heard a DUNNOCK singing strongly

THU 23 OCT

REDWING. At least a dozen in Sloe bushes south of Northney Marina. I found them among the Starlings and Blackbirds also enjoying the fruit by their 'Gup' calls but later saw their eyestripes. Also picked out a couple of Song Thrush by their sharp 'Xit' calls

NORTHNEY MARINA BIRD SCARER. While watching the Starlings the din of their chattering suddenly stopped and the birds rose in the air on hearing sounds of a Seagull being torn to pieces by a Peregrine. This realistic noise changed to a human voice saying 'Testing, testing', but not before it had persuaded me to see if there was a bird being murdered in the marina. I have heard of these tapes of bird distress calls being played to clear birds from airfields and to disperse Starling roosts and all I can say is that the noise had a dramatic effect on the Starlings, causing them to go silent immediately they heard it, then to fly off.

GOLDEN PLOVER. An estimated 100 birds roosting east of Langstone Pond

DUNNOCK. One at Northney singing repeatedly

BAR TAILED GODWIT (unusual in the north of the harbour) and GREENSHANK both off north east Hayling

BRENT GEESE HAVE LANDED! A flock were on the Portsmouth College playing fields when Maureen Coleman drove down the Eastern Road today.

WED 22 OCT

SKYLARK song was much more widely heard by me today in a circular walk around Blendworth, Chalton and Wick Hanger.

REDWING. I am surprised to hear that some local birders have not been seeing Redwing daily as I have. This morning seven passed over my garden and I saw another four at the foot of the hill south of Chalton Windmill (where I also encountered the first MARSH TIT that I have seen for some time). Later in the morning I heard CHIFF CHAFF song from a scrubby continuation northward of Wick Hanger while watching a couple of BULLFINCH.

PARTRIDGE. Almost certainly raised as game birds I saw a flight of 15 Partridge disappearing over a ridge of Idsworth Down as I was coming down the west slope towards Wick Farm – having only a distant tail view I could not tell the species (probably Redlegs)

SWALLOW. Two, possibly three, flying over Manor Close in central Havant in mid-afternoon sunshine

TUE 21 OCT

BUZZARD. Two heard over Watergate Hanger then seen soaring high over Big Busto House at the north end of this wood

FIELDFARE. The call of one distinctly heard in the vicinity of Fanny's Row east of Big Busto House – bird not seen. Redwing were also heard nearby.

SKYLARK. Several groups of three or four over the large arable fields around West Marden – one or two singing.

MON 20 OCT

SISKIN & REDPOLL. One Siskin flew over my garden and one Redpoll was heard and seen flying over Bedhampton Mill

GREY WAGTAIL. These are a much more common sight than they were just a few years ago and one by the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton was a normal occurrence but I was surprised and pleased to see two together on my garden lawn after lunch

REDWING. Four seen at Bedhampton and more heard calling at night

LESSER BLACKBACK GULL. One (light grey English race) on a Leigh Park football pitch with other gulls

AVOCET. A phone call from Alistair Martin told me of his sighting of an Avocet at Black Point (Seagull Island) together with some Knot and Sanderling. Alistair spoke of having seen the Avocet there last February, and I guess it is the same bird that is a regular winter bird on Pilsey Sands

SUN 19 OCT

Tony Gutteridge walked round Thorney Island seeing 7 STONECHAT, 4 SWALLOWS, 3 EIDER (not males), 3 SANDWICH TERN, 1 COMMON SANDPIPER and 1 WHEATEAR (being chased by a Ringed Plover)

SAT 18 OCT

REDWING. At 10pm last night and 3am this morning I heard Redwing flying west over my house and guess they were moving throughout a fine, still moonlit night. At breakfast time a group of four circled overhead and plunged down to feed on some unseen berry bush.

SWALLOW. Also at breakfast time one Swallow went fast and low south east over my garden. Tony Gutteridge saw four over Heyshott.

OTHER GARDEN BIRDS. Between 8 and 8.30am I noted 21 bird species from my garden, the most unexpected being a SWAN going over. I also logged COMMON GULL (hundreds of gulls stream inland each morning as soon as it is light, but all those that I see normally are Black Headed) and a single SKYLARK heading west (they have been moving steadily for about two weeks now), but otherwise it was the regulars – our Chiff Chaff came very close to me but did not sing whereas Starling and Great Tit did sing to accompany the Robins and Wrens.

IBM LAKE BIRD COUNT. The most unexpected item was the complete absence of Canada Geese – presumably they have already moved to Titchfield Haven or wherever they will spend the winter. 15 HERON were roosting on the islands until I disturbed them and four SNIPE got up from their preferred resting place nearby but the most significant thing that I noticed was that the WOOD DUCK had acquired its full spring plumage, and so had some of the male TEAL from which I heard the first 'belling' – a glorious winter sound.

FRI 17 OCT

GREEN SANDPIPER seen at Langstone (Wade Court wet meadow) by Tony Gutteridge. Tony also noticed many Skylark moving west over Havant this week end and saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker in the Museum carpark trees

PLANTS:

SUN 26 OCT

TUFTED VETCH, YELLOW-WORT, COMMON CENTAURY and TEAZEL were all in flower beside the route taken by Kevin Stouse's walk from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marsh. LUCERNE was flowering by Broadmarsh Slipway and PINK WATER SPEEDWELL in the pond where the Brockhampton Stream emerges from underpassing the A27 (No Kingfisher on that pool).

SAT 25 OCT

GOLDEN SAMPHIRE and ROCK SAMPHIRE were both in flower at Broadmarsh and South Moors respectively and there were a few white flowers on Sea Campion Inland I was slightly surprised to record COMMON VETCH in flower.

SPURGE LAUREL was plentiful in Barton's Copse and had many tight buds – no flowers expected until after Christmas.

THU 23 OCT

TEAZEL. Two plants in flower at Northney where many plants of CENTUARY were in flower. STRAWBERRY CLOVER was also flowering but with almost white flowers rather than the pink tinged white flowers of summer,

WED 22 OCT

BELLFLOWERS. The steep downland below Chalton Windmill facing north east towards Chalton village had a great display of three species of Bellflower in full flower as if it were early September rather than mid-October – many plants of Clustered, one of Nettle Leaved, and a few of Harebell

SMALL TOADFLAX was still flowering in the field north east of Wick Farm (on the road from Finchdean to Chalton) and I found more than half a dozen plants only a few yards out into the field from the track. (At present this is a very good weedy stubble field for botanists).

TUE 21 OCT

DWARF SPURGE still flourishing in field stubble and MUSK THISTLE flowering in fields near West Marden.

MON 20 OCT

PELLITORY OF THE WALL still flowering at St Thomas Church, Old Bedhampton (on wall of carpark)

SHARP LEAVED FLUELLEN still flowering in a weedy field west of Ramsdell Avenue, Leigh Park

WEASEL'S SNOUT (Lesser Sanpdragon) also still flowering in Havant New Lane allotments.

SUN 19 OCT

MULLEINS & BELLFLOWER. Nettle leaved bellflower was still to be seen in a number of places in the woods above Buriton where I also saw Dark Mullein after passing roadside Great Mullein at Chalton on the way.

YELLOW BIRDSNEST. This strange saprophytic plant which lives on decaying Beech leaves has had an unusually good year in Head Down Plantation above Buriton and we saw many blackened 'skeletons' of plants that a few months back would have been a bright yellow colour (there was a trace of the original colour in a couple of the dead plants).

SAT 18 OCT

COMMON CENTUARY & YELLOW-WORT each had one plant in flower at IBM where I also saw one of the 'sown' CORNFLOWER still adding its exquisite blue to the scene. PALE FLAX and SMALL SCABIOUS had many plants in flower and there was still one of the LESSER SEA SPURREY plants left over from tidal days still in flower.

INSECTS:

SUN 26 OCT

RED ADMIRAL seen at Farlington but much more interesting news from Chris Cockburn of a **CLOUDED YELLOW** seen by him there last Friday (Only his second of the year)

THU 23 OCT

SMALL COPPER and SMALL WHITE both seen at Northney bringing my total of butterfly species for the week to five. One or two RED ADMIRALS were also seen.

WED 22 OCT

Three RED ADMIRALS, one COMMA and one SPECKLED WOOD in the Blendworth area.

SNIFE FLY LARVA. On Oct 1st I recorded, under the heading "The worm and the maggot", an intriguing find made by Sue Drewett in her garden. She saw a white, maggot like, fly larva apparently attacking a worm much larger than itself and 'biting the tail off the worm'. Being even bigger than the worm Sue was able to capture the maggot and the 'discarded' tail of the worm and give them to me in a jam jar containing a little earth to make the maggot feel at home. I passed the jar to Chris Palmer, curator of the Havant Museum, and tonight Chris met Sue and myself and told us that the larva was an early stage in the development of a SNIFE FLY and that these larvae really do survive by attacking and eating living things in the leaf litter – Chris Palmer said that they regularly attack worms (though he was surprised

at the size of worm this one had gone for) where Michael Chinery in his 'Field Guide to the Insects of Britain and Northern Europe' (the one with masses of small print – not the more popular 'Collins Guide to the Insects of Britain and Western Europe' which is mainly pictorial) says of the Snipe Flies (Rhagionidae of which there are 18 British species – he only describes the common *Rhagio scolopacea*) that they are predatory on insects both as larvae and adults. You can look for adults between May and August, resting head down on a tree trunk or other vegetation until a prey item passes within range when they become fast flying predators. With its long legs and long thin body it has some similarity to a Mosquito but the body is more than twice as long, and if you do find on at rest in its vertical, head down position, you should notice some yellow in the body colour and very well veined wings. It also has some similarity to the biggest of the Robber Flies (*Asilus crabroniformis*) but that is noticeably larger and tends to rest in a horizontal position on top of a pile of animal droppings (a good place to wait for the smaller insects on which it preys – look for it in pony fields, particularly those north of Fort Widley)

BEE FLIES. Most people are familiar with the furry bottomed *Bombylius major* with its 'narwhal like' proboscis through which it obtains nectar from long throated flowers but I was not aware until told by Chris Palmer that its larvae predate other bee species. Chris says that the Bee Fly manages to drop its eggs onto a selected target bee while both insects are flying – the egg then sticks to the bee and becomes a larva which kills and eats the bee.

TUE 21 OCT

Two RED ADMIRALS seen in bright sunshine despite a gale of wind from the east.

SUN 19 OCT

SPECKLED WOOD & RED ADMIRAL both seen in Head Down Plantation

SAT 18 OCT

COMMA & COMMON DARTER both seen at the IBM site.

OTHER:

SAT 25 OCT

HEDGEHOG. On Thursday this week Maureen Coleman rang me to ask if I had heard of any disease affecting Hedgehogs as she was aware of several being found dead on South Hayling for no apparent reason. Today I came on a small one (probably this year's youngster) sitting like a Hare in its form in a small hollow nest of leaves (totally exposed on top) and it did not move away even when my foot was almost touching it. It may have been sun-bathing and was still there when I returned after more than an hour, though this time it did move away.

WED 22 OCT

RUTTING DEER. We will soon hear the grunting coughs of Fallow Buck and see their well trodden stands in favoured spots in Stansted Forest and elsewhere. This note is mainly to pass on something that I did not know and which I learnt from Simon King in a recent Countryside Hour on television – if you are in the New Forest and come on rutting Sika Deer they have a rutting call which includes a high pitched whistle quite unlike the barks, coughs, groans and grunts of the other deer species in this part of the world.

HARE. The valley running south from the Chalton Windmill through Blendworth Down still had at least eight Hares early this summer but the field in which they lived is the one which I quoted recently as being over-dosed with herbicides, etc compared to the next field south and I could see nothing living in the field today. Continuing north to the windmill then taking the path north east towards Chalton I found more spraying taking place in the field at the foot of the hill and one Hare fleeing across it from the chemical attack. Spraying is no doubt part of the reason for the decline of the Hare.

TUE 21 OCT

My first find of PARASOL MUSHROOM for this autumn. I have seen the shorter stemmed, chunkier SHAGGY PARASOLS on a couple of occasions but this was the elegant 'real thing'

MON 20 OCT

New fungi seen today were the snow white COPRINUS NIVEUS on dung and a troop of GLISTENING INKCAPS

SUN 19 OCT

FUNGI IN HEAD DOWN PLANTATION. The fungus foray led by Rosemary Webb lived up to expectation. I noted the names of some 30 species that were identified and among them were the EARTH STARS (Sessile & Triplex) that are more numerous than ever this year, MAGPIE fungus also numerous and eye catching, the colourful AMETHYST DECEIVER & MYCENA PURA, BLACK HELVELLA and what I thought Rosemary called Dead Man's Fingers but which looked to me more like GEOGLOSSUM COOKIEANUM. Another naming confusion occurred over what is listed in my books as Tricholoma argyraceum for which she used the alternative T. scalpturatum. A few DOG STINKHORNS were exciting finds towards the end of the walk plus fruiting GREEN WOODCUP nearer the start, and as usual on a fungus foray we had found the unexpected and not all the expected items – no Amanita species and just one Russula in the whole morning!

WEEK 41

OCT 13 - 19

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IBM LAKE BIRD COUNT. The most unexpected item was the complete absence of Canada Geese – presumably they have already moved to Titchfield Haven or wherever they will spend the winter. 15 HERON were roosting on the islands until I disturbed them and four SNIPE got up from their preferred resting place nearby but the most significant thing that I noticed was that the WOOD DUCK had acquired its full spring plumage, and so had some of the male TEAL from which I heard the first 'belling' – a glorious winter sound.

FRI 17 OCT

GOOSANDER?? Walking south over Langstone Bridge I was watching Brent near the Hayling Shore to the east when I noticed what I at first thought was a Diver by its size and way of submerging like a sinking submarine. Later I saw it was grey with a red head and assume it was a redhead Goosander but I was not close enough to be certain (could not see the sharp cut-off between red head and grey neck)

RED BREASTED MERGANSER. Five redheads in the innermost pool at high tide with the two summering birds (assumed to be them by their position) sitting on the old path separating this pool from the next which also retains water. These are the first winter Merganser that I have seen or heard of - we could also have Goldeneye back any day (Oct 25th is my 'expected date' for them)

ROCK PIPIT?? These should be back now and I thought I heard the calls of one or two near the Oysterbeds but they came from among a flock of Meadow Pipits and I could not be sure that any were Rock Pipits.

CHIFF CHAFF singing again this morning in my garden and tentative Linnet song from one bird at the Oysterbeds

THU 16 OCT

LITTLE EGRET BREEDING SUCCESS. I hear that Radio Solent today broke the news that a pair of Little Egrets bred successfully on Brownsea Island (Poole Harbour in Dorset) in 1996, and that four pairs have bred there this year. This comes in the same week as I received the Wetland Bird Survey Summer 1997 newsletter in which Andy Musgrove of the BTO claims that the total number of Little Egrets in this country during the late autumn this year will probably exceed 1,000 birds, and that the birds have been seen in well over 100 10km squares, many well

inland (e.g. Derby and Nottingham) and three in Scotland (Harris in the Outer Hebrides on the west coast and Aberdeen plus Peterhead on the east coast) DUNNOCK song heard for the second time this autumn.

WED 15 OCT

BAR HEADED & EGYPTIAN GEESE. Across the A259 from Farm Lane at Nutbourne a footpath leads north and immediately across the railway line the path runs beside a small artificial trout fishing pool (normally accessed from Priors Leaze Lane to the north). Among a miscellaneous collection of chickens and ducks there were two resident Egyptian Geese and two Bar Headed Geese. The owner of the place (who accosted me when further up the path and seemed intent on preventing people from using the path) told me that the geese were not pinioned but that they had never left their home – this may or may not be true and I think these Bar Heads could be the ones that we occasionally see elsewhere in the area though there may well be others around.

SWALLOW. Back at Farm Lane late in the afternoon at the end of my walk I watched three Swallows overhead.

TUE 14 OCT

LESSER REDPOLL. Five going west over my garden identified by size, flight and call which can only be confused with the sound made by young Linnets and they do not make it in the same rhythmic pattern fitting their flight.

HOUSE MARTIN. Six circling the houses where you park for St Hubert's Chapel at Idsworth. There has clearly been a large movement of hirundines south in the last few days, no doubt those still lurking in the English countryside felt in the north wind the same message that brought in the Redwing and Fieldfare

SWALLOW. Possibly one with the House Martins at Idsworth but certainly one going over Havant Museum in the afternoon

SKYLARK. Walking on Idsworth/Chalton Down I heard the first full song of the autumn and saw seven or eight small groups of them going west (the singing birds were probably residents objecting to the invaders). If anyone wants to participate in a BTO WINTERING SYLARK SURVEY I received a form for reporting them with the latest BTO NEWS. They want records of flocks of more than 50 birds seen between mid November and mid February and for each observation they want the date, place name, map reference, number in the flock and general description of habitat (what was in the field where they were seen). If you want to join in ask me (or the BTO) for a form or send the above details to myself or Brian Fellows when you see a large flock.

RED LEGGED PARTRIDGE. One seen with Pheasants at a feeding station on the shoulder of Chalton Down above the railway – probably a reared bird but maybe a 'wild' bird enjoying the grain.

SONG THRUSH. One with other thrushes on Chalton Down (almost certainly some were Redwing and I saw three over my garden again today) indicating the presence of roving continental thrushes.

MON 13 OCT

BRENT. Brian Fellows saw the first 4 juveniles in Emsworth Harbour today and at the South Moors the flock had increased to 72 birds.

SHELDUCK. The first two back on the mud east of Langstone Pond – in the winter there will be 60 to 100 there.

TEAL. The birds which had come back to the Wade Court wet meadow for the first time last Saturday now numbered 30.

SPARROWHAWK. A female seen going west along the shore over Wade Lane at Langstone

HOUSE MARTINS. Jill Westarp told me that a small flock had been over her house in north Emsworth today.

LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER. Julian Howard phoned from Langstone to say that he had seen one in his garden – going up a tree like a Tree Creeper and about the same size.

BIRD SONG IN WEEK OCT 13 - 19. Robin is the commonest with Wren now coming up a close second. Skylark resumed with full song on the 14th and a single Dunnock was heard from my garden on the 16th (second for this autumn). Chiff Chaff still singing intermittently and Great and Blue Tit sporadically. Linnet heard once. Starling fairly regular but no Collared Dove or Wood Pigeon heard.

SUN 12 OCT

BRENT. In the evening I visited Budds Wall and found 48 Brent on the shore (with the first four WIGEON to return here). These are the first I have seen on the north shore of the harbour. Soon they will be moving onto the fields – last year I saw the first flock on land at Hayling West Lane fields on Nov 8th – will they come ashore before the end of October this year?

DUNLIN. A tideline flock of around 100 birds on the South Moors shore was the first large flock I have seen this autumn.

PLANTS:

SUN 19 OCT

MULLEINS & BELLFLOWER. Nettle leaved bellflower was still to be seen in a number of places in the woods above Buriton where I also saw Dark Mullein after passing roadside Great Mullein at Chalton on the way.

YELLOW BIRDSNEST.

SAT 18 OCT

COMMON CENTUARY & YELLOW-WORT each had one plant in flower at IBM where I also saw one of the 'sown' CORNFLOWER still adding its exquisite blue to the scene. PALE FLAX and SMALL SCABIOUS had many plants in flower and there was still one of the LESSER SEA SPURREY plants left over from tidal days still in flower.

FRI 17 OCT

- SHRUBBY ORACHE (*Atriplex halimus*) is the grey shrub which dominates the roadside of Langstone Bridge by the Sailing Club and is now in flower (one or two anthers poking out of some of the pinkish globules which it has for flower heads)
- THRIFT (Sea Pink) Just one otherwise dead flowerhead had half a dozen fresh florets on it to count towards my total of 138 plants in flower this week.
- SHAGGY SOLDIER. A small cluster of these plants flowering in the garden of a house in Northwood Lane at Stoke, Hayling.
- CYPERUS SEDGE. Leaves in a ditch of Castleman's Lane taken to be this sedge on account of their strong 'pleating' - no sign of any flower stems (past or present). With Pond Cottage at Stansted and a ditch site at Marine Walk, South Hayling this is a third site for this plant that was new to me this year.
- WINTER HELIOTROPE & COW PARSLEY both showing fresh leaves and could flower next month

WED 15 OCT

- LESSER WATER PARSNIP (*Berula erecta*). All this summer I have been searching local watercourses for this plant after being told by a trout fisherman (Brian Clarke) that it is extremely common and is a nuisance in every river he fishes. I had assumed that he must be speaking of a different plant (especially when he said that it often forms long underwater 'streamers' with no flowering stalks emerging above the water), but perhaps not. Today I found a good example of the plant in a tributary of the Ham Brook running alongside Priors Leaze Lane near Hambrook, and in checking its identity I looked in the Hants Flora and see that its distribution is along the main rivers (where it is recorded in every square) but that it is not recorded elsewhere, and I assume the same is true in Sussex.

TUE 14 OCT

- MISTLETOE. As the leaves fall the large bunches of Mistletoe high on Lime trees between the 'Walled Garden' at Idsworth and the road (just south of St Hubert's chapel) can now be seen. The same sight can probably be seen on trees around Watergate House.
- SMALL TOADFLAX. Just a couple of plants in flower in the field edge by the track leading up from Heberdens to the ridge of Idsworth Down (SU 73501405). This is only my second find of this plant this year in SU 70/71
- ROUGH POPPY. One plant still flowering on Chalton Down – the seed heads of previous plants easily proving its identity.
- GREEN BRISTLE GRASS (*Setaria viridis*) ???. Just one clump (maybe three or four plants) of a grass that I had never seen before among the weeds around the edge of a strip field of Sweetcorn and Kale planted for Pheasant rearing on the shoulder of Chalton Down. I keyed it out as *Setaria viridis* and then saw in the Hants Flora that this is 'very rare' so I have sent a specimen to Paul Bowman for confirmation.

MON 13 OCT

- GREATER PERIWINKLE. A couple of flowers was an unexpected sight, albeit on planted plants between the Tesco store and the A27 at Havant.
- KINGCUP. Two flowers out on the plant which flowered profusely at this time last year on the South Moors (in the water channel east of the orchid meadow where the new ditch around the factory meets it). Last year there was a tall plant covered

with flowers – so far this year the flowers are ‘ground hugging’ and you have to look for them.

WILD CELERY. A fresh plant with flowers just opening between the seawall path and the reed bed at the north end of Langstone Pond

SUN 12 OCT

COMMON DOG VIOLET. I am still not confident in distinguishing between Common and Early Dog Violet but I think the small cluster of plants in flower at Lyels Wood in Stansted were *V. riviniana* (Common Dog).

INSECTS:

SUN 19 OCT

SPECKLED WOOD & RED ADMIRAL both seen in Head Down Plantation

SAT 18 OCT

COMMA & COMMON DARTER both seen at the IBM site.

FRI 17 OCT

BUTTERFLIES. Four RED ADMIRALS seen together with one LARGE WHITE and another, possibly SMALL, WHITE. Plenty of Bees, Flies and a few Wasps on the Ivy

THU 16 OCT

HONEY BEE COMMUNICATION. We all know how Bees tell others in the hive where they have just found a good source of nectar by running round in circles and wagging their tails. Today I was looking at an interesting refinement of this story published in The Times on Sept 13th (bang up to date!). A Danish professor Axel Michelson has constructed a robot bee, having a brass body and wings made from razor blades powered by four tiny motors, to prove his theory that the message is relayed by the currents of air set up by the fanning of the ‘dancing’ bee’s wings, these currents being more precisely controlled by the ‘wagging tail’. This method of transmission does not rely on sight and works in a dark hive, and the robot has ‘proved’ the point by persuading up to 30 bees at a time to fly 500 metres to a nectar source.

WED 15 OCT

RED ADMIRAL. Just one seen today, going round in circles over Priors Leaze Lane at Hambrook as if it was searching for something it had just dropped

TUE 14 OCT

RED ADMIRAL. Just one flying over the garden and a report of one yesterday in Jill Westarp’s garden

REDDISH BUFF moth. I had never heard of this moth until I tuned in to Radio Solent today and heard Peter Potts talking (very well) about moths and his work as a Countryside Service Ranger for the County Council (I also learnt that while he is still warden of the Bishops Waltham Moors reserve he is now based at Netley rather than Titchfield Haven). I did not hear the full piece but I think Pete was taking the Reddish Buff as an example of how conservation work, based on knowledge of the habitat requirements of species, can maintain bio-diversity. This tiny moth with a wing span of 2.5cm (what I would in the past have called a ‘Clothes Moth’) is listed in the moth book which I use (“A complete guide to British Moths” by Margaret Brooks, Jonathan Cape 1991) as one of six moth species given complete protection by the 1981 Wildlife & Countryside Act. The book says it is only found in woodland glades in the north of the Isle of Wight, and its food plant

is Saw-wort. Although I did not hear the full facts it seems that the moth is now found in Hampshire and that Pete and the County Council are encouraging both the moth and the Saw-wort to flourish. The only local site I know of for Saw-wort is in a ditch by Ingoldfield Lane near its junction with Dradfield Lane at Newtown near Wickham, but when I looked for it this year I could not see any – can you tell me of its presence elsewhere here? The Hants Flora indicates that it has been found in all the squares down the east side of Hayling but I have not come on it yet. It seems that this plant also has special requirements, needing a soil in which chalk, clay and acid heath elements are mixed.

OTHER:

SUN 19 OCT

FUNGI IN HEAD DOWN PLANTATION. The fungus foray led by Rosemary Webb lived up to expectation. I noted the names of some 30 species that were identified and among them were the EARTH STARS (Sessile & Triplex) that are more numerous than ever this year, MAGPIE fungus also numerous and eye catching, the colourful AMETHYST DECEIVER & MYCENA PURA, BLACK HELVELLA and what I thought Rosemary called Dead Man's Fingers but which looked to me more like GEOGLOSSUM COOKIEANUM. Another naming confusion occurred over what is listed in my books as Tricholoma argyraceum for which she used the alternative T. scalpturatum. A few DOG STINKHORNS were exciting finds towards the end of the walk plus fruiting GREEN WOODCUP nearer the start, and as usual on a fungus foray we had found the unexpected and not all the expected items – no Amanita species and just one Russula in the whole morning!

FRI 17 OCT

FOX seen enjoying the sunshine in the pony field north of Wade Court
TOADSTOOLS seen in a walk on Hayling included a couple of large SHAGGY PARASOLS, HONEY FUNGUS, FAIRY RING toadstools and fresh MANY ZONED POLYPORE plus one VOLVARIELLA SPECIOSA and some large unknown species in a meadow (could not get to them)

TUE 14 OCT

HARE. On Chalton Down one had been lying up in the Kale and Sweetcorn strip on the shoulder of the down and got up when I was within five yards of it so I had excellent views as it ran onto the almost bare down outside the strip field. I wonder how many more there were in the cover?
BADGER. The path (part of the Staunton Way) along the high ridge of Idsworth and Chalton Downs is not the place that I would expect to find Badgers, but close to the Tumuli at the highest point a new Hawthorn hedge has been planted (at the moment it is a close packed line of Tully tubes which have been there for a year or so I think) and where the path goes through the hedge line Badgers have typically chosen to mark the junction with their dung pits.

SUN 12 OCT

FUNGI IN HEAD DOWN PLANTATION. Rosemary Webb will be leading a Fungus Foray in Head Down Plantation (above the railway tunnel at Buriton) starting at 10am from the carpark by the east gate of the Q E Country Park off Newbarn Lane going south from Buriton and today she joined a similar foray led by the Wildlife Trust Petersfield district group. She tells me that they saw 'hundreds of EARTH

STARS' (both *Geastrum sessile* and *G. triplex*), a log covered with BEEFSTEAK fungus (too old to be edible), GREEN WOODCUP in fruit and VERDIGRIS Toadstools. Better still she came on three of the rarities of this wood – MYCENA CROCATA, MICROMPHALE FOETIDUM, and AMANITA ECHINOCEPHALA. She has never found, nor heard of others finding, this rare 'spiny headed' Amanita elsewhere (Gordon Dickson has just one record of it in his book on New Forest fungi), yet it occurs each year at Head Down, sometimes in good numbers.

WEEK 40
OCT 6 - 12

BIRDS:

SUN 12 OCT

REDWING. Sipping a cup of tea in the garden between 7.45 and 8.00am at least four flocks (totalling 115 birds) of Redwing flew low overhead. Between 8.50 and 11.20 I saw another 300 going over Stansted in loose flocks of between 6 and 50 birds and when I arrived back home I saw at least one more flock. To ram home the point that the winter thrushes have arrived I definitely had 3 FIELDFARE at Stansted, seeing their white armpits and hearing their Chack chack calls.

CROSSBILL. A marvellous view of about 25 birds feeding on Larch at the extreme north west end of the 'Shooting' or 'Rough' Avenue at Stansted (just above Andrews Farm and Dean Lane End). The sun was shining brightly, the larches were still green, the sky was a beautiful blue and the male Crossbills were a super red colour like tiny parrots.

LESSER REDPOLL. My first of this winter flew over Lyels Wood making its distinctive 'Chuch,uch,uch' call. There were also some Siskin about.

NUTHATCH were once more noisy at Stansted and several Wrens sang to confirm the return of their vocal powers – in Lyels Wood I specially noticed one immediately and strongly respond to the song of another nearby.

KINGFISHER & BUZZARD were both reported as having recently been seen in the Brick Kiln pond area where I came on Michael Prior fishing on my way home. Does anyone know if the three Swans now on that pond are the family that was there earlier in the year? Their one cygnet was very pale, and if the third bird with them is indeed a this year's cygnet it has acquired an adult white plumage well ahead of any other.

SAT 11 OCT

SWALLOW. A day memorable for rain and wind started dry if dull and sitting in my garden at breakfast time I briefly glimpse a single Swallow, probably following the Billy Line south. The regular Robin, Chiff Chaff and one Blue Tit both sang and a single Heron flew over.

TEAL. Around a dozen back on the Wade Court wet meadow for the first time. 18 Mallard and 6 Moorhen were with them and 5 Heron were perched in the Yew tree where I saw 9 Little Egret on Thursday.

GOLDEN PLOVER. Around 20 of these were on the eroding saltings south of the Langstone Royal Oak (west of the Lymbourne Stream). Their normal low tide roost was still under water and maybe they use this higher ground regularly though I have not seen them there before.

KINGFISHER. While standing by the Royal Oak I was watching the Swan family (still seven cygnets) coming up the Lymbourne Stream creek towards the Mill when a Kingfisher flew in over them and perched below the Mill within 20 yards of me. The Swans soon reached the same point and pushed the Kingfisher off its low perch onto a higher one nearer me where it in turn ousted a beautiful Grey Wagtail.

BRENT GOOSE. Just two off the Royal Oak, presumably summer birds ashamed to confront their newly arrived relatives. I thought I heard Wigeon whistling near them and saw a small party fly west over them.

GREENSHANK. East of Langstone, at the mouth of the stream flowing out of Warblington Castle Farm, four Greenshank flew in to the point where the fresh water emerges through its metal trap door and I assume they intended to drink or bathe in the fresh water but left when they saw me nearby – I was trying to get a view of a Goldcrest making lots of noise in the Tamarisks. Between this stream and Pook Lane (where the shore is a mixture of shingle and mud) there were more (20+) Ringed Plover than usual.

BLACKBIRD & SONG THRUSH. I had the impression that there were more Blackbirds around today than there have been recently, and I even saw a Song Thrush in Pook Lane – perhaps we have had an influx of continental birds.

FRI 10 OCT

DUNNOCK. A single short burst of song from a bird beside Bartons Road in West Leigh just east of the New Lane junction – the first I have heard for a couple of months.

GREY WAGTAIL. A pair almost certainly nest by the section of the Lavant Stream near the Colt and Vickers factories at the north end of New Lane in West Leigh. I saw one there this morning as I do on any visit here regardless of the time of year.

SISKIN. Just one flying over the Bartons Road/Wakefords Way playing fields.

THU 9 OCT

STONECHAT. One female back on the South Moors – presumably others are now returning to the coast for winter.

PINTAIL. Three back on the Budds Farm pools

LITTLE EGRET. 9 (possibly more) sitting out the afternoon high tide at Langstone in a big Yew above the Lymbourne Stream west of Wade Court (seen from the shore path across the wet meadow). There were also three Grey Heron in the Yew, another five further south in the wet meadow and one more on Langstone Pond.

SANDWICH TERN. Two still fishing off Langstone pond.

SKYLARK. Two chirruping as they flew west over my garden may have been continental birds (it is always worth looking at migrant Skylarks at this time of year as there could be Woodlark among them – look for short tails).

MON 6 OCT

HOUSE MARTIN. Now we are in October these are becoming a rare sight and so it is worth recording just one over Stansted House

BRENT GOOSE. Flock of 344 seen by Brian Fellows in Langstone Hbr seen from the Kench.

SUN 5 OCT

COBNOR PENINSULA WALK. The party led by Kevin Stouse recorded 52 bird species including 14 SWALLOWS flying south in a flock (I have not seen any since then), a pair of GREY PARTRIDGE with a young bird, a flock of a dozen or more

CHIFF CHAFF in bushes and another of 20 BRENT GEESE on the water. 2 GREENSHANK and 1 WHIMBREL were on the shore, near which they also found a COMMON SANDPIPER and a KINGFISHER. More than 10 LITTLE EGRET were seen and one young male KESTREL which allowed the walkers within 20 feet of where it was perched on a post (it was probably hoping for food – the young seem to have much difficulty in learning to hunt by hovering).

WIGEON. These have been back in force for several weeks but I had my first sight of a winter flock of at least 300 on the Thorney Deeps just east of the main road guard post. Being a sunny evening there orange/russet colours were greatly enhanced. Later I found another 150 of them at Nutbourne Bay.

LITTLE OWL. The farm buildings beside the path to Nutbourne Bay from Farm Lane have been a good place to see Little Owl for several years and one was on the roof of a low building at the back of the farm, seen from the metal gate to the farmyard from Farm Lane, at 6.45pm having just emerged for its evening hunt – I watched it stretching and scratching after a good day's sleep.

SAT 4 OCT

BUZZARD. One seen by the 'Saturday morning walk' group flying south from Walderton towards Racton Folly.

THU 2 OCT

SNIPE. In last week's notes I omitted the finding of my first winter Snipe on the South Moors.

COOT. Brian Fellows counted a total of 1088 on the various lakes of Chichester GP. The highest count for October that he could find in recent Sussex Bird Reports was of 746 in 1992 (but remember that these counts are those taken on the one day a month selected for Wildfowl counting – possibly not representative of peaks within the month – and they may not necessarily include all the lakes that Brian visited, north as well as south of the A27)

GADWALL. Brian had 18 back on the Chichester GP

BEARDED TIT. Brian also saw 2 male and 3 female Bearded Tits at Thorney Little Deeps, and he passes on a report from Barry Collins that this year at this site 4 pairs had bred, raising 30 young.

MON 29 SEP

BLACK NECKED GREBE. One seen by Brian Fellows off the Oysterbeds, presumably the summer bird not yet joined by winter visitors.

BIRD SONG DURING WEEK 40. Most unexpected song this week was a short burst from a Dunnock in sunshine on Friday (10th). Robin continues as the only regular songster, with occasional song from Starling, Chiff Chaff, Collared Dove Great Tit and Goldfinch. No Woodpigeon heard by me, but Wrens are becoming much more vocal this week. Listen out for Mistle Thrush that should now be demonstrating why it is called 'Storm Cock' by singing loudly from tree tops in autumn gales.

PLANTS:

SUN 12 OCT

COMMON DOG VIOLET. I am still not confident in distinguishing between Common and Early Dog Violet but I think the small cluster of plants in flower at Lyels Wood in Stansted were *V. riviniana* (Common Dog).

SAT 11 OCT

TAMARISK. This shrub seems to flower all round the year but at present those along the Warblington shore are looking well dressed with fresh flowers.

FRI 10 OCT

WEASEL'S SNOOT (Lesser Snapdragon) still flowering in several plots of the New Lane allotments visible from the road just south of the Kenwood factory.

TRIFID BUR MARIGOLD. A single plant (which had flowered) in the Lavant Stream beside the Bartons Road playing fields area where the stream reaches Bartons Road – its seeds might float down to replenish plants in the new Millicent Park building site area where I saw some earlier this year (then found they had been removed by vegetation clearance, probably before they had seeded).

BUTCHER'S BROOM. Plants with many buds and at least one open flower in the north of Hammonds Land Coppice in the Staunton Country Park. About a week ago I was told of this plant being in flower in Richard Moore's garden at Catherington, and so must revise my mental impression that it does not begin to flower until December each year.

DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS. A very good year for this species – today I found plants in flower by the Lavant Stream on the east side of the Bartons Road/Wakefords Way playing fields.

THU 9 OCT

IVY is just starting to flower and will provide any insects that survive the gales and rain with their main food source when the sun shines again

TUE 7 OCT

CANARY GRASS. Probably originating from bird seed (hence the name) this is a very attractive species of grass, sufficiently so to catch my eye as I was cycling along a road in north Emsworth – the grass was growing from a crack in the tarmac between the road and the curbstone. The flower head is a tight egg shape and the glumes have beautiful green stripes on them.

INSECTS:

SUN 12 OCT

SMALL WHITE. Just one on the wing in my garden at midday in warm sunshine.

FRI 10 OCT

SPECKLED WOOD. Two seen by Hermitage Stream in Leigh Park on a very sunny day. Also today I saw two RED ADMIRALS, one LARGE WHITE and a number of SMALL WHITE. COMMON DARTER were seen in several places and one pair was flying in tandem over the lake at Leigh Park Gardens.

THU 9 OCT

Despite rain and very strong winds one RED ADMIRAL fluttered around a bush in Langstone High Street.

TUE 7 OCT

SMALL WHITES were still a regular sight today and yesterday but no other butterflies seen by me.

OTHER:

SUN 12 OCT

CLUB FOOT TOADSTOOL (*Clitocybe clavipes*) was one of many toadstools to be found in Stansted. UGLY MILK CAP (*Lactarius turpis*) was the biggest and ugliest while a troop of bright yellow toadstools (covered in a horribly sticky slime) under Larch were LARCH BOLETE.

FRI 10 OCT

'MAGIC MUSHROOMS' (*Psilocybe semilanceata* or LIBERTY CAP). At this time every year young men assemble on the Gipsies Plain (west of the Staunton Arms at Rowlands Castle) to seek out these hallucogenic toadstools. I hear that there has been a fairly good harvest this year and that there were at least 15 people out collecting yesterday though I could only see five when I passed by today. These are small, domed toadstools with a cap only about 1 cm tall including a prominent umbo (or 'teat') on top. They can stand up to 7 cm tall in grass and are an off white colour with rusty markings. The gills become very dark brown and the species could be mistaken for a *Coprinus*.

FOX. These are plentiful enough but it was a pleasant surprise when following the Staunton Way trail through Leigh Park to find one lying out in the open to enjoy the midday sun on the banks of the Hermitage Stream just north of the point at which the stream from Leigh Park Gardens lake joins the main stream (behind Priorsdean Crescent off Barncroft Way).

WEEK 39

SEP 29 – OCT 5

BIRDS:

SAT 4 OCT

MONTAGU'S HARRIERS AT CATHERINGTON?? A phone call today from someone living at the junction of Catherington Hill and Lovedean Road mentioned among other things that this person had a neighbour who kept a number of hawks and falcons, including Montagu's Harriers. I questioned this as I have never heard of this species being kept by falconers and will be intrigued to find out if it is true.

SWEARE DEEP GULL ROOST. Sunshine in the late afternoon encouraged me to cycle along the shore from Langstone pond to the Thorney Great Deeps and at this time of day the gulls are moving from their daytime feeding areas to the places where they will spend the night in huge communal roosts in the harbours, one of these roosts being in the Sweare Deep area between Warblington Church and Northney Marina. With the sun low in the sky it lit the ranks of white gulls already assembled on various mudbanks and showed up those still having a wash in the water before retiring. The majority of the birds were Black Headed Gulls but there were plenty of Herring Gulls and a few Great Blackbacks with just one or two Lesser Blackback and Common Gulls. Among the 52 bird species seen on this trip were one Sandwich Tern and one Whimbrel (calling briefly and showing its small size and hooked bill as it flew off) off Langstone and two Wheatear, one Common Sandpiper and one Kingfisher at the Great Deeps. With the sun still above the horizon 22 Little Egrets were standing in a huddle on the field north of the deeps as if waiting for some gate in the military fence to be opened before they could enter their roost trees – at one point they all flew up and two headed for the roost but flew

high over it towards Hayling, the others returning to the field. I would have thought that if they had finished feeding for the day they would head straight for the roost to secure the best perches for the night, but they have their own ritual and stick to it.

FRI 3 OCT

SKYLARK. Walking up Windmill Hill above Blendworth and Chalton I thought I heard faint and spasmodic Skylark song. At the top, from a field of weeds, a flock of more than 40 Skylark rose and moved on westward with much chirruping and some faint snatches of song. At a guess these were the first continental birds arriving for the winter, and a delight to see and hear.

KESTREL. Coming down the same hill I had just reached the minor road from the A3 to New Barn Farm and Blendworth when I heard a sharp 'kee, kee, kee' nearby and saw a Kestrel apparently devouring prey on the cross piece of a power line post (below and just north of the pylon line). On the few occasions I have been here I usually see a Kestrel somewhere here and in the dusk I thought I could see a small mound on the cross-piece where the bird was having its supper – could it possibly have chosen such an exposed site for a nest earlier in the year? (If you are there you will see the low line of power cables going north up the hill. Where they pass under the pylon line the lower cables go underground so there is a section between two wooden posts with no apparent cables – the post I am referring to is the one from which the cables resume their visible presence north of the pylons)

BARN OWL. A phone call from someone who had been shopping in Chichester today told me of a Barn Owl seen dead in a stream below a main carpark in the Avenue de Chartres. My guess is that the bird had been hit by a car on the nearby road and had flown on to collapse in the stream (such road accidents when the birds are hunting the roadside verges are the commonest cause of death but I think the second commonest cause is drowning when birds in waterless country areas attempt to bath in a cattle drinking trough and are unable to get out – farmers are encouraged to put a plank or other object in the trough for them to climb on after bathing). Another possible cause of death in this urban situation is starvation – many people keep 'tame' Barn Owls and some (for good or bad reasons) turn them loose to fend for themselves which they are totally unable to do. (I once took one such bird from Leigh Park where a resident had seen it sitting on a post round one of the greens being tormented by children – I believe this bird is still on display at Brent Lodge, not as a hospital patient but as the property of one of the people who work there who had one Barn Owl and wanted another of the opposite sex).

THU 2 OCT

CHIFF CHAFF still singing and COLLARED DOVE becoming more vocal each day.

WED 1 OCT

SISKIN. Three darted over my garden early in the morning making noises a bit like escaped cage birds with their high pitched, slightly plaintive, calls – I think I may have heard one of them over my garden about a week ago when I remember saying to my son that I could not recognize the call of a bird dashing over but thought it might be an escaped cage finch (my ears were not then tuned to their note, and hearing it in an unexpected situation rather than from a flock in a conifer wood made it less easy to identify). In the afternoon I heard and saw three small parties of Siskin while I was in Havant Thicket, helping to fix the sound and flight silhouette in my mind. At a guess this recent wave of sightings will abate as the

first arrivals move on west, and it will be some time before we get our own settled winter flocks in e.g. Stansted Forest.

BLACKBIRD. We are constantly told about the decline in Song Thrush numbers but have you noticed a decline in Blackbirds? Today I saw only one during two hours in Havant Thicket and none at home – that may be a seasonal effect of autumn moult, but Tony Gutteridge has just given me a worrying report on the Warblington Farm common bird census which has now been running since 1977. **In 1978 he recorded 94 Blackbird territories on the 150 acre farm and this number has fallen year by year to just 31 in 1997** (over the same period Song Thrush have declined from 17 pairs in 1977 to just one this year, and Skylark from 33 pairs to 12).

ENDANGERED BIRD WATCHERS. I expect you will have heard the news of a bird watcher being mugged for his video-camera near Bournemouth. I have long expected to hear such news as birders wander the countryside with expensive optics dangling from them, but it is a sad day when it happens. Perhaps the twitchers, flocking for mutual protection, will survive.

“RYAN’S OWL”. At Havant Tourist Info office today I was asked if I had seen the huge, eared, owl on the building at the junction of East and South Street (used to be Ryan’s Hardware shop). I was assured that one was perched there at dusk yesterday evening and that it was seen to move and had something in its bill. Remembering the escaped European Hawk Owl that was a feature of Chichester Cathedral a few years ago I set out to investigate, but soon found that this was an excellent model placed at the highest point on completion of the recent re-decoration of the building (perhaps to keep pigeons off the roof). It’s not easy to see but well worth looking for – the best view is probably from outside Havant News opposite the church entrance in West Street, but it can also be seen from the door of the Stationery Store, and outside Glanvilles solicitors, in East Street and you can just glimpse it from one point outside Waitrose in the Pallant. As this bird is not a species that I recognise I have been wondering if it is the same as that other unknown species that keeps appearing in Brian Fellows’ notes – the ‘Tawney Owl’.

TUE 30 SEP

BRENT GEESE. Four seen on the South Moors shore from the Oyster Beds were, I suspect, birds that have been in the harbour all summer. The newly arrived birds are too wary as yet to come to the north shore of the harbour (and would be in a bigger flock) but over recent years I have noticed some of the summering birds are last seen by me on the South Moors in May, then they retreat to Farlington Marshes or the islands for the main part of the summer and moulting season, re-appearing on the South Moors shore about this time of year. The newly arrived birds congregate off Saltmarsh Lane and increase in numbers until they feel brave enough to come out on the fields and visit the north part of the harbour with its greater coastal human activity and road noise. Each year they come north earlier:- I can remember when they were timid until after Christmas but this year we may see them by the end of October.

KINGFISHER. Passing Langstone Pond I could hear the sharp staccato calls of Kingfisher several times but never saw the bird. I did see just two Golden Plover out on the mud.

MON 29 SEP

GOLDEN PLOVER. Heading for Hayling on an afternoon cycle ride I reached Langstone Mill Pond to find the tide was falling but still covering the area where the Golden Plover roost. While scanning the birds that were present I was joined by an elderly ex-wildfowler by the name of O'Shea who (I think) lives in the old railway cottage nearest the point where the Billy Line crosses the road at Langstone (i.e. the old level crossing keeper's home) and started a long conversation which lasted until the mud was exposed and the first six Golden Plover flew in. One of the most interesting things I learnt from the conversation was that at some time in the past (since 1945) the wildfowlers had brought a pair of Canada Geese down here from Norfolk – can we still try them for war crimes and atrocities? I was also told that much more recently a Buzzard had once been seen perched in a big oak tree in Russell's field (the one you cross from the Royal Oak to the Billy Line). While we were talking an Egret flew over and later I saw three on the saltings off Northney Marina.

YELLOW WAGTAIL. Just one heard, then seen flying over, Northney Marsh was the only bird of much interest seen on this outing though there was a COMMON TERN perched off Northney Marina, a GOLDCREST and CHIFF CHAFF in trees of Northney Churchyard, and the first flock of COLLARED DOVE (less than 20) on the north Hayling fields.

BIRD SONG DURING THE WEEK. Robin is still regular, Collared Dove is increasing in volume, and Woodpigeon can be heard regularly while Starlings chatter their heads off in evening roosts. Chiff Chaff and some Tits can be heard occasionally and I heard snatches of Skylark song for the first time since the summer on Friday evening on Blendworth Down.

PLANTS:

FRI 3 OCT

A FIELD EDGE WORTH VISITING. After walking up Windmill Hill (Blendworth Down) from on a path starting a little west of New Barn Farm (north of Blendworth) and down again on the path nearer the A3 I was feeling disappointed with the plants I had found in the stubble – clearly the soil was soaked in chemicals which caused any natural growth to wilt or change colour (much of the Black Bindweed had leaves of a glorious rich red like mature Virginia Creeper), and the only plant of sufficient interest to note was one of CORN SPURRY. Coming back to the minor road from the A3 to New Barn Farm I crossed it to look in the richer green of the wheat re-growing after harvest in the field south of the road and I was absolutely delighted with what I found. If you go there I suggest you start from the base of the pylon marked on my map at SU 709152 and work east parallel to the road. You should find masses of SHARP LEAVED FLUELLEN with some ROUND LEAVED, and lots of FIELD PANSY, some of it with large and colourful flowers suggesting the hybrid with Viola tricolor. Among these is a lot of DWARF SPURGE and of course there is a mass of Field Speedwell, Scarlet Pimpernel and other common field weeds such as Common Poppy, Black Grass and Sun Spurge. If you come south on the A3 and take the tiny road to the left after the Chalton exit (top of the hill above the start of the A3M) you can park on either side of the minor road at the

junction, and from here you can walk the 200 yards to the pylon and also walk north beside the A3 to find a mass of other plants on that wide chalky verge and bank – the track along the verge has been a mass of Autumn Gentian and still has some Yellowwort, and on the bank there is a great variety of planted trees and shrubs including *Cotoneaster horizontalis* (or similar species) and some Juniper bushes.

THU 2 OCT

DUTCH ELM DISEASE. On the South Moors the east side of the 'orchid meadow' has a line of young elms along it above a tiny stream channel. One of these elms at the southern end died a little while ago and I see that one or two more at the north end have just died – will we lose this whole line as the trees reach the size at which the disease takes hold? While there I found just one flower of DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS in the orchid meadow – another species hanging on by its fingertips.

WED 1 OCT

SNEEZEWORT. Recording plants in the Bells Copse area of Havant Thicket I was totally puzzled by one 'flower' that I came on. It was close to some flowering Devils Bit Scabious (which seems to be having a good year and can be found in many places in the Thicket area) and seemed to have similar domed flowers on the end of its stems but of a mauve colour rather than the beautiful blue of the Scabious. The puzzle plants were creeping along the ground to escape from thick shrubby growth of other plants and when I got down to have a look I found the leaves and stems of these plants were nothing like the Scabious, but were apparently those of Sneezewort. To cut a long story short these were Sneezewort plants with no sign of their own white flowers (probably because they were being starved of light by the other plants) but with some unknown insect gall at the tip of their stems. The gall had induced growths that were mauve/white in colour with a lot of white hairs among the growth.

MON 29 SEP

SHAGGY SOLDIER. Walking the new Northney Marsh footpath I went down Church Lane and where it comes into the open fields I turned back to walk up the field side of the hedge separating me from the track I had just come down. Here is a great mass of weeds and among them was a large amount of Shaggy Soldier (but nothing else of great interest). On the sea wall I found a good amount of SLENDER HARE'S EAR, and coming back across the field to the south (leading back to St Peter's Avenue) I found the very first CORN SPURREY that I have seen this year. Near it the field was choked with the remains of Willowherb plants and I brought one home to struggle with its identification, eventually coming to the conclusion that it was the AMERICAN WILLOWHERB that I know is rapidly increasing to become one of the commonest species – among the problems of identifying it are that Francis Rose insists that this species has four raised ridges on its stem (but this had a round stem with no ridges) and he names it *Epilobium adenocaulon* while Stace names it *E. ciliatum* (saying that the name *E. adenocaulon* "seems predated by *E. watsonii*" to add to the confusion – he makes no other reference to *E. watsonii*).

STRAWBERRY TREE. One in Northney Churchyard is well worth a separate mention. Right by the north east corner of the church, just inside a black metal 'kissing gate' leading from the road, is a really magnificent example of this small

tree which at the moment has the glossiest of leaves and the biggest fruit that I have ever seen, some berries being as red and as large as the best of strawberries (but not, I am sure, as tasty – I assume everyone knows that the tree gets its name of *Arbutus unedo* from the fact that any one who tries to eat the fruit will only eat one)

MUSK STORK'S BILL?? In the Northney Posthouse Hotel carpark area, just alongside the kerb of the exit road from the marina, I came on specimens of Storksbill which seemed very different from the normal species (probably because they have been close mown, run over by cars and lorries and trodden by human feet) but the pinnules of their leaves are much less deeply 'cut' than usual and they have an excess of glandular hairs on the flower stems. Unfortunately I could find no seeds and I do not know what 'musk' smells like – I thought it was a really nasty smell given off by Skunks, but it is also I think advertised as a perfume for humans. I must now look more closely at other Common Storksbill plants and also go back to this site to find some seeds before even thinking of claiming to have found the very rare *Erodium moschatum*.

INSECTS:

FRI 3 OCT

RED ADMIRAL and SMALL WHITE still to be seen frequently and I hear that a BRIMSTONE was seen in Stansted recently.

THU 2 OCT

One SMALL TORTOISESHELL seen on Michaelmas Daisies.

MON 29 SEP

SPECKLED WOOD butterflies seem to have recovered from a bad mid-year period and I saw them in three different places today. LARGE & SMALL WHITES were also to be seen plus RED ADMIRAL but the most interesting sighting was of a very tatty male COMMON BLUE at Northney Marina. MIGRANT HAWKER dragonflies are still on the wing.

OTHER:

SUN 5 OCT

CHANTERELLE TOADSTOOLS. This morning's 'Farming Breakfast' programme on Radio 4 included Chanterelles, said to have been just picked on Exmoor. These can be found in Havant Thicket but I have not come on any for several years. I have, however, commonly found FALSE CHANTERELLES in almost every conifer wood hereabouts. The real Chanterelle is a gourmet's delight among toadstools but the False Chanterelle should not be eaten (one book marks it inedible, another says that it is "said to be edible but known to cause alarming symptoms of hallucination in some cases". Both are medium sized toadstools (caps around 5 cm across, stems also around 5cm) and are coloured orangey yellow all over, but the prime distinction is that the true Chanterelle does not have thin, sharp edged, gills but has broad 'folds of flesh' below the cap and running down the stem – it is also a brighter 'egg yolk' yellow and smells sweet (of apricots) where the False Chanterelle smells mushroomy, and it is often found under broad leaved trees rather than conifers.

THU 2 OCT

WEASEL. Cycling along the little used path running south of the A27 and north of the Xyratex factory on my way back from the South Moors I noticed a tiny brown animal darting from side to side of the path ahead of me, soon recognising it as a Weasel on the hunt. It spotted me when I was about fifty yards away and paused momentarily to look at me, then decided quite typically to ignore me and get on with the job in hand which it did until I was less than ten yards off when it reluctantly moved into the undergrowth beside the path (almost certainly still hunting just as actively). These tiny creatures, about the same length as a Rat but much thinner, seem totally fearless of humans, only moving out of their way because we lumbering great beasts are likely to disturb the other small mammals that the Weasel is hunting.

WED 1 OCT

TOADSTOOLS. October is traditionally the month in which these are most numerous but the recent drought seemed likely to put off their appearance this year so I was very pleased to find a large and colourful troop of FLY AGARIC in Havant Thicket and to come on quite a few large FLEECY MILKCAPS and sporadic Russula species as well as AMANITA CITRINA (False Deathcap), Common Earthball, Sulphur Tuft, Honey Fungus and white puffballs (*Lycoperdon perlatum*). I hear that Fly Agaric are also to be seen in Stansted Forest where the HORN OF PLENTY has attempted to grow in large numbers but has found the conditions not to its taste and is now a sorry sight. From another source I hear that there has recently been a very good crop of PARASOL MUSHROOMS on Rake Common