

RALPH HOLLINS WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS – 1999

FRI 31 DEC

Brian Fellows did not spot the Goosander at Emsworth Mill Pond today - just one Merganser and a pond record of 44 TUFTED DUCK - but he definitely had the Hampshire birding highlight of the day in hearing full song from a BLACKBIRD as he walked home. The bird was heard in late afternoon somewhere near the main Havant Road, presumably not far from the Mill Pond

With news from Sussex (see below) of more RED THROATED DIVER heading our way Pete Potts reports that at least one was to be seen at Dibden Bay on Dec 29. He also had a SLAV GREBE off Hamble Point on Dec 27. The Divers flying west past Worthing may of course give Hampshire the cold shoulder and keep on into the sunset - I believe these birds form large rafts in some of the southern bays of Cornwall in winter.

John Goodspeed reports 'a few FIELDFARE' in gardens near his on Portsdown in the past couple of days (and there may be others in the Nutbourne/Thorney area from which I have not had recent reports) so they remain a rarity along our coastal strip.

The Sussex latest sightings reported on their website include .. On Dec 27 18 RED THROATED DIVERS flew west at Worthing (13 in one flock), on Dec 28 the GLAUCOUS GULL was still in Pagham Harbour and Red Crested Pochard at Ivy Lake, Chichester, and on the Dec 29 four WHOOPER and 9 BEWICK'S SWANS were near Amberley Castle and the Castle Hill (Brighton/Lewes) CORN BUNTING flock was estimated to have 120 birds. Way to the east at Rye 4 BEAN GEESE flew over and were later seen at Pett Levels - these were the smaller Tundra race birds with only a narrow orange band on the bill and that could add to their authenticity as wild birds.

The Hampshire sightings mentioned on the pagers confirm the presence of the Ferruginous drake at Falington Deepes and 3 Avocets at the lake (plus 19 Bearded Tits) and Water Pipits somewhere at the reserve. At Lymington the Long Tailed Duck and Scaup were still on the pools (but no mention of Smew) with the Marsh Harrier still in the general area

The Wildlife Trust circular walk of the Havant, Langstone and Warblington area led by Cath Cooper this morning drew a good crowd and rewarded them with all the birds and flowers that might have been expected along the route. Just up the Billy Line from the walk's starting point in the Townend House carpark a WOOD PIGEON had been one of the breakfast time songsters among the more vocal Collared Doves, and all along the line Blue Tits could be heard singing among the Robins and occasional Great Tit - both Song and Mistle Thrush were seen but not heard. At the start of the walk a few Redwing could be heard as usual in the Lymbourne springs area as we followed the rail track to the main road at Langstone and found a GREEN SANDPIPER cooling its feet in the edge of a large pool of standing water on the meadow across the road (immediately north of Mill Lane and south of 'The Mallards' - can anyone tell me if there is any established precedent for this field being referred to by Havant Borough as 'Southmere'? or is it as newly invented a name as The Mallards for the road and housing development around the now udderless dairy farm?).

.....The Langstone eastern shore at low tide offered a distant panorama of shore birds. More than 60 Shelduck were on or near the water with a few Merganser and Goldeneye, and relatively small parties of Golden Plover and Lapwing were on the mud - at most only 150 Golden Plover were present, only one Swan was seen by myself, and even the Mallard and Teal on the pond were in less than full strength. The pony field north of the pond partly made up for this with a colourful display of half a dozen REDWING working over the ground, churned up by the ponies hooves, in search of worms but there was not a single Heron in the field and we had to search for just two Egret out in Sweare Deep.

.....Looking south from the Warblington Church shore by far the most impressive sight of the day was the way in which 300, maybe 500, Brent put up from the corn fields west of Northney Church patterned the sky with their silent skeins (too far away against the brighter southern sky to hear a sound). A small party of us went on along the shore, past two Ringed Plover and the only large flock of Dunlin we were to see, to Conigar Point and the easternmost shore field of the farm in which we could watch a large flock of Brent and see how many young they had with them (most of the young now have neck collars like the adults but they all still retain the distinctive thin white bars across their closed wing tips)

.....The Warblington Farm eastern stream, running east towards Emsworth through the mud south of Nore Barn, gave us good views of a single GREENSHANK, and moving north along the 'Selangor Avenue' footpath we enjoyed the sight of three Jays, a few more Redwing, up to ten EGRETS together, and both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers before we rejoined the main road back into Havant. The eastern fields of the farm have been popular with the Egrets this month as the cattle in them not only churn up the ground from which the Egrets can take worms but the cattle food may also supplement the birds diet

(does anyone know if this is true?). In early December I heard of 23 Egrets being seen together here and today John Goodspeed told me of a report of 27 of them there on Dec 17.

THU 30 DEC

Paul Winter visited the Lower Test reserve in this morning's rain and was pleased to find a FIRECREST and 2 Chiffchaff .. 'near Nursling Substation (a stone's throw from the northern boundary of the reserve)' There was also a mixed flock of around 60 Redwing and Fieldfare, and the more regular Green Sandpipers (2) and Water Pipit (3)

Steve Copesey was at Titchfield Haven on Dec 29 but his news just missed that day's update. In the reserve he found a SNOW GOOSE and 11 BARNACLE GEESE that could well have come from Baffins Pond but also with them were two BAR HEADED GEESE of which I have heard nothing earlier this year (Steve says that one of the two was a 'hybrid of some sort'). Have these oddities been at the Haven for some time and just ignored as plastic objects? If not, does anyone know more of their history? Steve found some more serious birds along the canal path, including a Chiffchaff and 15 SISKIN plus 10 GOLDFINCH feeding on Alders above the bridge (at SU 536033) taking the field path away to Lower Posbrook Farm where there were some 15 Fieldfare among 30 to 40 Redwing

WED 29 DEC

With the wind in the north west I guess the beach just east of Gunner Point (around SZ693989) on Hayling was as sheltered a feeding place as SANDERLING could find today and at 3pm, just an hour before high tide, Brian Fellows found a magnificent flock of 150 busily feeding with thoughts of another very chill night ahead of them. I am surprised at the number present and wonder if they had flown over from the more exposed Bembridge Sands (which would have been covered by then). They could equally well be birds moving west along the coast from the much colder North Seas shores. Has anyone else seen any here this winter?

Yesterday Brian found our elusive local redhead GOOSANDER back on Emsworth Mill Pond and a clue as to where it now goes when not at Emsworth comes from John Gowen who saw it on Langstone Mill Pond on Sun (26 Dec). I doubt it spends much time on that pond or it would have been seen by more people but if it goes that far west from Emsworth it probably also returns to its original haunts around the Langbrook and Hermitage streams. On Monday (Dec 27) Brian was impressed by the sight of 500 BRENT flying north-west more or less over his garden and suspects they were intending to feed on the young corn in the large open fields south of the A27 and west of Southbourne where they are of no interest to the people who record the feeding habits of the Brent, those fields being outside the political boundaries for which a Brent Goose strategy is said to be in preparation.

David Parker was pleased to look from his garden into the larches along the northern edge of Stansted Forest immediately east of the road and to see a party of 11 CROSSBILL on Christmas Eve. This is where Dave Mead's RSPB group saw a similar number on Dec 19 and previous sightings indicate that there has been a party of 10 to 20 birds moving around in the east part of the Forest from the road to Lumley Wood for a couple of months. Despite hard weather we cannot expect any sudden influx of these birds now as they are said to turn their thoughts to next as early as January (maybe these will all stay here to breed?)

Gwynne Johnson had a KINGFISHER hovering over, and diving into, her garden pond at Soberton in the Meon Valley yesterday, causing great excitement in the household. With hard frosts making many streams and ponds to the north of us inaccessible this was probably a newcomer to the Meon trying its luck where no resident Kingfisher would drive it off. The chances are that it was one of this year's young birds, and a close encounter such as this might give you the chance to prove the point by checking the colour of its feet (those of adults would be bright orange while the juveniles have black feet and a tiny white tip to the bill though you are only likely to see that on a corpse).

.....In the same garden at least three different BLACKCAP have been seen this winter, and REDWING, FIELDFARE and Egrets are regularly seen in the area - Gwynne could see 5 LITTLE EGRET on Christmas Day in one riverside field visible from the house, and in the same batch of messages comes the first anonymous news (from Paul Winter's pager) of a LITTLE EGRET at Alresford in fields just south of the bridge taking the A21 over the Itchen.

Other pager news, starting with sightings on Dec 27, bring confirmation that 3 AVOCET have settled at the Farlington Lake with a Greenshank and at least 3 of the original 5 Little Stint. At the Deeps the FERRUGINOUS DUCK is still to be seen as is the Black Brant in the Main Marsh fields west of the deeps, and 2 Water Pipit are still on the reserve. Yesterday (Dec 28) Paul Winter himself saw 2 GREAT NORTHERN DIVER off Hill Head, and watched one fly west towards Southampton Water at 3pm. Reports from others for that day include another sighting of Pale Bellied Brent at Farlington and the

Alresford Egret sighting already noted.

.....Also on Dec 28 Steve Copsey was at the Southsea Sealife Centre and comments that 10 BRENT were feeding on Southsea Common regardless of children kicking a football about only 20 yards from them, and many people walking by. I believe the same reluctance of Brent to get out of the way of humans can be seen on the Cams Hall Golf Course alongside Fareham Creek - the golfers have to force their way through the feeding flocks and probably lose a few balls in the melee. Elsewhere the Brent take flight when anyone gets within a hundred yards of them....

The Sussex website carries no Hampshire border reports for the past couple of days but in the Brighton area one garden has a BLACK REDSTART and another a 'splendid male Blackcap'. We seem to be luckier than Sussex in the number of our wintering Blackcap with around 150 winter birds reported in the county in 1997 compared to only 67 in Sussex, though the number present probably greatly exceeds the number reported in both counties, but wintering Black Redstart numbers are (to my mind) lower than usual in Hampshire in recent years. So far this winter I have only heard of two of them in Hampshire (around Oct 31 near Old Winchester Hill, Dave Mead, and Nov 3 at Eastoke on Hayling seen by Tim Timlick). PURPLE SANDPIPER is another bird more likely to be seen in Sussex (where there were four on Southwick Beach, just west of Brighton, on Dec 26) than Hampshire this winter. Another item that caught my eye in the Sussex news was of a pair of LITTLE OWLS being 'very active and vocal at dawn and dusk' at a farm also in the Brighton area near Ovingdean - if pairs are working up enthusiasm for nesting there others should be having similar thoughts here in Hampshire.

MON 27 DEC

So far this winter we seem to have few sightings of either RAZORBILL or GUILLEMOT fishing off our shores, those that have been reported have been in the category of Auk spp just flying by. On Hayling Island Alistair and Jeni Martin put that right on Christmas Day with a Guillemot in the tidal inlet down the west side of the Black Point causeway and I see that today a Razorbill is reported on the pagers as being on the Hythe side of Southampton Water with 2 GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS. On Boxing Day another GN Diver turned up in Haslar Lake on the Gosport side of the mouth of Portsmouth Harbour (I presume it was in Haslar Lake itself at SZ618994, but if you intend to look for it it might be worth checking that it is not further up the Haslar/Stoke/Anglesey Lake complex as in one recent winter a GN Diver gave excellent close-ups when it settled in the enclosed Anglesey Lake SZ 605987). Yet another GN Diver was reported in the Chalk Dock area of Langstone Harbour (north east of F/Marshes and north of N Binness island). An adult MED GULL was near the diver and a RED NECKED GREBE has been off the Point at F/Marshes over the holiday. The long stayers, such as the Ferruginous Duck on the deeps, are still at the marshes with some variation in numbers (3 AVOCET but only 2 LITTLE STINT seen) and the regulars at Fleet Pond are also playing the numbers game (only 2 Bittern and 5 Mandarin seen on Boxing Day)

WEEK 51 DEC 20 – 26

SUN 26 DEC

Apologies to all our readers for my failure to put out a web update on Christmas Eve - having driven to Gatwick and back that day I was smitten by the flu that is going around and retired to bed with a temperature which has now abated - having survived that normal service will hopefully be resumed despite the threat of Millenium Bug which so far has only manifested itself as a plague of MONEY SPIDERS which appeared on (and perhaps inside) the clothing of the panel and audience at the Radio 4 Gardeners Questions programme broadcast from Greenwich today.

I remember a SNOW BUNTING which arrived on the Farlington Marshes seawall quite a few years ago and spent a week or more defying gale force winds and winter waves which threatened to engulf it at each high tide - if the water rushing along the wall where the birds was perched could not possibly be avoided it would flutter a few yards to where a previous wave had receded, then return to its original chosen perch for a few more seconds until the next wave crashed onto the concrete. This vivid memory was brought to my consciousness today by a report on the Sussex recent sightings website of another Snow Bunting with the same liking for living dangerously seen on Dec 18 at The Crumbles in East Sussex at the west end of Pevensey Bay - I've no idea whether the bird stayed to challenge the storms that have brought Pevensey into the national news this week, but the thought demonstrates both the power of wind and water and the ability of living things to survive every disaster while they remain fit.

.....More relevant news from West Sussex tells us that the Selsey GLAUCUOUS GULL, which normally

sits out the winter around the Lifeboat Station, is back but currently sheltering within Pagham Harbour (seen Dec 22 & 23, but I have no idea if it is old George or am upstart - and if old George has departed this life were his last words 'Bugger Bognor?') Also in the Harbour on the 23rd were 15 AVOCET and 4 MED GULLS, and at Chichester lakes both a BLACK THROATED DIVER and RED CRESTED POCHARD were seen that day. On the 22nd the list produced by seawatchers at SELSEY BILL is reported to be 27 RED THROATED, 2 GREAT NORTHERN and at least 1 BLACK THROATED DIVER, 4 RED NECKED and some BLACK THROATED GREBES, 11 EIDER, 5 VELVET SCOTER, 5 POM and one or more ARCTIC SKUA, 4 LITTLE GULL, 250 KITTIWAKE, 2 MED GULLS and a (Turkey?) SANDWICH TERN.

This afternoon Peter Morrison walked the canal path at Titchfield Haven and saw 3 or 4 WATER PIPIT in a meadow much further south than the northern flooded fields which they used to favour. Peter says they were in the .. 'third field up, view from high ground just past bridge over canal.' I take this to be around SU 537032 opposite the bridge at the southern end of the field path coming south from Great Posbrook Farm past Lower Posbrook Farm rather than the bridge much further up which leads directly west to Great Posbrook. Offshore Peter saw one GREAT NORTHERN DIVER which could be one of the two reported (with a GUILLEMOT) at the mouth of the Hamble off the Hook nature reserve on Dec 24 but could well be a third in that area, which reminds me that a large flock of GREAT CRESTED GREBE normally assembles off the Chilling/Brownwich shore at this time of year - any sightings/counts of them? While on the subject of GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS Nick Mills has an amusing story of how he and another birder were watching one of the mouth off the Hamble last Monday (Dec 20) when a lady dog walker came by and asked what they were looking at - when Nick told her it was a Great Northern Diver her response was succinct .. 'Silly man he'll catch his death of cold out there.' When they invited her to look through the scope and she realised it was a only a bird she beat a hasty retreat as if fearing she might become catch the madness which brought two adult humans out into the cold just to look at a bird on the water. Nick now has two male BALCKCAP in his garden at Hook Park, and can watch their mutual aggression concerning sole rights to the food supply from inside his house wihtout exposing himself to further ridicule from the right minded (non-birding) people in the area.

For those who are interested in seeing GREAT NORTHERN DIVERS it sounds as if there could be at least six in the Southampton Water/Solent area since, on Dec 24 when there were at least two off the mouth of the Hamble, another three were 5 km north off the Southampton Weston Shore seen by Andy Collins who still has two MED GULLS in that patch.

Other than that story the oldest snippet of news which I have not previously passed on dates from Dec 22 when Martin and Margaret Baggs were walking in the Lyecommon area (around SU 789127 south east of West Marden) and saw a RED KITE circling above them. I am indebted to Brian Fellows for passing this on to me. On the same day the pagers confirmed the continuing presence of the Ferruginous Duck, 5 Stint, and 2 Avocet at Farlington together with a vague report of one or more Bewick's Swan in the Ibsley are where John Clark counted 13 on Dec 19. A similar report of one Pale Bellied Brent on the west shore of Langstone Harbour ('fields by the Eastern Road') on Dec 23 shows that at least one is still with us. Also on Dec 23 the pagers told of the redhead Smew, female Long Tailed Duck and 3 Scaup at Normandy Lake with a Spotshank, 3 Greenshank and 100 Golden Plover (on Dec 24 Bob Groves went to Normandy Lake and saw the Long Tailed Duck and at least one Scaup plus a Spotshank). Still on Dec 23 there 2 drake Goosander and 3 Bittern remianined on show at Fleet Pond.

The PEREGRINES which have roosted on the spire of Chichester Cathedral intermittently over recent years were back there this afternoon - Graham Roberts saw two wheeling round the spire giving an 'excellent aerial display' in the storm foice winds and later spotted one roosting there at 4:30pm. Another message of Christmas cheer for birders came from Trevor Carpenter who drove to the south end of Church Road at Warsash (SU 500054) and set out to walk down the valley of the Hook stream to the shore in search of the Great Northern Divers. As soon as he got among the trees overhanging the deep stream valley he came on a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER, and although he did not see any Divers he was delighted with this bird as a Christmas present wrapped with many Goldfinch and Long Tailed Tits in the same trees. I have put the full text of Trevor's message in the Comments section as I am sure many will agree with his pessimistic and optimistic thoughts for the future.

Living in Surrey Paul Boulton finds plenty of good birds in that area but enjoys an occasional excursion to the coast (some may remember the evocative account of how he took his two very young boys for a week-end around Pagham Harbour in May and both dad and the youngsters were in seventh heaven for the full weekend). He also expresses his thanks to all those who share info on birds via the Internet and lists six species whihc have been added to his life list this year as a direct result of the internet (the birds were Black Throated Thrush, Merlin, Serin, Temminck's Stint, Woodchat Shrike and a rare male of one of the

Yellow Wagtails - Ashy Headed Wagtail, M.f. cinereocapilla). If you are reading this you presumably already have access to the internet, but old fashioned methods of communication (face to face communication with like minded souls and also with experts) are still the best, especially when it comes to doing something constructive with your hobby. If you live in the wider Southampton Area a read what Andy Collins has to say about the SOUTHAMPTON NATURAL HISTORY SOCIETY. 'Southampton has an excellent Natural History Society which has a comprehensive field and indoor meeting program, conducts surveys and produces newsletters and an annual report detailing sightings in the Southampton area. Anyone interested in joining or finding out more can email me for details (arc@soton.ac.uk)'

Brian Fellows found the redhead GOOSANDER on Emsworth Mill Pond (with 4 Merganser) on Dec 22 but it was elsewhere on Christmas day and again today when Brian made brief visits - the news on Christmas Day was of 27 Tufted Duck on the pond (this winter's peak count to date), and today, over to the east of Thorney in the Prinsted Channel, the Shelduck were up to a respectable count of 66. Back on Dec 22 Tony Gutteridge was also on the east side of Thorney, further south at Stanbury Point, where he saw a flock of 280 SHELDUCK, many PINTAIL and a couple of AVOCET (According to Barry Collins up to four Avocet are regularly somewhere around Thorney and often feed in Nutbourne Bay).

For those who may be interested birdsong has stepped up a notch this week with many BLUE TIT joining in with the Great Tits, Song Thrushes, Collared Doves, Starlings, Wrens, Robins and occasional DUNNOCK, Wood Pigeon and Mistle Thrush. On my lawn it looks as though a pair of Blackbirds regard it as their territory and drive off any intruders (the female bird seems more active than the male in this).

Paul Winter passes on a rumour (source being chatter overheard by his mum when she was at the hairdresser's) of a WHITE STORK (but there again, it could be an escaped Turkey or much more likely a Little Egret) perched in a tree close to the A27 on the west side of the Itchen at Bursledon and we would all like to hear of more and more detailed sightings. Paul says it is described as .. 'a large bird "much bigger than a heron" seen perched on a chimney of a house close to the A27 as it descends eastwards from the pub at the crown of the hill to the railway bridge at Bursledon.' This reminds me that I have had a further message from the lady who reported a couple of white herons by the River Nadder recently. She has not yet seen them again but intends to take a camera and to look carefully at the leg and bill colours.

And finally, Ian Thirlwell contributed the following message to HOSLIST on Christmas Day .. 'Possible RING-BILLED GULL in Langstone Hbr at 13:15, SU678004 approx (look from Portsmouth, Milton Common shore, near University buildings). Not 100% sure, but looked good.'

WED 22 DEC

For those thinking of their New Year's Day lists the long staying FERRUGINOUS drake is still on the Deeps at Farlington and the 2 AVOCET and 5 LITTLE STINT were at the lake today. Also with New Year's Day in mind take a look at the Imminent Events on the What's New page if you have not already done so ..

Brian Fellows found the redhead GOOSANDER (which must be the one from the Broadmarsh/South Moors area though this is not proven) back on Emsworth Mill Pond today with 4 Merganser (one of them a drake). Also were 18 Tufted Duck but only 33 Swans

A request (on the HOSLIST info exchange) from Simon Woolley for details of where to see WATER PIPIT drew responses from Paul Winter regarding those at the Lower Test Marshes and Peter Morrison about Titchfield Haven. Paul says .. 'I think up to 7 have been seen at LTM so far. Usually (hiding) on the grassy hummocks in front of the pylon viewed from the five bar gate (c.SU362145) where the Test Way heads off NW across the boardwalk'. Peter writes of several at Titchfield Haven and says they are 'supposed to be in the first (southernmost) watermeadow' which I take to be the first open access field as you walk north up the canal footpath. There have also been sightings of 2 at Farlington Marshes up to Nov 30, and I suspect these will remain there through the winter, probably by the stream in the area visible from the building.

As I drove past today I noticed that Aldsworth Pond (SU 763088) was once more full of water - this year it was effectively dry on Aug 5 and has been dry for just over four months. Hopefully the water will remain until late summer and we may soon see the Emperor Goose back there, with a selection of vegetarian wildfowl to enjoy the rich underwater vegetation.

MON 20 DEC

Paul Winter's pager today brought us news of a female FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Timsbury gravel pits where a female was reported on Nov 21 and a drake on Nov 28 and 29, with no further sightings until now. As the difference between the sexes is one of colour tone I would guess that there is just one bird resident there and playing hard to find but if anyone has a more positive view of multiple birds I'm sure we would like to know the details. At Fleet Pond 3 Chiffchaff went on the attendance list on which the

500 Siskin and 20 Brambling remain as yesterday.

It seems that some BRAMBLING are addicted to garden seed feeders and are on them as soon as they arrive here - John Goodspeed tells me that friends of his at Grayshott saw them on their feeder in mid-November. I am not familiar with the winter plumage of Brambling but have a better idea of what to expect thanks to the picture sent by Mike Bending yesterday and a note today from Stephen Harvey pointing out that the birds on his seed-feeder which started this correspondence were almost certainly adults, not immature birds as I suggested. Another message from Mike Harris, just back from a holiday in the Canary Islands, tells me that out there they do not have the northern Brambling but they do have a BLUE CHAFFINCH (no doubt if that was offered the appropriate corn it would use the birdtable as a cabaret stage to entertain you with its special brand of humour)

The Emsworth ponds were frozen today and many of the regular birds had left but, in Brian Fellows words .. 'one stood out as a possible YELLOW-LEGGED GULL *Larus cachinnans*. The most striking feature of this bird was its bright yellow legs which showed up well in the sunlight. I thought its mantle was a little darker than that of a regular Herring Gull though I did not have one to compare it with. Also, its head was plain white with no streaking, though I know some Herring Gulls also have plain heads.' Brian also points out that I mis-quoted him over the Treecreeper in his garden - he did in fact say it was Wren probing the bark like a Treecreeper.

John Clark was in the Ibsley area of the Avon Valley on Saturday (Dec 19) for his special wildfowl WeBS count and reports the presence of 13 BEWICK'S SWAN and 4 WHITEFRONT geese in a flock of 185 Greylag (I hope this does not mean that one of the family of 5 WHITEFRONT which Russell Wynn saw flying up the Lymington River from the sea on Nov 11 has perished). Single Common and Green Sandpiper were seen with 7 RUDDY DUCK and 9 GOOSANDER. The other totals for the Blashford Lakes make impressive reading - Little Grebe 16, Great Crested Grebe 85, Cormorant 29, Mute Swan 45, Wigeon 728, Gadwall 400, Teal 141, Mallard 204, Shoveler 77, Pochard 235, Tufted 220, Goldeneye 17, and Coot 1454. Just one Little Egret flew over as did a first-winter Peregrine.

Nick Mills tells me that the GREAT NORTHERN DIVER which was reported off Calshot on Saturday was seen by him only 200 yards off the Warsash (Hook) shore on Sunday (Dec 19). In his own garden at Hook a male BLACKCAP was again seen over the weekend.

Bruce Archer says he is very familiar with winter Goosander in the north of Hampshire (his patch is Moor Green where there are currently 17 males and 13 females) but he too has never seen them displaying as John Norton did at the Lower Test on Dec 16. For anyone who is interested (that includes me) he quotes the Handbook on the subject .. '(1) sudden and rapid stretching of the head and neck perpendicularly upwards to fullest extent, bill gaping, and equally abrupt return to normal position; (2) rising up on the water with beak touching breast; (3) sudden spasmodic movement of feet, throwing up a spurt of water, much more forcibly than Goldeneye, and propelling bird forward a foot or two. Elevation of head-feathers, slight bowing and head-tossing also occur, and display is associated with much bickering, splashing and chasing.' Bruce thinks that many of them remain paired through the winter and do not need to go through elaborate courtship until they get back home and have to work up enthusiasm for mating and nest-building.

John Gowen was on the Langstone South Moors today and enjoyed a glimpse of the KINGFISHER by the Langbrook stream before a dog walker 'moved it on'. At the mouth of the stream a flock of 60 LAPWING were resting on the shore - not normally seen here this was probably a flock trying to escape the snow inland and taking a breather while considering if it was worth trying further south (as the tideline around the harbour was frozen this morning they probably opted for the onward journey south). Walking back along the edge of the moors a SNIPE got up and set off, probably on a similar journey in search of unfrozen soil (this reminds me that yesterday a lone Snipe was resting at the edge of Langstone Mill Pond where I cannot recall seeing one before). Also yesterday John Gowen watched a flock of 25 FIELDFARE speeding west over his house in Langstone and spotted the first two Redwing of the winter in the pony fields north of Wade Court.

If anyone wants an amusing story about how an Arkasas hunter shot a crow and then complained that it did not taste good despite following the instructions on the band around its leg (saying, as he read it, 'Wash, Boil and Serve') has caused the US Dept of the Interior to change the tags put on by the Washington Biological Survey they should visit the SOS Recent News page (link provided in the What's New page) which today has lots of news from East Sussex but little for us at the Hampshire end.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 24 DEC

Nik Knight has started a programme of garden clearance and improvement at the Old Farmhouse, across

Wade Lane from Wade Court at Langstone, and in newly created flower beds where trees have been cleared this year, and unusual fungus was seen by me today (seeming growing around a newly planted rose bush but much more likely based on the tree that was previously there). The colour and shape are close to Roger Phillips illustration of OTIDEA ALUTACEA, though my guess would be that it stood taller than the 5cm height given (certainly the shape with a split down one side of the cup was as illustrated). As I gave it the briefest of glances I can only suggest this identification but will hopefully take a closer and more scientific view in the near future.

COMMENT:

24 Dec 99 - from Trevor Carpenter

Will it still be possible to see a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker in 100 years time?

I parked the car at the bottom of Church Road at Warsash this morning and walked into Hook Woods.

Within two minutes I saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. I remember looking in the same place with you some years ago. It seems like fairly recently but I think it was probably ten years ago. Its nice to know they are still around. On that path the trees were full of birds with many Goldfinches and Long Tailed Tits especially.

I walked down to the shore with the hope of the reported diver but saw nothing other than a Great Crested Grebe. The new scrape (I probably can't carry on calling it that forever) has a considerable number of birds on it including over 260 Lapwing, 12 Snipe and a Little Egret.

Keep up the good work in the new year. I think about what will happen to all yours and everybody else's web data in the next millennium. The sheer amount of information that will be available is going to be awesome. By 2099 people will be looking back not only knowing every great historical fact of the last 100 years in minute detail but that on Christmas Eve a hundred years ago you could still see Lesser Spotted Woodpecker on the site now occupied by the "South Hampshire Woodland Museum", one of the few natural locations not destroyed by the disastrous house building programme of the late 20th and early 21st century.

WEEK 50 DEC 13 - 19

BIRDS:

SUN 19 DEC

Dave Mead took his RSPB group for a walk in the Stansted East Park area this morning and they had superb views of a sunlit RED KITE circling east of them over the Walderton/Racton Folly area (squares SU 7709 or 7710). A couple of Buzzard were also seen and so was a Little Owl in trees at SU 761106 between the entrance to Stansted House and the Irongate Cottage. After lunch some of the party went north to Forestside and found around 12 CROSSBILL in the larches in the northern edge of the Forest opposite the church (Compartment 26C at SU 759123).

Despite the icy roads there was a good turn out for Kevin Stouse's walk from Warblington Church to Hayling Oysterbeds this morning. On my way to join them a Dunnock sang strongly and eight Redwing flew west over Warblington Castle, and as soon as the walk party reached the shore we were greeted by a flock of 30 Wigeon with three Goldeneye and a Great Crested Grebe in the background and many Brent everywhere along the water's edge. The tide was just starting to fall and many waders arrived as we watched - starting with a single Ringed Plover, a few Redshank and Oystercatcher we were soon watching a couple of hundred Dunlin and up to 100 mixed Golden and Grey Plover and Lapwing all whirling around the edge of the mud as a couple of Heron's flew in low to frighten them. One or two Curlew and Black Tailed Godwit were also present on shore with Merganser, Teal and a lone Swan on the water. Near Langstone Pond a lone Reed Bunting and Great Spotted Woodpecker added to the interest and as we looked back we could see several hundred Golden Plover and even more Bar Tailed Godwit on the exposed mud. Crossing Langstone Bridge three Egrets and a Little Grebe went onto the list and at the Oysterbeds a pair of Stonechat and a small flock of 5 Yellowhammer added colour. Back at Langstone we found a flock of 30 Merganser in the small pool of water remaining south of Pook Lane and counted at least 58 Shelduck on the mud.

My recent comments expressing surprise that BRAMBLING would visit a seed feeder drew a response from Mike Bending who has sent me an excellent photo of one caught in the act in his Waterlooville area garden last winter - the bird is a male but does not have its full black head and mantle, just three thick black lines running down from the crown, so I guess the photo was taken around this time of year (Dec/Jan).

Another interesting garden bird report comes from Rob Edmunds in Fleet who this morning had a male SISKIN visiting a nut feeder - like most people, he does not expect to see Siskin in the garden until

February or March, but with the pagers reporting 500 SISKIN at Fleet Pond it is not surprising that a few are visiting local gardens. In addition to the Siskin the pagers report 220 Chaffinch, 160 Redpoll and 21 Brambling at the pond today with 53 Fieldfare going over. No news of the 500 Brambling that were at Winchfield Moor near Fleet at the end of November so I guess that big flock has broken up and moved on.

Brian Fellows was very pleased to find the redhead GOOSANDER (presumably the Hermitage Stream bird) on the Emsworth Mill Pond this morning, to be able to watch a KINGFISHER at work fishing in the sea by the Emsworth Sailing Club, and to have a Wren explore a flowering cherry tree in his own garden in the manner of a Treecreeper.

It sounds as if the record for the furthest inland EGRETS at the moment must go to Wiltshire in view of a message today from Belinda Vohra who says .." The past two mornings I have seen a pair of white Herons (at least, that's what I assume that they are!). They are residing near a small river (Nadder) near Salisbury" .. and asks for help in identifying them. I assume they are almost certainly LITTLE EGRETS but recall a report from Simon Woolley of a GREAT WHITE EGRET in this area on Sept 6 (he thought that bird might be the American subspecies (Egretta alba egretta) as it had all dark legs and yellow bill). Can anyone be more certain about these birds?

SAT 18 DEC

The pagers were fairly busy today with news of a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER off Calshot, the continuing presence of the FERRUGINOUS DUCK at the Farlington Deepes, and late news of a possible DUSK THRUSH in Alton las Monday (Dec 13). CROSSBILLS were feeding in the Moors Country Park main carpark in the afternoon, and the long staying SMEW, LONG TAILED DUCK and SCAUP were still at Normandy Lake (where Paul Winter found that the female Scaup had been joined by a first winter male - he also saw the MARSH HARRIER still over the Keyhaven reedbed)

Paul Winter was in the Normandy/Keyhaven area near Lymington today and met someone who had seen the widely reported late OSPREY at Sowley Pond on Dec 4 and again at Needs Ore on Dec 11. I have also heard of a less certain recent sighting of one over the Thorney Deepes from Gary Stevens who saw a very large dark raptor flying low over the deepes and scattering all the other birds before it - if anyone can confirm there has been a December Osprey over Thorney Gary would be pleased to know he was not imagining things.

Andy Collins was in the Victoria Country Park at Netley on the shore of Southampton Water at first light this morning and for three hours watched a SKUA chasing gulls over the sea off the Fawley refinery across the water. He describes it as .. "Probably Pomarine - very dark & uniform , bulky, long winged, much larger than BHGull." Others saw it still there through the day until dusk.

Ian Calderwood tells me that the Goosander which have been seen in several recent winters in Angelsea Lake at Gosport (the dammed off section at the extreme west end of Haslar and Stoke Lakes) have not turned up this winter but Ian did see 6 Goldeneye, 9 Little Grebe and 2 Merganser in that complex yesterday. He also saw an adult MED GULL at the west end of Stokes Bay where it adjoins the Browndown area. Along at Titchfield Haven Dave Pearson saw another MED GULL today and reported 4 BEARDED TITS in the reeds near the Suffern Hide, and someone else tells me they saw four SANDERLING on the shore at Titchfield Haven on Thursday Dec 16 (at a guess birds which had flown across from the Bembridge Sands?)

A Blue Tit was singing continuously in a neighbour's garden this morning and a note from Ann Hearn reported three Song Thrush singing in the Denvilles area of Havant and when I was later in that area I found a small flock of Stock Dove feeding in the market gardens. The main news of the day came later when I was on the shore east of Langstone and counted 55 SHELDUCK in an area where I would have in past years expected 60 to 100 in the January peak time for them so we are not doing so badly this winter Dave Mead came on a flock of more than 50 BRAMBLING somewhere along the Bolderwood Ornamental Drive west of Lyndhurst in the New Forest today (around SU 247072).

The Evening Class group walked from Emsworth to the west Thorney Deepes this morning, finding 62 KNOT and 2 GOLDEN PLOVER on the mud of the Emsworth Channel and hearing Greenshank in the distance. On the Little Deepes both POCHARD and GADWALL were seen (Stonechat and Reed Bunting also, but no Bearded Tit) and the flock of LITTLE GREBE on the Great Deepes gave them a total of 60 for the outing. Interestingly Emsworth Harbour kept up its reputation for attracting LESSER BLACKBACK gulls (it is not uncommon to find half a dozen there but today's number was 'several')

FRI 17 DEC

Ian Watts made two contributions to HOSLIST today, confirming that there are still some 550 GOLDEN PLOVER and 100 Lapwing on the Wide Lane playing fields near the M27 at Eastleigh, and also reporting an adult MED GULL on the Woolston side of the Itchen Bridge

THU 16 DEC

Stephen Harvey is pleased to have had two BRAMBLING visiting his Chandlers Ford garden seed feeder for six consecutive days (they first appeared on Dec 11) with every likelihood that they will continue to visit for some time to come. Stephen says .. "I normally see Bramblings in the garden only towards the end of winter, in March - and then only in exceptional years. My only previous non-March record was in January 1982, when the weather was severe with snow lying almost everywhere. These two Bramblings are very relaxed and certainly don't move over for Greenfinches." One thing that intrigues me is that they are seemingly taking food from a hanging seed-feeder - normally I think of them as ground feeder like their close relatives the Chaffinch which in my experience only take seed which I scatter on the ground for them. I think they will take seed from a flat bird table but have never seen Chaffinch hanging on a feeder like Greenfinch. These may be young birds prepared to learn new habits as Stephen describes them as 'probably male', indicating no clear distinguishing characters (and I believe that a male even in winter should be distinguishable at short range by darker markings on the head and a more brightly orange breast). Any comments on this feeding behaviour?

Brian Fellows visited Swanbourne Lake at Arundel and was disappointed to see only one RUDDY DUCK and no Mandarin among the gulls, Coot and Canada Geese waiting for crusts of bread (which make a nice change from the loads of grain available over the road at the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust reserve. Surprisingly there were about 150 Common Gulls on the pond - as Brian points out their favourite food is earthworms, but perhaps no farmers were ploughing in that part of Sussex. The best birds were 30 GADWALL - another reflection on the increase in numbers of this species is recent years.

John Norton watched a pair of GOOSANDER displaying at Redbridge on the River Test at first light this morning - something which I have not seen as it is only in the last few years that Goosander have been regular visitors to the coast, and of those that I have seen only one or two have been males. The Merganser which are common here get very excited in springtime, chasing around on the water at high speed, diving and bobbing up in what seems a totally erratic fashion, and they do this in groups rather than as individual pairs, so I have seen nothing comparable to the mutual displays between Great Crested Grebe or Swans, nor the one sided neck bobbing of male Goldeneye. None of my books describe Goosander display which I imagine is a common event among the large flocks on the north Hampshire ponds, and I would appreciate more info of what to look out for. Other HOSLIST news is of single Bittern sightings at Fleet Pond both yesterday (when 11 Mandarin were present) and this evening.

Welcome news from Barry Collins this morning is that the 'lost' EMPEROR GOOSE can still be seen with a flock of Canada Geese by the Thorney Great Deeps (the geese are most likely to be seen in the central section of the Deeps just east of the guard post on the road into the army base). Also on Thorney at the moment are four SHORT EARED OWLS and a small flock of CORN BUNTING (I think less than ten of them). Barry also told me that the four Avocet which Brian Fellows recently saw feeding in Nutbourne Bay, have been in the harbour for some time and favour that bay as a feeding area.

Barry Collins also told me that he had found 14 CROSSBILL in the Lumley area of Stansted on a recent visit there but when I walked along the east border of the main forest this morning I only encountered two Crossbill flying south over the high point of Rosamunds Hill. A couple of FIELDFARE called from trees along this eastern edge and up in the northern larch compartments near the road at Forestside a small party of birds included at least one Siskin (heard) and one Goldfinch (seen). The best dressed birds seen were three male BULLFINCH posing on bare sunlit branches but one Greenfinch was also showing a lot of colour on its breast, having preened off the dull brown tips of its feathers (hope it doesn't catch cold as a result of its wish to look pretty). One Marsh Tit was seen enjoying the last of some Honeysuckle berries, and back in the carpark the regular Marsh Tit was exploring beech mast above my head.

Towards sunset this afternoon I cycled back from Emsworth to Havant along the west Emsworth shore path with the almost full neap tide bringing a glassy sheet of shallow water almost to my feet but leaving substantial areas of mud exposed out in the saltings. The wintry sun in a mainly clear sky, plus some dramatic clouds, and the calls of Wigeon and Greenshank made a great setting for a large number of birds (from Dunlin to Brent) still feeding along the tideline and among them I was especially pleased to see at least ten PINTAIL. Two Swans flying west in the distance completed a picturesque winter scene.

WED 15 DEC

Brian Fellows did not make a full survey of the Emsworth Mill Pond today but did report that the number of Tufted Duck had gone up to 22 and that there were more Common Gulls than usual - are these gulls being driven south by bad weather further north.

TUE 14 DEC

In 1962 John Taverner published a comprehensive and authoritative account of 'Wildfowl in Hampshire' in which he begins his description of GADWALL with the sentence .. "Apart from extreme rarities, there is

no more uncommon duck in Hampshire". In those days the presence of a total of ten Gadwall in the whole county in one winter would have been big news, yet nowadays the seven or eight birds which Ed Griffiths saw today on Farlington Lake do not even get a mention in any accounts of unusual birds. That increase is good news, but Shelduck, another bird which impressed Ed by its numbers in Langstone Harbour today, is in fact declining dramatically. I see that there were 4000 in Langstone Harbour in Feb 1968, but I doubt the winter peak will be anywhere near 1000 this winter (the 1996/97 winter peak was only 889, also in February) and I doubt that the flock which impressed him numbered much more than 200 compared to the 600 which I used to expect off the south west corner of the Marsbes in the 1980 winters. Other birds which rightly impressed Ed (who comes from Bucks and is not familiar with our shore birds) were some 30 PINTAIL on the harbour off the Deeps, and he was told that the Ferruginous Duck is still to be seen on the Deeps, a Short Eared Owl has been over the Point fields on recent afternoons, and that a Hen Harrier had been seen late last Monday (Dec 13). Birds which Ed did see included the 2 AVOCET on the lake, a Stonechat, and several ROCK PIPIT, among them one which may have been of the Scandinavian 'littoralis' race though my books indicate that it is very difficult to pick out birds of this race until they have their summer plumage in the spring (I wonder if Ed in fact saw one of the Water Pipit that are probably still present?)

The 50 to 60 SWANS that have been on the Southsea Canoe Lake since the beginning of October have suddenly shot up to 70 in number according to Brian Fellows who says this is the highest count here since January 1980. On this visit to Portsmouth today Brian also found, for the very first time, 180 BRENT on the grass specially set aside for them by Portsmouth City Council in 'compensation' for building a new school on grass which they formerly grazed at Dundas Spur (SU 668023). The new site is about 1 km south east of the area they have lost to the 'Admiral Lord Nelson School' and is at SU 672013 (east of Baffins Pond). On the same trip Brian thought he had found a rare 'red legged Grey Plover' in the old Glory Hole (Eastney Lake at SZ 677995 west of the Hayling Ferry) but his scope showed that it too was a visitor to the huge wildfowl and wader Millenium Party that is clearly going to take place in Southsea - it had put on all the red rings which Pete Potts could give it when it asked him to make it stand out in the crowd. The big question now is will the Purple Sandpipers turn up at Southsea Castle for this once in a lifetime event - none seen there today. At Baffins Pond the counts were much as on Brian's last visit - among the birds 110 Mallard, 34 Tufted Duck, 12 Shoveler and a single Pochard.

Chill winds and overnight frost here on the south coast may cause us to think of the 'poor Robin' sitting out the night with no central heating, but weather reports from further north and from Europe indicate conditions likely to persuade most birds to move south and such movements into Hampshire seem to be borne out by today's pager report of 300 SISKIN and 100 REDPOLL in trees around Fleet Pond. It could even be that we will soon see similar flocks here, and only yesterday John Gowen told me he had seen three Siskin in Alders by the Langbrook stream at Langstone. Back at Fleet Pond 12 MANDARIN were seen - previously the highest count there this winter had been 8 on Dec 5th - and all three BITTERN were seen. The pager message about the Bittern seems to correct my misapprehension that the nightly reports of birds flying across the pond were sightings of birds feeling free to move to better feeding areas as the dusk descended and humans retreated from the scene (rather like wild duck flighting to their feeding grounds at dusk) - today's message implies they fly from day time feeding areas to nighttime roosts - any comments?

John Shillitoe adds to Dave Noble's sighting of an Egret by the Meon near Droxford with news of three other locations along the mid and upper stretches of this river where these birds can be seen currently - one is Mislingford bridge (SU 589141), the second is around St Clair's Farm (SU 604152) and the third is in the long stretch between East and West Meon villages where up to three separate birds have been seen. John also remembers seeing 10 Egrets together last winter in fields immediately south of Soberton Church (SU 609167) - whether they are there this winter probably depends on the presence of cattle as the Egrets clearly like a field in which Cattle or Ponies have churned the soil into a mudbath.

.....Yesterday John was at Southampton airport (Eastleigh) at 5:45am and was surprised to hear a SONG THRUSH (possibly two of them) belting out its dawn chorus to the airport lighting - he says it showed more enthusiasm than he did for being there at that time of day. Last Saturday (Dec 11) he was the one to get excited when walking the fields around SU 597113 behind his home at Hundred Acres, near Wickham. Not only are there now 18 WOODLARK wintering there but the noise of protesting corvids drew his attention first to 3 BUZZARDS, then to a PEREGRINE which, in John's words .. "kept making half hearted passes at one of the Buzzards. It would fly at it (fairly slowly from above). As it got near the Buzzard, the Buzzard rolled over, exposed its talons, and the Peregrine passed by. It almost looked like play, as I would imagine a tangling between the two could result in damage to either."

MON 13 DEC

The winter CORN BUNTING flock has re-assembled in strength in Colin Law's home patch near Woodingdean to the east of Brighton and he writes in the SOS website "Yesterday (Dec 12) at first light on Castle Hill NNR 60 Corn Buntings perched atop bushes at the field edge north of the dewpond making the fantastic almost continuous rattle that a perched flock makes. The flight call is also very distinctive, the books talk of 'ticking' but it always seems to me to sound like the popping of tiny bottles of champagne. A flock of 60 in flight sounds like a lot of champagne, even in tiny bottles."
.....Colin goes on to raise a question which has occurred to me but to which I have no proper answer. He says "Still present (at Castle Hill are) two pairs of Stonechat. Do stonechat normally stay in pairs all year? All through last winter I almost always saw them in pairs here."
At first light this morning Mike Collins was driving across the normally dry valley of the River Ems at Ellbridge, upstream of Westbourne and east of Aldsworth, when he spotted the silhouette of a BUZZARD on a dead tree close to the road. I know this spot well and think of it as symbolic of the increasing lack of water in our countryside (any water in the upper stretches of the River Ems is abstracted at Walderton, leaving the river bed dry until it reaches Westbourne where more water is pumped up at Deep Springs to replenish the river so that it can hide its shame as it flows through Westbourne and Emsworth). Towards the end of a wet winter the river will probably flow for a couple of months but at the moment I would think the view from the road bridge is more reminiscent of some 'Dead Man's Gulch' than of England's green and pleasant land, and Mike's description of the Buzzard on the dead tree immediately brought to my mind the vision of a Vulture in some future desert that is Southern England in the new millenium. Coming back to reality Mike assumes the Buzzard had spent the night on this perch and would not move until the sun warmed it, despite protestations from the Rooks that were just waking to the new day (they have in the last few years set up a substantial extension to the Aldsworth rookery in a small copse, mainly of conifers, just west of the river). Possibly this was a young bird ousted from the established territory further up the valley around Watgate (south of West Marden).
Another river crossing that still retains its dampness and dignity is that of the River Meon at Brockbridge (north end of Droxford) and here Dave Noble regularly sees at least one Little Egret on his way to work each morning. I believe there are several Egrets that now regularly fish the Meon in its upper reaches and would be interested to hear of others.
Brian Fellows checked out the Emsworth Mill Pond today and could not see the redhead GOODSANDER which had been there in Saturday's gale - presumably it has worked its way back to its normal beat west of Langstone Bridge.

PLANTS:

THU 16 DEC

Mary Cockerill tells me that (unless you can come up with an earlier date) the very first CELANDINES to flower in Hampshire were to be seen beside a stream running through the Botanic Garden at Southampton University on Dec 11 (one day earlier than I found them in Havant on the banks of the Lymbourne stream). Also in Southampton, in Mary's own garden, an Elder bush had well advanced new leaves on the same day - she believes leaves were showing on this bush in late December or early January last winter but cannot pin down the date, but it would certainly have been earlier than my first note of leaves this year which was on Jan 26th (and I see that on 20 Feb 98 one bush, which had had leaves showing for some time, also had flower buds)
In two hours walking around Stansted Forest today I only saw four species of flowering plant but one of them was totally unexpected - this was a large plant of COMMON CENTAURY covered with its lovely pink flowers found in the sheletered grassy clearing at the extreme north end of the Ladies Walk (to be fair all the flowers were closed, but that did not hide their colour).

TUE 14 DEC

A quick walk round the central Hayling fields to the east of Stoke Village today showed that the frost is beginning to take its toll but there were still 30 species to be found in flower including a new find of FIELD WOUNDWORT at the roadside in Castlemans Lane (the plants that were flowering in a nearby field are now giving up). Both here and elsewhere garden varieties of PRIMROSE and Primula species have started to flower, but so far I have seen none that I could put on my wild flower list for the month.

INSECTS:

THU 16 DEC

When buying some late Christmas cards this morning in the Havant Tourist Info office (where they only

have the best information) I was told of a wasp's nest on Portsdown that was still very active a couple of days ago. The nest was in the ground and a continuous stream of wasps were going in and out.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 16 DEC

In Stansted Forest today the only fungi I encountered were one clump of VELVET SHANK and a few Clouded Agaric but Rosemary Webb tells me that last Sunday (Dec 12) she revisited the conifer compartment near the northern boundary of the forest on the west of the road (Compartment 3 centred on SU 755117) and again found a good selection of fungi including the colourful Plums and Custard, the unusual and 'interesting' Dog Stinkhorn, White Coral Fungus, the uncommon Tremella foliacea (rare on broad leaved trees, rarer on conifers as here), and some of the 'pretty ones' like Mycena pura, Mycena epipterygia, and fruiting bodies of Green Wood-cup.

WEEK 49 DEC 6 – 12

BIRDS:

SUN 12 DEC

Despite a very strong wind there were birds to be seen in a walk around the Havant/Langstone area today. The now regular Song Thrush was singing from a garden near mine at breakfast time and when I took a late morning stroll to Budds Farm and back by Langstone Mill Pond I noted 15 Egrets at Wade Court, 9 of them in the pony fields below the A27 and the rest with 12 Heron in the damp field south of Wade Court house. Also in that field was one Green Sandpiper, the other one of the two local birds being at the Budds Farm pools where the Tufted Duck are down to just one bird and the Shoveler down to five although there are still 44 Teal present (the Teal at Langstone Mill Pond are now loudly 'belling' from the reeds). On the high water around the Budds Farm outfall were five Goldeneye and one male Merganser but rough water and high tide had driven the shore birds and geese elsewhere – I guess there were plenty of Brent on the Warblington Farm fields but from Langstone all I could see was a cloud of what I took to be Golden plover airborne over Warblington church.. When almost back home a single Redwing was perched at the top of an oak above the Lymbourne springs. Mark Litjens had good reason to hope that strong winds yesterday and today would have brought a few more oceanic birds (such as the recent Leach's Petrel) into the Lymington shore but a visit there today revealed nothing more than the Smew, Long Tailed Duck and Scaup are still on the Normandy pool, with two brave Slav Grebe still operating on the sea. Mark also points out that anyone with access to the internet who is looking for natural history books at a discount should check out www.nhbs.com (Natural History Book Society) which is offering some titles at 30% discount up to the end of March.

SAT 11 DEC

Brian Fellows was in the Black Point/Tournerbury area of south east Hayling for his usual section of the Chichester Harbour WeBS count and while his back was turned a redhead GOOSANDER (presumably the Hermitage Stream/South Moors bird, driven east by the fierce west wind) sought shelter in the Emsworth Mill Pond where it was recorded by John Chapman along with several Merganser. Back at Langstone John found a full winter complement of 82 Teal on the Wade Court 'wet meadow' and one Green Sandpiper with them. Down on Hayling the birds seeking shelter in the lee of Tournerbury Woods or on the shore fields where having to put up with additional disturbance from a shoot taking place in the woods and walkers on the seawall and Brian only recorded 534 Brent, 28 Shelduck, 16 Teal and 11 Merganser with no Wigeon to be seen. There were more birds on the sheltered Tournerbury Farm pond (66 Mallard, 10 Tufted Duck and still 2 Gadwall in addition to the regular Little Grebe, Swans, Coot and Moorhen). The wader roost on 'Seagull Island' west of Black Point usually benefits from southwesterly gales which make the Pilsey Sands across the water thoroughly unpleasant for the birds and there were 400 Grey Plover at the Black Point roost but few other waders.

We know how reliant the thousands of shore birds that winter in our harbours are on the fertility of the mud allowing them to harvest the great variety of food items to be found in the top few inches of the mud that they can probe with their bills, and we also know that local fishermen have shared in this crop to acquire bait for their fishing. From time to time however we see gangs of bait diggers all operating in a small area, and strongly suspect that they are not fishermen but are people who have been 'recruited' by others who wish to use them as cheap labour to collect bait which the organisers will sell on at a handsome price

without even having to put on a pair of waders. You may disapprove of this practice for various reasons, but the main reason I object to it is that it can make it impossible for the shore birds to obtain any food from the dug area for several weeks after the digging. Not only does this mass extraction remove most of the large ragworm but the process of digging covers the fertile top few inches of mud with a cement like coating of the 'lifeless' mud coming from a spade's depth under the surface. When the Dunlin come to search for the tiny *Hydrobia* shellfish on which they live (and in which the bait-diggers have no interest) they cannot get at them through the material which now overlays the top mud and it can take weeks for the tides to restore the mud to its normal state. I hear rumours that a gang of these 'press ganged' bait diggers have been operating in Fareham Creek recently, and unfortunately there is little that can be done to stop it - the law allows normal bait digging so long as it does not disturb moorings, and there are many difficulties in the framing of byelaws that would be effective, and then in enforcing them against itinerant gangs. The best hope is to identify the organisers and to charge them with other, more normal, offences which they have almost certainly committed.

The 1996 Hampshire Bird report carried an article recording a study of wintering Blackcap in one garden over 27 consecutive winters from 1969 to 1996. The author was Graham Roberts, Sussex County Ecologist, and the garden is the combination of his own and that of his father's property which adjoins it, sited at the foot of Portsdown in East Cosham. From 1969 to 1989 the number seen each winter was around two or three and varied little from year to year (none seen in the 70/71 winter and an exceptional ten in 84/85) but from 1991 to 1996 the average number was more like 12 birds with an peak of 39 in the 93/94 winter, and this higher average has I think been kept up in the following four winter to 98/99. These total numbers are obtained by ringing all birds when they are first seen in the garden so that each can be separately identified and a total of individuals seen in the garden at some time during the winter can be recorded. The birds do not arrive as a 'flock' in November and stay until March, but numbers build up from November to March, and thus the four now present could have increased to twelve or more by the end of the winter. These totals cannot be taken to accurately reflect changes in the winter population in this country (though they must reflect it to a degree), since the garden is one which offers shelter (lots of bushes, ivy and trees), has little disturbance other than regular Sparrowhawk visits, and above all provides a regular and ample supply of excellent food (a special sponge cake mixture with added fruit is baked specially for the birds). Inevitably any Blackcap wandering the south of England looking for a good wintering place, and happening on this garden, is likely to stay, and already this winter one of the regulars has returned, its ring showing that this is the sixth winter that it has been present. These wintering birds come from central Europe, and as they return there in March or April so the birds that will breed in England arrive from Africa - normally two pairs of this different population will nest in the garden each summer.

Wind and rain kept down the heads of both birds and bird watchers today but I was among those struggling to record for the monthly WeBS count the birds which could be seen. As usual my effort was restricted to a gentle walk of just over 2km around the IBM Lake, plus a paddle out to the islands from which I put up four Snipe. Moorhen are one of few birds that seem to enjoy the rain and come out to feed on the grass everywhere though I only saw 34 of them, and by now the Coot have forgotten their aggression and feed together on the short grass - today there were 58 of them with a lone Canada Goose that presumably can't fly. Another puzzle was the presence of just one Swan for the second month in a row - it was seen by this year's nest site and made me wonder if it was mourning the loss of it's mate. On the water there were at least 100 Herring Gull and 60 Great Blackbacks but no flock of Black Headed (just two isolated birds on land) and very few Common Gulls plus one Lesser Blackback. In and around the reeds at the sheltered end of the water many Teal were skulking and my figure of 40 may have been an understatement. With them were 6 Pochard and 5 Tufted Duck, and scattered around the lake were some 52 Mallard. Two Heron, 3 Cormorant and 3 Little Grebe were the only other birds recorded.

FRI 10 DEC

The old saying that something must be true if you hear it three times almost applies to the WHITE BILLED DIVER that is said to have been on the sea off Church Norton since last Sunday (Dec 5). I have just read two reports of it being seen today 'drifting east', but in fact there is no hard evidence to raise its status from the 'probable' as it remains difficult to see out on the rough sea, and the two reports were in fact the same - one read on the Sussex website and the other coming from Colin Law who either put it on the website or saw it there himself - Colin did not I think see the diver. Nevertheless the news is good as the bird is staying and the sea must calm sometime.

Nick Mills, who happens to be one of the Hampshire Police Wildlife Liason Officers and is based at Gosport, was off duty today and visited Thorney Island where the first of two highspots was to see a female MERLIN take a Meadow Pipit, fly with it to a bush for a short rest, then carry off the kill over the

Emsworth Channel to Hayling Island. The other highspot, which he thought was even better than this casual murder, was to watch the two SHORT EARED OWLS quartering the marshes for up to half an hour, at one point one of them flying straight for him as he viewed it through his scope giving the impression it was going to continue until it hit him. I assume the Owls were over the marsh at the east end of Thornham Lane but am not sure, but I do know that they appeared as early as 14:45, well before dusk though there was an overcast sky by then. There were plenty of other birds - Kingfisher, male Sparrowhawk, several Snipe, many Grebes (Little and Great Crested) and one line of 12 fishing Merganser. The only birds in short supply were Egrets with only two seen (but that is no indication of a drop in roost numbers). Yesterday (Thurs 9 Dec) Nick was at Titchfield Haven long enough to enjoy a group of BEARDED TITS coming up the reeds to feed on the seed heads, giving him prolonged views. The pager news from Fleet Pond today is of an adult KITTIWAKE flying over to the west in the morning as well as of 2 Bittern making their usual dusk flight across the water (two were also reported there yesterday evening).

Brian Fellows walked the Nutbourne/Prinsted shore circuit this morning, starting from Farm Lane down the path to the shore beside the Ham Brook stream meadow in which bird numbers and variety are at last beginning to perk up. In addition to the female Stonechat, Teal (30+) and Moorhen (10+) which have been present for some time there were 4 Snipe and 4 Brent plus 1 Grey and 2 Pied Wagtail (but no Water Rail seen, and no Egrets - they are probably not far inland). With the tide nearly up the waders were crammed on the spit of the bay to his right as he reached the shore (some 80 Ringed Plover and at least 100 Dunlin) but the piece de resistance was the sight of 4 AVOCET feeding in the shallow water at the end of the spit and eventually flying east towards Bosham as the tide rose. On the water, not disturbed by the rising water, were 98 Wigeon but no Pintail. Continuing west along the seawall Brian saw the local Kestrel perched on a post in one of the shore fields with 8 RED LEGGED PARTRIDGE feeding close to the hedge on the landward side of the field (not long ago there were 7 Grey Partridge close to Cot Lane just 1 km east of this field - take note for the New Years Day tick list). Following the seawall north along the side of Prinsted Bay the field on his right (the 'corner' field at SU 770050) was as usual crammed with birds - 610 Brent and 92 Black Tailed Godwit (one colour ringed), with 8 Curlew, 4 Oystercatcher and 1 Egret. Continuing inland along the path he found 58 Lapwing on the winter wheat in the field between him and the orchards in which more than half a dozen Fieldfare were feeding among perhaps 200 Starlings.

THU 9 DEC

A LEACH'S PETREL seen off the beach carpark at Milford on Sea (immediately west of Keyhaven) was a new excitement for the Lymington area today and was reported on the pagers along with a Med Gull and the continued presence of the Marsh Harrier over the Keyhaven Marshes. Also courtesy of HOSLIST Dave Pearson tells us that today he saw some 300 Golden Plover and 100 Lapwing by the A303 where it meets the M3 about five miles south west of Basingstoke (they were in a field just west of a piggery that is west of Popham airfield). Down at Eastleigh Ian Watts reckoned there were 400 Golden Plover and 100+ Lapwing on the Wide Lane playing fields today.

Two messages tell me that up to 23 LITTLE EGRET can be seen together in the eastern field of Warblington Castle farm where cattle are grazing. Cath Cooper told me today that a friend of hers who walks her dog along the path between the shore at Nore Barn and the junction of the Havant Road with Selangor Avenue has counted 23 of them in what she called the 'cattle field'. and an email from a D J Keiran reports 17 in one of these fields along the west side of that path which borders three fields - the northern one, in which Roman remains have been found, is full of huge white plastic covered bales and is unlikely to have the Egrets, but they could be in either or both of the two lower ones which have a small stream running through them. Last winter there was a similar number of Egrets to be seen regularly in the field abutting the farmhouse on the east side of Church Lane when that field was a morass of mud trampled by cattle - this winter it is ungrazed grass and the birds seem to have followed the cattle.

Brian Fellows today walked the circuit of the lower Ems valley from Lumley to Westbourne and back into Emsworth. There was no sign of the huge flocks of 400 or more Woodpigeon that were there for much of last winter, instead Brian watched a Kingfisher perched (in the shadow of the Emsworth gas holder) above the branch of the river which flows down the Emsworth side of Brook Meadow, and at the top of the section had a dead Fox in the stream at Westbourne. In between he enjoyed a couple of Grey Wagtail, one Green Sandpiper and an unexpected Pheasant. One Redwing flew into trees at the Westbourne end and when crossing the A27 by the Mill Lane bridge the first 20 Brent of this winter could be seen feeding on the large open fields between the A27 and Southbourne.

Song Thrush song is now a regular morning event here in Havant whenever the weather permits and today's

sunshine and strong wind was ideal for the MISTLE THRUSH to adopt its 'Stormcock' role and sing loudly from trees in the centre of its large local territory (this time it was just south of Netherfield Close). Between Havant and Emsworth a dozen REDWING and half a dozen FIELDFARE were in Southleigh Park where the widely spaced parkland oaks give them a feeling of safety as places to fly to if disturbed, and in the huge wheatfield of Southleigh Farm to the south of the park there was the usual winter daytime roost of around 80 GREAT BLACKBACK and other gulls resting between visits to the landfill rubbish tip site in Southleigh Forest to the north. In one of the gardens of houses bordering the west side of these fields a male BLACKCAP has just resumed its winter feeding – I'm hoping we will soon be given an update on the Blackcaps in their winter mecca at Cosham where they swarm to feed on sponge cakes made specially for them by Theo Roberts family.

WED 8 DEC

The SOS website tonight reports a 'probable' WHITE BILLED DIVER seen distantly in rough seas off Church Norton with the suggestion that it has been there since last Sunday (and the implication that it may stay longer). Further east, in Beeding Quarry (which I guess is by the River Adur about 3 miles inland from Shoreham) there is a WHINCHAT which may be staying the winter (I recall two overwintering in the Portsmouth area about 1983 - both those, at Hilsea Lines and the Portchester area, were in pony paddocks feeding on insects around the pony droppings). Much further east at Barcombe Reservoir north of Lewes the flock of feral BARNACLE GEESE numbered 48 on Dec 4 (there were around 40 on Nov 22 - I wonder if they have gathered in the flock of seven that were in the Lymington/Normandy area on Nov 24?). The website also tells us that we can expect the new Sussex Bird Report in January (will Hampshire achieve the 'before Christmas' promise and beat them to it this time?) and that it will have twice as many photos as usual. There will be articles on the current status of the Buzzard in Sussex and another one on Gamebirds in Sussex, and we will be hearing more from Graham Roberts on the Peregrines nesting on the block of flats in Brighton where he put up their nest box (there were shots of the young being fed in it on TV within the past week - not live TV in that case but repeats, so it must have been on the BBC).

More evidence that Little Egrets are feeling the cold and moving inland came from Jim Berry today - driving up Dunsbury Way past the Leigh Park shopping centre he saw an Egret fly across the road in front of him (following the small tributary of the Hermitage Stream which comes from the Leigh Park Gardens Lake through Great Copse and then under this road)

TUE 7 DEC

Brian Fellows checked out the Emsworth Mill Pond as usual on Monday and found the Mallard flock up to 98. Last winter he had 106 there on Dec 7 and a peak of 116 on Dec 13 after which they dropped off and the last count of 100 was on Jan 18 so there is a good chance of a 'quacking good time' to be had along the new Bridgefoot path area on the night of Dec 31. The big question is, will the Black Swan return in time to join in? It's whereabouts, and those of the Emperor Goose, are still unknown. If we go by the number of Tufted Duck now present (13) the chances are we will never see either again ... Also from Brian news of regular Song Thrush song in gardens near his at Emsworth.

Among today's news on Paul Winter's pager was a report of 150 REDPOLL in the trees around Fleet Pond - two were reported there on Oct 5, and 70 were said to be resident on Nov 10 - I think there are plenty in the New Forest, but no substantial flock has reached Havant Thicket or Stansted Forest yet. Two Bittern were seen at Fleet Pond today and down in the Lymington area the Smew and Long Tail Duck are still on Normany Lake, the Marsh Harrier over the Keyhaven reeds, and in Milford on Sea carpark there is an adult Med Gull

In Nottingham November brought the famous 'Goose Fair' and in Gosport it looks as if the Brent are showing a bit of 'private enterprise' and setting up their own. Nick Mills tells me that, in addition to the large flock of 400 or so which meets daily on the HMS Sultan playing fields at the south end of Military Road (plenty of open space and easy getaway from there) a flock has now started to appear within a stone's throw of the High Street - they are on the St George's Barracks Playing Fields with the busy Spring Garden Lane along the west side, Mumby Road to the north and Walpole Road to the south.

Dave Pearson has corrected my interpretation of the whereabouts of the Farlington Marshes BRANT which he saw on Monday - it was in fact not on the water at Chalk Dock but on the reserve 'Hay Field' which lies between the east seawall and the track to the underpass, so it seems that the place to look for it in the daytime is on the fields along the east side of the reserve from the Deeps north to the A27 (no doubt it and its flock of Brent fly onto the water for safety at night). Dave did see the Red Necked Grebe distantly in the area I suggested, between the Point and the islands to the south east of it.

I made my weekly round of the mid-Hayling fields allotted to me in the Brent Goose feeding survey at high tide time today when the geese are supposed to be most likely to be on the fields, but the large north Hayling Fields south west of Northney Church on which there were 500 of them during low tide the previous week had none today. At both high and low tide there seems to be one flock of around 300 that is always on the same field at the south end of the West Lane (west of it, immediately north of the Saltmarsh Lane housing) despite a great array of white flags and the traffic on West Lane - the geese do seem to be of an independent mind and quite prepared to ignore human theories about where and when they should feed (I think we need some of the 'ley line' people on the job to determine the secret energies which guide them to the spots where they appear). One place where they can usually be seen is Verner Common and there were the expected 200 or so there with the small flock of 10 Canada Geese and the large flocks of perhaps 600 GOLDEN PLOVER and 300 LAPWING.

I picked up my copy of the Hayling Islander newspaper today and read with surprise that there is at last movement on the proposal by Havant Borough to create a large Local Nature Reserve in the north west corner of Hayling (based on the Oysterbeds but including nearly all the land west of the main road from Langstone Bridge down to a line drawn west from Daw Lane) The area would also include much intertidal mud to give a total of around 250 Hectares (100 Hectares is a whole 1 km square on the map). The news is that the management plan for the area, drawn up by Bob Chapman (warden of Farlington Marshes), was discussed by the Havant Leisure Service committee on Nov 16, and they recommended that it be published and circulated to interested parties for comment. Another significant step to protect wildlife on Hayling Island would be the declaration by English Nature of the Sinah Common/Hayling Beachlands area as an SSSI and the ball is now rolling towards this. I understand that the area under consideration is not only all the land west of the Beachlands 'Funfair' and south of the Ferry Road but also all the land south of Seafront Road east of the Funfair to Chichester Road (and presumably also the land north of Ferry Road and west of Sinah Lane (Sinah Warren and the Kench, etc). I am told that the number of indicator species found are roughly three times those required as a minimum for the declaration of an SSSI and I do hope this proposal is carried through to implementation. My only wish is that it can be achieved with goodwill and co-operation from all concerned - English Nature has had a bad press this year over its strict adherence to the 'letter of the law' in connection with the A31 roadworks through the New Forest, forcing several weeks of extra traffic delays on motorists while Smooth Snakes and Sand Lizards were collected from the central reservation and told that they must in future be good animals and remember never to cross the busy road again, and just last week we have heard stories of a ban imposed by EN on work to shore up crumbling cliffs on the Isle of Wight so that some un-named species of wasp could survive while houses faced destruction from the falling rock. It may well be that sections of the media and other interested parties wish to blacken the good name of nature conservation but I am sometimes inclined to see a similarity between the dogmatic implementation of the powers given to English Nature and the dogmatic positions taken up in the past by certain politicians in Northern Ireland - I think the great majority of people in Britain who long for real peace in Northern Ireland cannot understand why the Ian Paisley types on both sides cannot bend to achieve what seems to the outsider as the obvious best way forward for the people of Northern Ireland as a whole, and one gets the same feeling over many cases where there is confrontation between what seems common sense and the strict implementation of the law. My sources tell me that the starting position taken by English Nature towards the people who have to manage the Hayling Beachlands is a blunt 'you can't argue with us, you do as you are told' - whether there is any truth in that or not it is a pity that people can have that impression.

MON 6 DEC

Dave Pearson had a good day's birding at Farlington Marshes today but returned to find his car window smashed by someone who had seen a binocular case on the seat and had stolen it (only to discover it was empty). Dave saw the BRANT at Chalk Dock (where supplies for the Portsdown Forts were landed 150 years ago) just near the north east gate of the reserve, went south to see the FERRUGINOUS DUCK still on the Deeps and then saw two AVOCET and 5 LITTLE STINT at the lake before getting back to his vandalised car. His message to Hoslist includes .. "A probable Red-necked Grebe from the spit now gives diligent observers the possibility of seeing all five grebe species in the harbour!" I hope that means that he saw the grebe but am left wondering what he means by 'the spit' - my guess would be that the bird was in Russells lake between the Point and Baker's Island/South Binness

The Sussex website this evening tells of 14 SLAV GREBE off Church Norton but only single FIRECREST and AVOCET in the Pagham area. Up at Pulborough there have been 5 inland DUNLIN and a Common Sandpiper but the big attractions are 14 RUFF, 2 BARN OWLS and 4 SHORT EARED OWLS. At Coates Common a single WILLOW TIT (at SU 995173) is news along with a few Crossbill and no

mention of all those Woodlark. Further afield I was surprised to hear that FULMAR (which do not nest until May) are already back on the cliffs east of Hastings but my old Popular Handbook tells me that they normally return as early as November. Another bird that we are unlikely to see in Hampshire this winter is TREE SPARROW, a flock of 35 being reported from the area around the River Brede north of Hastings.

Kevin Stouse had wonderful winter weather for his walk in the Petersfield area yesterday for which 20 people joined him at Buriton where 30 Redwing and a flock of Long Tailed Tit looked on from the chuchyard trees as the party assembled. A smart male Sparrowhawk flew over them in the first field they entered, perching openly on a pylon to give everyone good views, and within the first mile they came on 50 Fieldfare in orchards at Old Ditcham. Soon after this they met a bright male Bullfinch before they stopped at Nursted Mill Pond for coffee and prolonged views of Kingfisher, Grey Wagtail and Dabchick. Continuing from Goose Green to Petersfield Heath Pond they spotted 3 Roe deer and various birds including a flock of Lapwing which Kevin believes to have been faithful to the same field over the years despite changing crops from grass to Sweetcorn and this year having wheat stubble which had attracted a Skylark for their list. Petersfield lake held their attention for quite a time as they watched a mystery gull - Kevin says "To all purposes it looked like a common gull but it had pure white head and a black band round its bill but when it flew close to us we could clearly see it had pink legs". Thoughts of Ring Billed Gull went through their minds but did not accord with the pink legs (if this was an adult Ring Bill it should I think have a bright yellow bill and legs, and at least some streaking/dotting on the white head, and those pink legs also seem to rule out Common Gull leaving Med Gull as a possibility but Kevin later says the wings were similar to those of the Common Gulls so my best guess id that it was a Common Gull that had been using too much make-up on its bare parts) Correct answers from locals in the Petersfield area will be most welcome.

PLANTS:

SUN 12 DEC

Today's big news is that the first LESSER CELANDINE is flowering on the bank of the Lymbourne stream – no oddity nor escape, this is a genuine first spring flower for next year and to judge by the number and healthy look of leaves on other plants there will soon be more of them. If you want to see them go down the Hayling Bill track until you are south of the A27, then walk along the stream bank and look on your side not more than 100 yards from the road. Beside the bus shelter in the layby on the main Hayling road just north of Langstone High St, but on the Mill Lane side, is a HAZEL tree which always flowers early and close inspection today found several catkins which have fully extended and opened the gaps between the florets to allow the anthers to emerge from the flowers. One other first flower seen today was WHITE COMFREY though this is a bit more dubious as it appears to have been planted at the back of the Parchment housing beside the stream running from the Homewell spring to join the Langbrook. If this is a planted version I am sure we will soon see flowers on some of the many escaped plants which flourish in the area. Not flowering, nor likely to until next May or June, there is nevertheless a grand display of the leaves of one of our local rarities at the South Moors. This is KNOTTED HEDGE PARSLEY and the leaves are to be seen on the grass bank of the Langbrook 'seawall' which is on your right when going north immediately after climbing the stile from the seawall path.

SAT 11 DEC

En route to count the birds at the IBM Lake I stopped off at Theo Roberts house in Cosham where we went to look at the corpse of a juvenile Sparrowhawk which had mysteriously appeared on the lawn. Beside it grew one stalk of BETONY with two flowers still on it - a much more natural token of remembrance of sunny past days than are those plastic wrapped bunches of flowers which people now leave at the scene of road accidents (reminding me more of the plastic wrapping of our modern way of life and death than of the natural beauty of people and flowers - no doubt that will give unintentional offence to some, so I apologize in advance). Theo Roberts told me that the first SNOWDROPS are already flowering in his garden though I did not see them. Three flowers which caught my attention on the IBM site were THALE CRESS, the first I have seen for several months, KINGCUPS, which can be expected to flower there until hard frost hits them, and best of all half a dozen clusters of HAWTHORN flowers on the group of what I think of as 'Glastonbury Thorn' on the south bank of the lake. Other flowers that you might not see elsewhere were Small Scabious, Ox Eye Daisy, Stone Parsley, Hawkweed Oxtongue and Sea Aster.

THU 9 DEC

The 'twitchel' path between Wade Court Road and the Pook Lane footbridge over the A27 has an interesting

collection of wild flowers along it and as this path lies through what was not too long ago a good piece of natural woodland it is difficult to be sure if all the plants are just garden escapes or if some are survivors from natural stock – for example Lesser Periwinkle is found here. One plant that has almost certainly established itself from garden escapes is SHINING CRANESBILL, of which there is more to be seen each year. There are plenty of its shining leaves to be seen at the moment but no flowers, but the PELLITORY OF THE WALL which also flourishes here does still seem to have flowers and buds of more to come. Coming towards Havant along the path you can turn off into Shawford Road and get more surprises – at the bend in that short road there is a HANDKERCHIEF TREE (also known as Dove Tree or Ghost Tree) which seemed about to die a few years ago but tree surgery seems to have given it a new lease of life and its bare branches still have a few of this years fruits hanging on long stems from the branches. Nearer the twitchel a couple of young Date Palms have been planted this year and at the gateway of the last house at the end of the roadway there was today's biggest surprise – a large and healthy plant of WEASELS SNOUT holding up a fresh pink flower.

I do not know if Australians decorate their homes and towns with Christmas Trees but the question came to my mind when cycling round the junction of Beach Road and West Road in Emsworth and seeing above me a mass of white flowers on a tall EUCALYPTUS tree. I assumed that it was flowering now as this would be summertime in its Australian homeland but I see that Alan Mitchell says that this tree flowers in July. Is it homesick? Are there several tall species (at least 40 foot) with the two forms of leaf (rounded juvenile and long adult leaves)? Can anyone tell me why it is flowering now?

INSECTS:

SUN 12 DEC

Outside the window of the room where I am writing this an orb web spider has a web and is still hoping for a Christmas dinner to arrive in it but it got more than it bargained for this morning when a large Bumble Bee (possibly *Bombus lucorum* or *B. terrestris*) became temporarily caught. The spider immediately started out from her hide-away but soon thought discretion was the better part of valour when it felt the hefty vibrations and before long the bee had extricated itself and flown off with no harm done to it.

FRI 10 DEC

I do not take a daily paper and when I do hear of apparently interesting wildlife news I usually find that each paper has a different version, most of them clearly written by journalists unfamiliar with wildlife. Today Mark Litjens tells me that yesterday's papers carried this familiar version of 'news' on the subject of 'ENDANGERED BRITISH BUTTERFLIES' and I advise anyone who is interested not to read the papers but to visit the Butterfly Conservation website and click on 'Press Releases' to see what they actually told the press rather than the version which the press printed to misinform the public. The website address is <http://www.butterfly-conservation.org> and no doubt you can get to it through the link which I have to the website of the Hampshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation but I will be adding a link to this national website.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 9 DEC

Twice within the past week I have been told of MINK in our area. The first report was from Michael Prior at Stansted Forest who had seen one at the Brickkiln Pond where such predators on fish and other wildlife are not welcome - a baited trap will hopefully solve that problem. The other report was only of a distant probable sighting in the Finchdean area by a member of the East Hants Badger Group who should be familiar with animals of this sort. I hope these are not the first of more sightings yet to come.

Foxes are good swimmers yet it is not uncommon to find them apparently drowned. Today Brian Fellows found one in the River Ems at Westbourne and not long ago I came on one in the bay on the east side of Cobnor just south of Eastfield Farm to the north of Chidham village. Although they sometimes fall into water from which they cannot climb out (they used to do so regularly in our drinking water supply at the Bedhampton water works before all the brick lined pools holding the spring water were covered over on EEC instructions) I do not think they normally drown and I wonder if anyone has any comment on this. I suspect they may be chucked into rivers by people who shoot them (saves the trouble of digging a pit or incinerating the corpses and avoids the ghastly stench that I once encountered in the abandoned orchard by the Langstone Dairy Farm alongside the Langbrook stream where five corpses had been left in a heap to rot) but what I am really interested in is if, having been poisoned, they come to water desperate to drink and then topple in to die. Whatever the cause it's not good for the water quality.

WEEK 47 NOV 22 – 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 NOV

Paul Winter's pager carries lots more good news today. Not only has the FERRUGINOUS DUCK re-appeared on the Deeps at Farlington Marshes but the drake of the same species is still at Timsbury. Down in the New Forest there were 15 MANDARIN DUCK on Eyeworth Pond at Fritham, and from the Fleet area we hear of a ringtail Hen Harrier over Fleet Pond and a count of 500 BRAMBLING at Winchfield along the railway just east of Hook.

Monthly statistics on waders and wildfowl that eventually appear in the excellent annual WeBS report (WeBS standing for Wetland Bird Survey) are supposedly based on the counting of all birds at around 2,000 sites across the UK on the same day each month - in theory that day is at a weekend with a good high tide in the middle of the month. For a number of reasons not all sites do their count on the same day - one reason is that some people prefer to do them on Saturdays, others on Sundays, and another practical reason is that, with limited hours of daylight in winter months, the time of high tide in some places may make it impractical to do the count on the day that suits the majority of other sites. I am slightly surprised though to find from the details of the Chichester Harbour count done this weekend that Sussex counting was done on Nov 27 while the Hampshire counts were on Nov 6 - just another factor to remember when you hear people quoting statistics of bird populations as if they represented absolute facts.

.....Brian Fellows introduced yet another element of uncertainty into the figures by doing something which many others must do and making his count on the Sunday rather than the Saturday but despite stronger wind today he recorded a good count of waders at Black Point on Hayling with 260 KNOT there (the biggest flock Brian has come across during his local counts) along with 64 Ringed Plover and 1240 Dunlin. Out on the water Merganser numbers were high with 24 seen in the Mengham/Tournerbury area, and there were 852 Brent sheltering on the Tournerbury fields. Another surprise was to find 4 GADWALL on the Tournerbury Farm Pond with 15 Tufted Duck and 44 Mallard plus 32 Moorhen around the pond. The lone Pink Footed Goose (presumably feral) which was there last winter on Dec 13) was not on Brian's list but maybe it will return next month.

A windy day produced little birding news but whoever it is who keeps reporting sightings of the Langstone Harbour Black Brant was out again today and spotted it in what is vaguely described as the 'north west corner of Langstone Harbour off the east side of Farlington Marshes' (to me that describes Chalk Dock right by the east entrance to the Marshes but a map reference would be worth a lot of words). Further down the east side of the Marshes this reporter failed to see the Ferruginous Duck on the Deeps so it may have gone...

For some time now I have been hearing MISTLE THRUSH song and it always seems to come from a different place and is often faint and distant though one song perch is on a tall poplar in my road. Today I heard the same song while out on my cycle and saw the bird on another tall tree 700 metres south east of the tree in my road, and as I do not see these birds frequently I suspect there is only one pair in the area with a large territory (or possibly moving about widely as it desperately seeks a mate?). Does anyone have any facts on the size of these birds territories? Yesterday Tony Gutteridge told me he had recently heard Mistle Thrush song in the grounds of the QA Hospital at Cosham - I think it would be stretching the imagination to think that that was the same bird a good 6 km to the west.

Motorway verges are known to be good hunting grounds for both Kestrels and Owls in search of Voles, and motorway interchanges such as where the M275 joins the M27 provide much larger areas of open rough grassland within the loops of the circling link roads, so I am not surprised to get a note from Sonia Bolton telling of a TAWNY OWL narrowly missing her car as she drove towards Portsmouth from Havant and was on the link road alongside Tipner Lake last week. There is even more good hunting ground on the nearby IBM site and if anyone is there at night I hope they will keep their eyes open for Barn Owls which have been known to hunt there in recent years.

SAT 27 NOV

The pagers today carried several items of Hampshire news starting in the north east of the county with 350 BRAMBLING seen at Winchfield (next stop after Hook on the railway from Basingstoke to London). This evening there was only one BITTERN on the dusk commuter flight across Fleet Pond (where there were 6 MANDARIN duck). At Farlington Marshes a SHORT EARED OWL was a new item and a fifth LITTLE STINT was reported at the lake with 2 Avocet. The Ferruginous Duck (a first winter male) was back on the Deeps and out in the harbour somewhere east of Farlington were 2 Slav Grebe, 7 Black Necked and the Black Brant. Along at Keyhaven a SNOW BUNTING was seen on Hurst spit with an

adult Med Gull.

Paul Winter walked along Hurst Beach this morning, seeing a female Long Tailed Duck and 3 Goldeneye plus a Peregrine eating its breakfast. Back at Keyhaven there was a WHIMBREL with a seemingly injured wing (did the Peregrine condemn it to winter here?) and along the shore to Pennington Paul saw a Black Throated Diver, 2 Slav Grebe, 7 Eider, also Merganser and Goldeneye.

This morning's welcome sunshine and lack of wind was ideal for a stroll around part of Stansted Forest. Near the Middle Lodge, at the entrance to the house driveway, a Dunnock sang briefly and in the grounds of the house a Song Thrush was sounding off as a couple of Redwing flew over. Coming into the East Park a Red Admiral butterfly sunned itself on an oak tree in contrast to a dozen FIELDFARE moving on a wide front across the growing corn. Beside the open track across the park Sharp Leaved Fluellen was in flower with a winter flock of Chaffinch (and a couple of Yellowhammer) searching the ground around it for seed. At the far side of the fields I turned north past Lumley Seat to reach Wythy Piece (the north east corner of the Forest) and here I put up a WOODCOCK within a few feet of the main path as I turned off into the trees to check for HARES (one of these got up a little further in). Coming towards Forestside a Kestrel glided overhead, perching briefly till it saw me, and a second Song Thrush sang near the village hut. Over in the north west Forest I found myself among a flock of Tits, Goldcrest and Tree Creeper, with a third Song Thrush tuning up nearby, before I headed south to the mid-point of the Rough Avenue (the broad grassy track heading north west from the house). On the way I passed another Red Admiral then found REDWING and FIELDFARE moving in all directions above me (probably at least 30 of each). I cannot claim a BRAMBLING for my list but I did hear a strange 'eeek' call which could have been one. Nearing the road a young Sparrowhawk perched almost above my head in the sunshine and gave me a good view before it spotted me. Finally, back at the Ornamental Drive near the carpark, I heard the Pitchou of a third Marsh Tit for the morning.

The Evening Class group enjoyed lovely weather for a walk round the east side of Stansted Forest this morning and I hear they saw at least 6 CROSSBILL in Larches beside the Ladies Walk just north of the Wood Pasture area.

Mark Litjens walked Hurst Spit and tells me he had good views of the LONG TAILED DUCK 'in the channel half-way along the spit' correcting my impression that people were seeing it on the west side of the spit on the open sea - I presume from what Mark says it is in what is marked on my map as Mount Lake at around SZ 306903. The Peregrine which most visitors to Keyhaven see at work was actively hunting over the marshes and several times disturbed a flock of around 200 GOLDEN PLOVER. Later, at Park Shore (a little over 2 km west of Needs Ore Point) another Peregrine was at work though a Hobby might have been more appropriate with butterflies and dragonflies still active here.

FRI 26 NOV

Mike Collins tells me that he had a surprise when driving to Chichester from Havant today to find a BUZZARD hanging in the wind above the pig farm just east of Funtington. He goes past here daily and has never seen one before, but I would not be surprised to find one anywhere hereabouts. I have told Mike to keep a look out for Kites and Ravens in the same area - such is the sorry state of pig farming in this country that there might well be a lot of them lying about for scavengers soon.

On the papers today the BLACK BRANT is reported as being still on the north west side of Hayling Oysterbeds (where it was seen on Nov 24, though in between it has been on Farlington Marshes), while news from Fleet Pond is of 2 newly arrived drake GOOSANDER and a second BITTERN (two of them commuted from the east side of the pond to the south end at dusk this evening).

THU 25 NOV

Ian Watts today saw around 300 GOLDEN PLOVER and 400 LAPWING circling over the Winchester sewage farm area (where the Morestead/Winchester road comes down into the Itchen valley). I was not aware of this as a regular site for them but looking in Birds of Hampshire I see that there is a regular Golden Plover flock recorded in the Chilcomb/Morestead area which has the sewage farm on its south western edge. Ian also saw the flock on the Wide Lane playing fields at the M27 junction south of Eastleigh - here were another 300 Golden Plover and 100 Lapwing.

Another anonymous HOSLIST message from Paul Winter's pager reported the Langstone BLACK BRANT on the Farlington Marshes main marsh fields (I assume there is only one in the harbour, moving between the Oysterbeds and Marshes) and the FERRUGINOUS DUCK still present there on the Deeps.

Warm moist air gave a spring like feel today after some chilly recent days so I was not surprised to hear a couple of SONG THRUSH singing at Rowlands Castle in 'The Sling' (the nose of Stansted Forest which sticks into the village), nor to hear a DUNNOCK singing in another part of the village, but it seemed slightly perverse to come on my first flock of around 30 REDWING there on such a day, and to see them moving south after perching in trees around me. Before they flew off as a compact flock these birds could

be heard all around making their thin whistles and distinctive 'gup' calls but remained frustratingly invisible.

WED 24 NOV

Russell Wynn had a good day in the Hurst/Keyhaven/Pennington area yesterday (Nov 23 - his message sent to Hoslist on Wed Nov 24 says these are sightings for 'yesterday Wed Nov 24'). Best bird was a redhead SMEW in the Keyhaven/Pennington area (no exact location, maybe on sea, maybe on Normandy Lake or other pools) listd with 'resident' female SCAUP and LONG TAILED DUCK and 'newcomers' such as 7 BARNACLE GEESE, 1 GREAT NORTHERN DIVER, 1 RED THROATED DIVER and 1 COMMON SCOTER. Before seeing these he had been sea watching at Hurst Beach where he had seen 9 SHAG and a Red Throated Diver flying east (also an adult Med Gull on Sturt Pond).

.....Russell adds that an earlier report of his (on Nov 11) of '5 Grey Geese' flying up the Lymington river to disappear inland has now been upgraded with the help of another observer to a sighting of a family of European WHITE FRONTED GEESE (2 adults with 3 young)

A FERRUGINOUS DUCK at the Farlington Marshes Deeps yesterday (Nov 23) was just one item on Paul Winter's pager. Other news from Farlington was of 4 LITTLE STINT and 2 AVOCET at the lake, 2 WATER PIPIT (presumably by the stream near the reserve building?) and 4 BACK NECKED GREBE plus 6 PALE BELLIED BRENT in Langstone Harbour (have all the rest moved away?). The BLACK BRANT is reported as being seen both off the Hayling Oysterbeds and with other Brent on the Main Marsh fields at Farlington.

The Sussex website has a list of birds at Pagham Harbour yesterday (Nov 23) which includes 28 SLAVONIAN GREBE, 12 EIDER, 1 GREAT NORTHERN and 1 RED THROATED DIVER (all probably on the sea off Church Norton) and 60+ Merganser with 3 Goldeneye that could have been in the harbour. An unusual item is the sighting of a single PURPLE SANDPIPER seen on Nov 20 by the Pagham village lagoon and on the nearby harbour shore near the entrance.

Recent conjecture on the introduction of Little Owls to Britain, and the remark that they were kept as Cockroach controllers in Victorian households, has led Ed Griffiths to contribute other interesting facts on the use of birds (and hedgehogs) as natural pest controllers, not only in historical times but nowadays (e.g. the quail kept in butterfly houses to eat up any spiders that get in). Ed's remarks are given in full on the Comments page where you'll see how he tells of Pied Wagtail nowadays queueing up at the doors of large commercial greenhouses where the growers gladly let them in to consume as many insects as they want. Please add your contributions to this fascinating discussion.

I headed for Budds Mound shortly after the midday 5 metre high tide wondering if I should see most of the South Moors under water but the seawall had done its work and there was no excitement there, the surprise being a 'low tide' in the Budds Farm pools where the landward pool had been partially drained to allow a new earth bund to be built across it at the northern end (no idea why but it looks as if the northern 20% or so of the pool is to be 'reclaimed'). As a result what was left of the pool had turned into a sea of liquid mud in which thirty Teal were 'swimming' and feeding. A couple of Black Tailed Godwits were wading about quite happily but a shorter legged Redshank at one point seemed to have become stuck like a human who cannot pull his 'wellies' out of the mud - the bird, which had been wandering about and feeding, seemed to be fixed in one spot, 'bobbing' vigorously but unable to move its legs though it did eventually fly to safety near a Green Sandpiper which was wisely keeping to firmer ground. The seaward pool was much as usual, with 13 Shoveler and another 60 Teal but little else other than two Coot. Offshore 62 Wigeon were sitting out the high tide, a male Merganser and one Cormorant were fishing in the gravel quay area and the usual dozen Swans were hoping for handouts on the Broadmarsh slipway.

.....I went on to the Broadmarsh Playing fields area to look for feeding Brent and had counted around 90 when most of them took off for no obvious reason and surprised me by flying north high over the Bedhampton Hill Road bridge over the A3M to disappear still following the line of the A3M. As there were no Brent left on the choppy harbour in the Broadmarsh/South Moors area many others may have flown north over Portsdown and I wonder if anyone can tell me where they went to? They may have dropped into the valley south of Southdowns College and west of the A3M where there are plenty of grassy fields but they seemed to fly on beyond that. Heading on past Bedhampton Mill, still puzzling over the Brent flying inland, I encountered my third flock of LONG TAILED TITS for the morning (they seem to be the commonest bird around now, their flocks of 12 to 20 probably outnumbering the Robins and Wrens which occur singly). This flock amused me by perching like Swallows on the telegraph wires which crossed the hedgerow they were following, bringing into my mind the idea of an excessive population spreading its numbers by sending some off to fly south and seek new lands - no more unlikely than the flights made by the Bearded Tits each autumn in search of new reedbeds.

Just after writing the above John Gowen phoned to tell me that the local redhead GOOSANDER was to be

seen on the tiny island at the mouth of the Langbrook stream at the Langstone South Moors during today's high tide, adding another piece to the jigsaw pattern of its behaviour \endash my impression is that it feeds in the Hermitage Stream between the Harts Farm Way and A27 bridges when the tide is low and everything coming downstream is concentrated into a couple of narrow, shallow channels, and spends the nights and high tides at the mouth of the Langbrook

TUE 23 NOV

At around 4.30pm this afternoon, with daylight nearly gone, the BITTERN at Fleet Pond was seen to fly from the east to the south shore. I wonder if this would be the end of the day shift feeding on the east side, moving to the south for night roosting, or the reverse - coming out of daytime hiding to start filling its belly when all those daytime disturbances quieten down.

On Monday Nov 22 Alan Snook led a party of New Forest Bird Group members on what must have either been a long foot-slog through the Forest (covering Pitts Wood and Black Gutter Bottom in the north near Godshill and the Ocknell Plain/Slufters Inclosure area down near the A31) or a Formula 1 Grand Prix race with a 'two stop strategy', driving between the two areas. However they did it they managed to see at least one HAWFINCH in Pitts Wood, a smart male HEN HARRIER in Black Gutter, numerous parties of CROSSBILL in Slufters and the Ocknell Plain GREAT GREY SHRIKE at SU 224105 (about 500 metres east of the road T junction west of Slufters, and a good 1.5km south west of its last reported sighting). Alan comments that both Shrikes and Harriers are thin on the ground in the Forest this winter and asks if anyone knows of other Shrikes (if there are no Harriers to do the job I'm sure birders will volunteer to 'harry' any that are discovered)

On Sunday Nov 21 Alan Cokes greatly enjoyed his first visit to Titchfield Haven where the drama of wild'life and death' was played out before him (well he did see a Fox carrying off its kill across the meadow and Kestrel eating its still warm supper on the river bank). A Kingfisher and one pair of Bearded Tits were among his sightings, the best being a SHORT EARED OWL which flew in from the west and landed close to the hide he was in.

An afternoon trip to Broadmarsh was too late in the day to record the shore birds - there were plenty there but the first of the really high spring tides had ebbed to expose more mud than usual, and the distances over which the birds were spread out plus the failing light made it impossible to see many of them. The only interesting bird that I could be sure of was the redhead GOOSANDER which was leaving the Hermitage Stream as I reached Broadmarsh slipway.

Brian Fellows, still suffering from a bad cold, made a brief visit to Portsmouth today to check out the sites which he has monitored regularly for some years but found nothing to make his journey worthwhile today. The only good news was that the CANADA GEESE at Baffins Pond were down to 8, reminding me that I still have no real evidence that the hundreds which disappear from the Portsmouth area each winter do all go to Titchfield Haven (as I suspect). Are there other sites locally where the numbers increase significantly in the winter? Or is there evidence that these would-be migratory geese do make longer journeys between their summer and winter localities?

MON 22 NOV

A few days ago John Clark rang me to check some final details before sending off the 1998 Hampshire Bird Report to the printers and he told me the finished work should be in the post to HOS members (and anyone else prepared to stump up £7) before Christmas. Since then he has published this promise on the internet - if I hear it a third time I'll know its true but until then it remains a hope with very good chances of achievement

Today's top Hampshire story on the pagers is of a BITTERN flying in to land on the east side of Fleet Pond late this afternoon. Along with Titchfield Haven this is one of the best spots for Bittern in the county and in past years they have arrived there as soon as the breeding season is over but this bird is more likely to be a continental bird driven over the channel by the hard frosts the whole of northern Europe has had over the past few nights. From what I read there could be three or four of them arriving to spend the winter at this pond if the cold persists. The pagers also confirm the continued presence of the Ferruginous Duck and Aythya hybrid at Timsbury today.

Answering my query about Little Egrets moving inland Nick Mills tells me that he has heard of one in a drainage ditch behind the Great Mills superstore at Hedge End - this is probably one of the birds that work their way up the Hamble making a diversion to do some back-door Christmas shopping. Nick has acquired a very nice Christmas present for himself in the shape of a water colour painting of a MARSH HARRIER as first prize in a Bill Oddie competition which he entered at Titchfield Haven - Wildlife Trust members will do even better, getting a photo of both the picture and Nick receiving it in their January 'Wildlife' mag. (or maybe in 'Natural World').

Alistair Martin was at Pulborough Brooks on Sunday (Nov 21) and was watching two SHORT EARED

OWLS quartering the meadows when they were attacked by up to three Crows and two Jackdaws. Not to be put off the owls gained height, got up wind, and dive-bombed the corvids into submission, then carried on hunting - one of them almost certainly got a meal when it plunged into the rough, stayed down for some time, and emerged trailing a cloud of fur or feathers. The Sussex website also reports Red Kite, Hen Harrier, Peregrine, Merlin and Barn Owl as seen here recently.

John Goodspeed's weekly Nature Notes poster has two items which I had not heard of - a late SWALLOW seen over Portsdown on Nov 17 (there was a later one at Shoreham on Nov 19) and a RED KITE seen for about half an hour over Stansted Park on Nov 12. I wonder if that Great Grey Shrike will return there this winter? (it was present through March and into April this year - usually seen on overhead wires at SU 764107, visible from the track going east across the park)

The Sussex website tells us that on Sunday (Nov 21) there were 49 WOODLARK and at least 31 CROSSBILL in the Coates Common area (around SU 9917 square) and that on Nov 19 a female Crossbill held out hope of being TWO BARRED but no one has seen it since. Down in Pagham Harbour the AVOCET total is up to 15. Over in East Sussex a flock of 40 BARNACLE GEESE were feeding near Barcombe Reservoir (inland from Newhaven up the Ouse) but these are thought to be all feral and this is the third winter they have been there - presumably they spread out over the county in feral pairs or small groups during the rest of the year? or do some come from across the channel? On the water of Barcombe Reservoir there were just two Ruddy Duck - should we tell John Prescott's Task Force? Down river at Newhaven there were 5 Purple Sandpiper on the rocks.

PLANTS:

SAT 27 NOV

SHARP LEAVED FLUELLEN was today's surprise wild flower found in a field edge beside the track which bisects the East Park at Stansted this morning. At another point there were still flowers on Marsh Thistle and among a Kale patch being grown for Pheasants there was a clump of Large Timothy grass standing well over a metre tall. In the Forest Spurge Laurel had large buds, but I do not expect to see them open until after Christmas and near it there was a great deal of Dogs Mercury showing no sign of dying back in respect for the winter. In my own garden and elsewhere recently I have noticed that quite a few Hazel catkins are already elongating and yellowing as if they were about to flower - keep your eyes open for the first to do so.

TUE 23 NOV

Nature does not subscribe to our artificial calendar and each species starts its own annual cycle when it thinks fit. You could say that the BUTCHERS BROOM which has been flowering for some time (I found the first flower on Sept 29 this autumn) and will continue through the winter and into the spring was the first of the new millennium but most people never see these tiny flowers, so I give the accolade to WINTER HELIOTROPE whose pink flowers cannot be missed by every wayside. I have been searching the abundant patches of leaves for several weeks but it was not until today, in Copse Lane on Hayling, that I saw the first flowers out. Other flowers seen today included FIELD WOUNDWORT, WILD PANSY (*Viola tricolor*), WATER FORGET-ME-NOT and WILD CELERY

INSECTS:

SUN 28 NOV

As early as 10am on a blustery morning yet another RED ADMIRAL was flying/being blown across my garden - clearly they have no hibernation genes in their DNA.

SAT 27 NOV

In a sunny sheltered part of Park Shore (SZ 406965) west of the Beaulieu River Mark Litjens watched both RED ADMIRALS and COMMON DARTER still on the wing, the butterflies using IVY flowers to keep up their energy while the Darters were no doubt not short of tiny insects (possibly also attracted to the ivy). A couple of days ago (Nov 25) Mark Litjens was surprised to see RED ADMIRAL still on the wing at Hursley and today I watched two, widely separated, each sunning itself on the trunk of a tree with winter FIELDFARE in sight nearby. These insects clearly haven't heard of hibernation and merely find temporary 'night shelters' to pass those days and nights when it is too cold, wet or windy to fly, emerging as if it were summer as soon as the weather gives them a chance.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 25 NOV

While exploring in Rowlands Castle an area of old abandoned clay pits for which there is a house building proposal I today came on a troop of medium sized whitish toadstools with caps around 8 cm across and

stems no more than 4 cm high. I did not immediately recognize them but as soon as I picked one and turned it over to examine the underside the presence of many creamy white spines (rather than gills or pores) gave away its identity as a HEDGEHOG FUNGUS. These are said to make excellent eating but these were not the freshest specimens, and slugs had already nibbled away portions of both upper and under surface, so we left the other specimens in situ and took just one to show anyone who has not yet seen this type of fungus. (Just for the record they were on land outside the planning proposal)

WED 24 NOV

PORONIA PUNCTATA is a tiny, narrow stemmed and broad, flat-headed fungus, which appears on balls of horse dung only when that dung drops from animals which have no 'added elements' in their feed, e.g. New Forest ponies, grazing on vegetation which has never seen any chemical treatment, and passing it through a digestive system that has never swallowed a vet's bolus (one of those slow release anti-biotic pills which prevent any living organism leaving the back end of the animal - goodness knows how their digestive systems continue to function). From the shape of the fungus it has a common name of 'NAIL FUNGUS' though the nails are at most 2cm high and 1.5cm across the cap (most specimens much smaller) and it is in the news today as it has been discovered in a new site on Dorset heathland. That is good news, but I was also interested to hear the person telling the story on Radio Solent this evening was Jonathan Cox who in the past worked for English Nature in Hampshire, then became an independent consultant, and is now apparently back with English Nature as Species Officer for Dorset.

While birding in the Keyhaven/Pennington area yesterday Russell Wynn saw a COMMON SEAL in the sea

COMMENTS:

24 Nov 99 - from Ed Griffiths - The historical and present use of birds and hedgehogs to control insect pests
I've been very interested over the information on why Little Owls were introduced - one of the first introduction schemes was by the redoubtable Baron Rothschild, near to Tring where I often bird watch, and I've often wondered why... I gather it was unsuccessful, though Little Owls are quite common around Tring these days, including some melanistic examples reported in the Buck's bird bulletin.. certainly cherries were a crop of major importance in Bucks/Herts near Tring & Bullfinches a pest (we have quite a number at the moment, in excess of usual, I believe they could be continental migrants as you mentioned a week or so back).

I have heard of other examples of creatures kept as pets to prey on insects in past times - a bizarre incident was a member of the royal family (Princess ?) in Georgian times accused of stealing a hedgehog used to keep down the black beetle in a bakery (no, its true...). Also I believe Blue-headed wagtails were pinioned and used as flycatchers about the mansions of either Nice or Naples in the 19th century - I read an account of an early ornithologist buying baskets from the market & liberating them.

My father, who visits many commercial greenhouses, tells me that wagtails are still in the insect catching trade - in Somerset queuing up each winter morning outside to be let in, where tomato growers are quite happy to have them patrol. I'm not sure how/when/if they get out again

*** Clearly there is more to be said on this subject and further contributions will be welcome

WEEK 46 NOV 15 - 21

BIRDS

- 21/11 BLACK BRANT remains near Langstone Bridge and 2 EIDER in Langstone Harbour
- 21/11 Week-end news from the Lymington area - lots of Woodpigeon but only one SNOW BUNTING
- 21/11 High-speed Harrier 'putting up a bow-wave of passerines' on the Downs near Brighton
- 21/11 More bird song - Mistle Thrush, Song Thrush and Woodpigeon, etc
- 20/11 Sea watching at Worthing in a north wind - 300 Gannets, 250 Auks, 15 Divers
- 20/11 Sea-watching at Portsmouth's Tipner Lake (not quite so glamorous, but interesting)
- 20/11 ... and at Southampton's Weston Shore (better birds here)
- 19/11 MISTLE THRUSH song and TREECREEPERS in my garden today.
- 19/11 Information on the O2K ringed Med Gull at Southsea Canoe Lake over six years
- 19/11 Still lots of birds in Nutbourne Bay but no Pintail seen today
- 19/11 Slavonian Grebe were at Church Norton on Oct 10 or earlier
- 18/11 BEWICKS SWANS, CROSSBILL and WOODLARK in West Sussex
- 18/11 BLACK BRANT and EIDER in Langstone Harbour
- 18/11 Information on the introduction of LITTLE OWLS to England in the 19thC
- 18/11 PINTAIL return to Nutbourne Bay where a Swan is marooned in a ploughed field

- 18/11 An inland Egret with Green Sandpiper near Westbourne
 18/11 300 GOLDEN PLOVER near Southampton airport and a wintering COMMON SANDPIPER by the Hamble at Bitterne
 17/11 Sussex Bird News - BLACK THROATED DIVER, RED NECKED GREBE & 15 SLAV GREBE off Church Norton
 17/11 ... and SWALLOW, HOUSE MARTIN, 2 BITTERN, 2 LAPLAND BUNTING and even 2 TREE SPARROW at Rye
 16/11 The Southsea Canoe Lake MED GULL O2K is back (with its left foot missing)
 16/11 ... and a 'Hawk-Owl' is not seen at Milton Lock
 16/11 First BLACK THROATED DIVER off Hurst Castle where auks can now be named and numbered
 16/11 Have we had an influx of BULLFINCH? (Kevin Stouse walks from Warblington to Budds Farm)
 16/11 News from Broadmarsh of PALE BELLIED BRENT and KNOT
 16/11 News from Hook/Warsash (18 Pintail and many other birds) and a description of the 4 Red Necked Grebe at Church Norton
 15/11 One satisfied customer at Titchfield Haven gets a good view of a BITTERN
 15/11 ... and one dissatisfied one dips on both Crossbill and Great White Egret
 15/11 The two Ferruginous Duck not seen at Timsbury today.
 15/11 SPECKLED TEAL are common in the Falklands
 15/11 News from Emsworth - a Kingfisher on Peter Pond and a "Through the tide" watch on the harbour
 15/11 SONG THRUSH song, a few more FIELDFARE, and seven GREY PARTRIDGE at Chidham

PLANTS:

- 20/11 EASTERN ROCKET, SHEEP'S BIT and HARE'S FOOT CLOVER flowering on Hayling today
 16/11 Late summer flowers in a Bishops Waltham hay meadow (Claylands)
 15/11 FIELD PENNYCRESS and ORANGE HAWKWEED in flower at Chidham

INSECTS:

- 17/11 A huge HORNET'S NEST in the loft of a house
 16/11 Another 5 RED ADMIRALS on ivy blossom in warm sunshine at Chilling.
 15/11 Spiderlings get airborne – a bit late in the year?

OTHER WILDLIFE:

- 18/11 Stunning BULLHEADS for their own good as part of the UK BAP plans
 16/11 A SEAL at Langstone Harbour entrance

COMMENTS:

- 17/11 Wildlife and the Law. Can the police save us all from being eaten by Leopards?

Ralph Hollins (01705-615528), 21st Nov 1999

BIRDS:

SUN 21 NOV

Pager news coming via Paul Winter says that the BLACK BRANT was to be seen just north of Hayling Oysterbeds both morning and afternoon today (and yesterday), and two female EIDER were seen with 7 BLACK NECKED GREBE in what is described as the north east corner of Langstone Harbour. Further from Havant one female FERRUGINOUS DUCK, and the Lesser Scaup look-alike, were on Timsbury Gravel Pits this afternoon, and there were still 7+ WATER PIPIT at the Lower Test

Mark Litjens was down at Hurst Spit early yesterday morning and was greeted by a MERLIN flying low over New Lane to perch on the stump of a Sweet Corn stalk. At first light 1300 Woodpigeon flew east in four flocks (the west country must be full up and they are coming back to plague us) and a Goldeneye swam off the spit. There were more Woodpigeon moving at Needs Ore on Sunday morning (only 150 going east) and the passerines (including a BRAMBLING) were also heading east. At Needs Ore point a SNOW BUNTING stopped off for a short time before also going east (is this the Keyhaven/Pennington one leaving that area?). Thank goodness at least one Dartford Warbler stayed behind.

Colin Law was out on the Downs between Brighton and Lewes this morning (around Castle Hill) and came on both male and ring-tail HEN HARRIERS. Colin says .. 'Usually when I have seen Harriers hunting on the downs they have been flying fairly slowly, peering intently down into the stubble or

scrub. Several times they have been so intent on the hunting that they have come remarkably close before seeing me and veering off. The ring tail this morning, however, had apparently been taking lessons from one of the Merlin that has been about, it was flying at astonishing speed a couple of feet above the weeds, with a bow wave of passerines parting before it. A couple of times it headed off after one of these and within a few seconds of appearing it was out of sight over the hill.' Sadly this energy was mis-spent as far as Colin was concerned as the Harrier did not work the area where the Corn Buntings were feeding and they were difficult to count without something to put them up - the estimate remains at around 40 birds here (yesterday John Newnham had another 20 at Lee Farm near Angmering/Worthing). Other birds near Castle Hill included a flock of at least 100 Skylark, two pairs of Stonechat and 16 Fieldfare.

.....Another item on the Sussex website that may be of interest is that Lawrence Holloway is leading a mid-week walk at Pagham Harbour on Wed 24 Nov (meet at Sidlesham Info Centre at 09:30)

This morning the Collared Doves that are singing strongly and making display flights around my garden were unexpectedly joined by a loud Woodpigeon, and yesterday the local MISTLE THRUSH perched on a tall poplar only a couple of gardens away to make sure I heard him. A note from Tony Gutteridge reports full SONG THRUSH song, and I have heard Starlings singing from local chimney pots but have heard relatively little from either Wren or Robin. Brian Fellows, currently at home much of the time with a bad cold, tells me that he gets plenty of Starlings feeding in his garden but few other birds are currently visiting him. I know he puts out plenty of food for them, but looking at the normally very active scene in my garden I think that there is more to attracting them than just nut-feeders and bird tables. We are lucky to have the old Hayling Billy rail track (overgrown with trees and bushes) passing the garden to funnel many birds toward us and in the garden there is a combination of tall trees, small trees and shrubs which provide perching places and security, and a large lawn on which I scatter seed for the ground feeding finches. This year there are lots of apples on the ground and these are enjoyed by both birds and squirrels. The main feeding and watering station is a bird table under an apple tree from which a squirrel proof cage type nut-feeder is hung, within a couple of yards of thick shrubs from which the shyer birds can make short, sharp sorties.

SAT 20 NOV

John Newnham spent a couple of hours seawatching at Worthing this morning (8 - 10am in a strong north east wind) and reports via the SOS website. Despite the wind he saw 300 GANNET going west (200 of them fishing near him at one stage, mostly adults) and in the second hour recorded 250 AUKS also heading west - he says they were definitely all razormots and guillemots making me feel a lot happier about my occasional attempts to identify species flying past over the sea in rough weather. 15 DIVERS also went by, all that could be identified were Red Throated, and there were also several KITTIWAKE. John says that to judge by the numerous 'blobs on the horizon' watchers at Selsey Bill probably had a very good morning (but alas no news from there).

While John Newnham was on the front at Worthing I was patrolling Tipner Lake (alongside the M275 into Portsmouth) for three chilly hours. This was partly done as a further trial of Anne de Potier's new idea for 'Through the Tide' counts in place of the BTO Low Tide counts and partly as a response to a plea from English Nature for up to date info in relation to the latest development proposals for Pounds Scrapyard site. While there were no rarities there were plenty of birds and my attempts to count and map them each half-hour re-inforced the conclusion that we came to in recent trials at Fishbourne, namely that a detailed record of how the birds move about during the tide cycle reveals a lot more useful info for conservation than pure low tide counts can do, but such mapping counts can only be successful if the observer sticks to one view point and devotes all their time to the task of watching and recording. As it is impossible to see the whole of this lake from one place I spent much of my time walking between observation points and ended with incomplete maps and some fascinating questions - one was how a roost of 36 Lapwing that could be clearly seen and counted on the motorway bank turned into a roost of 120 Lapwing on the seaweedy mud when the tide went out without any birds seen flying to or from the lake. Similarly about half of 350 roosting Dunlin on the motorway bank vanished without trace (but it is much easier for them to make an unobserved getaway).

Andy Collins did his 'sea watch' today from Southampton's Weston Shore where he saw two MED GULLS (the regular Woolston adult and a first winter bird) and an semi-albino Black Headed Gull that is pure white except for black primary tips. The bill is pure red with no black tip and apparently the bird catches the eye as 'something entirely different' - I remember twice in past years seeing an albino Herring Gull and being startled by it, and like that bird this one is also a long term

survivor which is thought to be the same one that has been spotted several times over ten years. (Incidentally I noticed one Black Headed Gull on Tipner Lake today with a full breeding plumage face mask - I believe some birds never lose theirs). Also in Southampton Andy saw a PEREGRINE on its regular perch at the Vospers Shipyard (by the Itchen at Woolston?) and noted a lone Chiffchaff.

FRI 19 NOV

On several recent mornings when out in my garden early to replenish the birdseed I have strained my ears to catch a subliminally heard sound which I thought was distant MISTLE THRUSH song and this morning I heard it clearly. I suppose you could claim this as the very first bird song of the new millenium as these non-migratory early nesters are probably already declaring their ownership of next spring's breeding territory as opposed to those (like Robins) singing to defend a winter food territory, or those like Tits that just seem to sing because they are feeling good. Collared Doves and Starlings may also be singing in places where they have nests at this very moment but they will have abandoned those nests by New Year. Skylark and Woodlark may also sing now but I think that is probably just a re-action to the close proximity of other birds of their species in winter flocks (and that goes for Goldfinch and Linnet that sometimes chatter away in flocks). So I declare the Mistle Thrush to be the first species to have crossed the threshold of the new millenium safely without suffering from the millenium bug.

.....Another good personal tick today was to spot one, probably two, TREECREEPER in my garden. No doubt they do pass through with the winter Tit flocks but I cannot ever remember seeing one in my own garden before.

Brian Fellows has charted all records of the Med Gull ringed O2K which has been a regular at Southsea Canoe Lake over the past six years and is still to be seen there despite having lost one of its feet below what we would call the ankle leaving the ring perilously hanging on the stump of the leg. Brian's records show that it has consistently been at Southsea in every month of the year except May and June (he doesn't know where it goes then - presumably to breed). Novmember is the peak month for sightings with a smaller peak in September, the other months showing littl variation. With its injured foot it now tends to perch with the bad leg (and the ring) withdrawn into the body feathers making it less easy to be sure it is old faithful that you are looking at.

Brian Fellows visited Nutbourne Bay this morning seeing several birds that I did not see yesterday but not spotting the Pintail which I hoped had returned to stay (as they used to at this site but have not done in the last couple of winters). Over the orchards there were 6 Fieldfare where I had seen none and in the bay there were 110 Blackwits where I had seen only 16 and 35 Shelduck where I saw only 19 and there was a flock of 140 Dunlin where I saw very few, but that may be just because it was a different state of the tide. In the Ham Brook stream meadow the male Stonechat was on show where I saw the female and I am pleased to hear that the lone Swan was no longer stuck in the ploughed field.

My remark last Wednesday (Nov 17) that the 15 Slav Grebe at Church Norton were the first that I had heard of prompted Paul Winter to tell me that he saw three there on Oct 30 and I suspect they were not the first to arrive.

THU 18 NOV

Jim Steedman has sent me a lot of interesting info from West Sussex. Last Sunday (Nov 14) he was at Betley Bridge (TQ 197174), where the B2135 crosses the River Arun north west of Henfield, and saw his first two BEWICK'S SWAN with a single WHOOPER that has been seen roaming the Adur Valley for the past four months (lost it's way back to Arundel?). Jim doesn't say when the Bewicks (genuine migrants) arrived here but it could have been as early as Oct 23 when three arrived at Ibsley on the Hampshire Avon. I was aware of sites for Bewick's on the Arun but not of this one on the Adur - looking at recent Sussex Bird Reports I see there are two areas where you may see them by the Adur (Henfield levels and Upper Adur levels) but the figures show that you have a much better chance of seeing them (and in bigger flocks) at Pulborough or Amberley.

.....Last Monday (Nov 15) Jim was at Coates Common and soon found a flock of 30+ CROSSBILL at SU 996172, then saw WOODLARK in a private field at SU 989173 (only a little over 100 yards from the road but it was not possible to get close enough to count how many Woodlark there were on the ground amongst other birds). (A separate report on the Sussex website says that there were 25 WOODLARK there today - Nov 18). At the nearby Burton Mill pond there were a dozen Siskin but no Lessser Spotted Woodpecker to be seen (apparently this is a good place to see them). Jim ends by saying that there are lots of FIELDFARE around in W Sussex but few REDWING.

A message on the pagers tells of a BLACK BRANT seen from Langstone Bridge today in company with

many Dark Bellied and 6 Pale Bellied Brent (the message is not clear as to whether the PB birds were in the same flock as the DB and Brant). This is presumably the same Brant that has been seen at Farlington Marshes (Nov 13) and tends to support my impression that the very 'white sided' Brent that I saw in the twilight off the South Moors on Nov 11 was a Brant as I thought (I came back the following morning and found 8 Pale Bellied birds so assumed the one seen in the dusk was Pale Bellied with sides looking whiter in the failing light).

.....As I have not heard any more Brant sightings from Thorney Island/Emsworth channel where Barry Collins saw one intermittently from Oct 8 to Oct 28 I assume this is the same bird which has wandered from Pilsey to Farlington Marshes and is now on the way back, and I would be interested in any comments on the movement of Brent during the winter months. Do they remain loyal to the flock in which they arrived or do individuals move between flocks during the winter? And do those flocks stay in the same area of the harbour and go ashore to the same fields or do they drift around on the chance of finding better food even when the food in their area is not exhausted? In particular is this Brant moving around as a loner or with a flock?

.....While on the subject of Langstone harbour Alistair Martin tells me that he saw two EIDER off the Oysterbeds last Sunday (Nov 14)

In response to the suggestion which I put out last Tuesday (Nov 16) that LITTLE OWLS were introduced to England to predate BULLFINCHES (a pest of fruit tree growers at the beginning of this century) Brian Fellows has come up with some facts about their introduction, but no mention of Bullfinches. Brian got his info from the 'Historical Atlas of breeding birds in Britain, 1875-1900' in which Simon Holloway says there were many attempts at introduction from 1843 onwards, including 40 birds released in Kent between 1874 and 1880, which all failed - the first wild breeding did not happen until 1889 and after that the birds spread rapidly to cover most of England (south of Harrogate) by 1925 (is 89 a good year for introductions? 1989 was the year in which the Little Egret invasion got under way). A couple of facts of the sort that will stick in my memory are (a) prior to the spread of wild birds Little Owls were common household pets serving the useful purpose of keeping the house clear of Cockroaches (we don't hear about that on programs about living in Victorian England) and (b) Simon Holloway says that 'Birds are an important food source for Little Owls but only in the breeding season when they take Starling, House Sparrow, Thrushes and other birds' (which may include Bullfinch).

A brief walk round the Nutbourne orchard and shore circuit this afternoon found a good number and variety of birds on the water but none of interest on land other than a female Stonechat in the Ham Brook meadow (in the hedge where the path from Farm Lane meets the seawall) and a lone Mute Swan standing in the centre of the newly ploughed field immediately east of the path from Farm Lane. From time to time the Swan would walk a short distance over the very difficult terrain and then it would pause, very gradually moving towards to sea. It had no apparent injury and looked healthy so I guess it had come down on or near the plough and once on the plough found it impossible to take off. I hope it survives, unlike a pony which had a heart-attack in the wet meadow last night and had to be put down (or so I was told by a passer by while we watched the swan). On the water of the bay there were plenty of Brent, Wigeon and Teal along with the waders and a couple of Egret but I was pleased to see a small group of 15 PINTAIL, mostly drakes, on the water here for the first time - this used to be a good place to see them but last winter they deserted this bay. There was also a lone Greenshank here.

At mid-day today Brian Fellows made his regular tour of the lower Ems valley, finding one Green Sandpiper with a Little Egret and a Grey Wagtail near Westbourne. Later in the winter we can expect several more Egrets to use these sheltered 'water meadows' in preference to the open harbour shore but they have not moved in yet.

Ian Watts today saw 300+ GOLDEN PLOVER on the Wide Lane playing fields (north of the M27 and west of Southampton airport) today with 130 Lapwing - he had seen 500+ there on Nov 10 with 90 Lapwing. I know that Lapwing tend to be widespread in the winter where the Golden Plover bunch into a few large flocks but I am a bit worried that, while the number of Golden Plover seen here seems to increase each winter, the number of Lapwing is going down (none in the summer and fewer in the winter).

.....Ian also saw a COMMON SANDPIPER by the Itchen on Nov 10 at a place he calls Bitterne Manor shore which I guess must be the Riverside Park area just upstream from the Cobden Bridge joining Bitterne to St Denys (map square SU 4314). This is the third winter in a row that there has been a Sandpiper here.

Pete Potts tells me that there was a flock of around 50 FIELDFARE at Bishops Waltham Moors today and that two LITTLE EGRET had reached the very top of the River Hamble just south of Bishops Waltham. It would be interesting to hear of other inland reports of these birds - the furthest inland I

have heard of them in recent winters has been Alresford on the Itchen.

WED 17 NOV

The SOS website today carries the first news I have seen of SLAVONIAN GREBE (15 of them) off Church Norton last Sunday (Nov 14) along with at least one RED NECKED GREBE and one BLACK THROATED DIVER. On the same day a Black Throated Diver was off Birling Gap early in the morning and this could be the same bird moving west to Church Norton and on to Hurst Castle on Nov 16 but another report of one back near Rye on Nov 15 is probably a different bird. In Pagham Harbour the three Ruddy Shelduck that were seen by Martin Baggs on Saturday (Nov 13) had been spotted there on the previous day (Nov 12).

.....Although well out of our area I'm sure many people will be interested to know that bot a SWALLOW (Nov 16) and a HOUSE MARTIN (Nov 17) were seen in the Rye Harbour area where 2 Bittern, 2 Lapland Bunting and 2 Tree Sparrow were also seen over the weekend. Nearer to us were 2 Short Eared Owls at Pulborough where, if I read it right, there was a dog fight between one Merlin, one male Hen Harrier and two Peregrine. On Sunday (Nov 14) there were 9 Eider on the sea off Rottingdean.

TUE 16 NOV

Brian Fellows was in Southsea this morning and says .. 'The O2K-RINGED MEDITERRANEAN GULL with the white ring on its left leg was back on the lake - this is my first sighting this winter. As observed earlier by Bob Hoare, the bird's left foot is missing, though the ring is still on the leg - presumably held on by the "ankle". The effect of this is that it perches on its right leg with the left tucked up, making the ring not so easily visible. Reminder: The bird was ringed as a pullus in Zeeland, Netherlands on 7 June 1994 and has been regularly recorded on Canoe Lake, Southsea each year from September through to February.' Also on the lake were 55 Swans but only 3 Mallard and at Baffins there were 13 Shoveler. On Southsea cricket pitch Brian found a Brent Goose family with six juveniles - the biggest single family seen by him this winter - and his overall percentage of juveniles now stands at 25.26%

.....Milton Locks Nature Reserve (is this the same as the one to the west of the Thatched House pub near the locks?) was a new port of call for Brian Fellows, who says ..'I was prompted to pay a visit to this small reserve by a report I had from a dog walker I met on Milton Common last week that there was what she described as a "hawk-owl, a large and beautiful bird" on the reserve. Needless to say all was quiet on the reserve this morning, but for a couple of Robin and a Dunnock.'

The Rare Bird news on Paul Winter's pager today recorded the first BLACK THROATED DIVER of the winter (to my knowledge) off Hurst Castle today. We have had several reports of 'Auks' there recently but today they are listed as 4 RAZORBILL and 3 GUILLEMOT. Up at Fleet Pond a RED KITE and a Buzzard flew over at midday.

A message from Kevin Stouse today starts with the sighting of a splendid male BULLFINCH near the Pook Lane stables at Warblington, and as this was on a day when I had come across these birds in a couple of unexpected places (and had heard Gary Stevens comment on seeing some when I met him at Langstone) I am wondering if we have recently had an influx of these birds? I thought I could remember news of continental Bullfinch on the move at this time last year (the north eurasian race are bigger and brighter birds) but cannot find the reference. I did however refresh my memory about a statement that Little Owls were introduced into this country in order to reduce the number of Bullfinch (a serious pest in orchards where they eat the flower buds) - if anyone can verify this slightly dubious statement I would like to know.

.....Kevin also heard a Chiffchaff near the stables and went on to see large numbers of Bar Tailed Godwit and Golden Plover on the shore off Pook Lane. I cycled by Langstone Pond after lunch and saw at least 500 GOLDEN PLOVER airborne and a couple of hundred Bar Tails joined them. Continuing down Langstone Mill Lane to the South Moors Kevin was concerned, as others may well be, to see bulldozers at work in the small meadow at the west end of Mill Lane but I have assured him that they are not the precursor to more house-building, merely the essential tools for building up the seawall along the east side of the Langbrook stream to protect the houses in Mill Lane from future flooding. The bank will be of earth and hopefully will soon be covered by natural plant growth (possibly some interesting newcomers with the soil used) while the clearance of trees from the very over-grown copse at the top corner of the field will also, in my opinion, be beneficial to wildlife, saving the meadow from scrub invasion and letting light in among the trees where we may see other flowers appear.

.....Along the South Moors shore were two Rock Pipit which I think have now settled there, and at Budds Farm the Shoveler count had increased to 13 with 5 Pochard. The Goosander was in the

Hermitage stream below the gravel quay with two Merganser and a dozen Little Grebe at the mouth of the stream. Walking up the Brockhampton Stream Kevin heard two more Chiffchaff and saw a Grey Wagtail, then disturbed a KINGFISHER from a perch where the stream disappears under Harts Farm Way.

Lyndon Hatfield deserted his usual birding haunts by Fareham Creek to visit Broadmarsh today and was suitably impressed by the number and variety of waders and wildfowl. Among those he picks out for special comment are 'at least 2 PALE BELLIED BRENT' among a large flock of Dark Bellied (the same inter-mixing of races on which I commented on Nov 12), with 30 KNOT (a good number for this site) and 30 BAR TAILED GODWIT (which until a couple of years ago I would never have expected to see on the mud but they now seem to have deserted the sand at the mouth of the harbour and moved in force to the mud along the northern shore - does that tell us anything about a decline in food available in the sand?). He also comments on 12 Little Egret seen together but regulars here would not be surprised at that number.

Nick Mills had a good day's birding yesterday (Nov 15) starting at the mouth of the Hamble with some 1200 Dunlin, 40 Grey Plover and 40 Ringed Plover with lots of Brent, Turnstone, noisy Redshank and a few Blackwits. A lone Kingfisher was fishing in a pool by the spit where there had been two together on Saturday. Moving south he came to the hide in the area north of Hook Lake and was lucky enough to get a good view of a Cetti's Warbler, with a couple of Snipe in the grass and many Wigeon and Teal on and around the scrape. He then went on to the old scrape beyond Hook Lake, passing three Stonechat on the way and seeing a Dartford Warbler flitting into cover near the bench overlooking the scrape on which there were 11 drake Pintail with 7 (possibly more) females. A passing Sparrowhawk put up more birds, and when he reached the woods there were a couple of Bullfinch (again possibly new arrivals?) with two Song Thrush and three or four Goldcrest.

.....Referring back to his report of 4 RED NECKED GREBE at Pagham harbour last Saturday (Nov 13) Nick says that one was diving vigorously at the harbour entrance and three more were hauled up on the shingle to the east. He describes them as .. 'stocky, with necks kept fairly well tucked down, brown on the back and a dirty looking patched neck, with what I took to be faded summer patches. The black crown came right down over the eye and was fairly even in width along the face. I read now that the bill colour would have helped (yellow at the base of the bill is a key factor in identification), but I'm afraid I didn't note this at the time, I shall know for next time.' I'm not sure what the situation is in Sussex but Birds of Hampshire says that most sightings are of one or two birds though there was a gathering of ten off Hill Head in 1957, other reports have been of up to five together.

MON 15 NOV

A message from Steve Cosey exudes his delight in 20 seconds of magic as a BITTERN flew north over the reeds while he was watching from the Meadow Hide at Titchfield Haven early on Sunday morning (Nov 14). In his words .. 'In the short space of time before it dropped (no more than 20 secs) the birds plumage looked a real golden hue as it caught the all too brief morning sun.' Steve says the Cetti's were in good voice with plenty of Goldcrest everywhere.

No such delight for Mark Litjens who spent Saturday morning (Nov 13) in a New Forest plantation south west of Pig Bush but failed to see the Two Barred Crossbill though he did hear his first BRAMBLING of the winter. On Sunday he took his bad luck with him to Needs Ore where the Great White Egret also failed to show (no need to be down-hearted about that - I haven't heard of anyone seeing it since the original sighting), but he didn't go home birdless. One, maybe two, ringtail Hen Harrier, a RED THROATED DIVER, Kingfisher, Dartford Warbler and 4 Spotshank made the trip a reasonable one and there were also flocks of Goldfinch and Siskin plus a vocal Cetti's Warbler which seems to have settled in here.

A Snow Bunting was still on the Pennington seawall yesterday (Nov 14) according to Paul Winter's pager, but it also told him that today neither the Ferruginous Ducks nor the 'Not Lesser Scaup' were to be seen at Timsbury.

John Goodspeed, who spent two years in the Falklands, is the first to tell me that SPECKLED TEAL (a couple of which turned up at Normandy, Lymington yesterday as escapees from a collection) are common wildfowl in the Falklands. John give the latin name for this species as *Anas flavirostris* and I was just rummaging for the meaning ('flavi' must mean yellow but what is a bird's 'rostrum?') when I saw that he had added that they are difficult to separate from YELLOW BILLED PINTAIL which seems to answer my question succinctly.

The glorious weather and morning low tide today persuaded Brian Fellows to sit on the marina seawall overlooking the Emsworth harbour and channel for two and a half hours to observe the movements

of the shore birds while the tide rose. His watch was similar to the 'Through the Tide' watches (organised by Anne de Potier) in which several of us participated on the Fishbourne Channel in recent week-ends and it seems Brian found this one just as interesting as those. The idea of sitting in one place for this length of time with no rare bird in view may seem strange to some birders, but my experience was that the interest in the birds never flagged, while the business of trying to record the position and numbers of each species each half-hour kept you so busy that there was no time to get bored. As well as the interest it offers at the time it also provides for the first time a real record of how the birds use the harbour which I feel the low tide count method fails to do partly because it only shows which parts of the mud are occupied at the bottom of the tide, and also because the bottom of the tide is the most difficult period for seeing the birds in many areas (they are hidden in channels or behind mudbank slopes) - and perhaps in my case only, when covering the large area from Langstone Bridge to Emsworth harbour, there was hardly enough time to take a snapshot of the birds in one place before having to move on.

.....Brian made this count on a rising tide when the birds would have had several hours of feeding time before he started, and while the behaviour of the birds in that period is important (indicating loafing areas, sub-roosts, and places where they go for a good wash and brush up after filling their bellies), I suspect that the study of their behaviour on the falling tide (particularly in the morning when they may have gone hungry overnight) may be more important in revealing the areas which are most essential to their feeding. I certainly intend to make similar mapped counts in the Langstone area, concentrating on the central two hours between high and low water (both on the falling and rising tide)

.....The birds which Brian noted this morning included a Kingfisher briefly perched above Peter Pond, the Black Swan and a reduced count of just 47 Mute in the town mill pond, and a full range of shore birds seen in the Emsworth channel - among these I was interested to see there were 15 Knot and 7 Lesser Blackbacks (why do they favour this place?) but only one Great Blackback. Apart from 950 Dunlin the waders were all in small numbers and there were no Turnstone or Lapwing.

Today's sunshine brought a female GREEN WOODPECKER onto the grass in our garden, presumably in search of ants. Although we do not see ants in the winter when they are hibernating in their nests the woodpecker knows that this is a good time of year to catch them 'at home' and feed on them.

My book on ants says that ants remain the major food source of Green Woodpeckers in the winter.

.....Walking from Nutbourne to the Bosham channel via Chidham today I came on two small groups of four and five FIELDFARE and heard one SONG THRUSH in strong voice but the sighting which pleased me most was of seven GREY PARTRIDGE in full view from Cot Lane as they worked their way across the bare earth of a potato field with mechanical harvesting of the crop going on within a couple of hundred yards of them. In Nutbourne Bay there were well over 200 WIGEON on the water but I could not pick out any Pintail

PLANTS:

SAT 20 NOV

The Evening Class group chose a chilly day to visit the exposed beachlands of Hayling's Gunner Point today but were rewarded with a list of 54 plants still in flower, some good ones among them. A very pretty flower which I would not have expected was SHEEP'S BIT though the equally pretty blue of VIPER'S BUGLOSS is still relatively abundant (the colour seems far more intense at this time of year in contrast to the dull colours of most vegetation). Next best find, to my mind, was EASTERN ROCKET growing in one of its regular sites alongside the harbour entrance, and near it was the equally surprising HARE'S FOOT CLOVER. Sea Campion, Large Flowered Evening Primrose and Storks Bill are good looking but not uncommon plants at the moment but the group were luckier to find THRIFT and GOLDEN SAMPHIRE still 'tickable' as flowering.

TUE 16 NOV

Today Pete Potts visited part of the Claylands proposed nature reserve in Bishops Waltham which is managed as a hay meadow only cut in late summer (and not since grazed by the Highland Cattle). Many wildflowers were still blooming with OX EYE DAISIES and HOARY RAGWORT among the buttercups, hawkbit and Knapweed. With frost expected for the next few nights this scene won't last much longer (but no doubt there will be the usual return of flowers as the weather turns mild and sunny again in December after the late November cold snap - that seems to be a regular weather pattern in recent years)

MON 15 NOV

Today's two surprise plant flowerings were of FIELD PENNYCRESS in an arable field at Chidham

and a single plant of ORANGE HAWKWEED (sometimes called Fox and Cubs) growing in roadside grass in the same village.

INSECTS:

WED 17 NOV

The house magazine (FRONTLINE) of the Hampshire Constabulary which I happened on today had an interesting wildlife section in which I read (and saw a photo) of a HORNET'S NEST hanging from the rafters in the loft of a house (I think at Ashurst on the edge of the New Forest). A Wasp nest in such a situation is normally spherical but this was a cylindrical shape 18 inches across and 3 feet from top to bottom, otherwise looking externally similar to a wasp nest. Alongside this was a description of another and more dangerous nest of the continental wasp *Dolichovespula media* - a big and vicious insect. This nest was in a small Bay tree which had been clipped to a spherical shape at roughly head height. One of the dangers with these wasps is that they nest in situations like this, often in bushes in gardens, where the innocent passer by or the gardener can disturb them before seeing them, and the wasps naturally spring to the defence of their nest with very painful results for the person who disturbed them.

The weather should be chilling by now but at Chilling (between Warsash and Titchfield) Pete Potts had 5 RED ADMIRAL on ivy blossom in his garden last Saturday (Nov 13)

MON 15 NOV

Walking from Nutbourne Farm Lane to the seawall along the field edge path the sun caught a million strands of gossamer stretched across my path. One end of each strand was caught on the hedge to my right but the other was floating freely on the faintest of breezes blowing the strands across my path, and with only one end lightly fixed I would hardly have detected these fine lines of silk by touch. This is the first time this autumn that I have noticed this sign of baby spiderlings leaving home, and it seems much later in the season than I would have expected - can anyone comment? Another unexpected observation of insect activity was also seen this afternoon - a large Queen Wasp on the sunny side of a wooden fence looking as if she were collecting wood to make a new nest. Surely at this time of year she should be hiding away in some natural cranny to pass the winter, leaving thoughts of starting a new nest until next spring? It almost goes without saying that I saw the statutory RED ADMIRAL flying in the sunshine and I see that Brian Fellows had another in Emsworth today.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 18 NOV

I'm sure the Environment Agency staff who were at Bishops Waltham Moors with Pete Potts today said 'This won't hurt at all' to the fish as they stunned them with electric shocks in order to check on the species and numbers present. The good news was that there were lots of BULLHEADS in the water and as these tiny fish are the subject of both British and European conservation activity (they are one of the British government's Biodiversity Action Plan species and are also a European Union Annex 2 species), this find was not only good news for Pete and others responsible for managing the Moors nature reserve and the water but also, when they got over the shock, for the fish.

TUE 16 NOV

While taking a coffee break at Eastney during his tour of Portsmouth bird sites this morning Brian Fellows watched a SEAL swimming in the Langstone harbour mouth near the ferry pontoon.

COMMENTS:

17 Nov 99 - from Ralph Hollins - Wildlife and the Law. Can the police save us all from being eaten by Leopards?

An unexpected invitation from Geoff Culbertson, the Hampshire county Police Wildlife Liaison Officer, enabled me to spend a fascinating day at the 1999 Wildlife Liaison Conference held at the Police training headquarters at Netley today. The presentations ranged from a report on how the various agencies which try to enforce wildlife law in this country (Home Office, DETR, MAFF, Police etc) are now getting their act together, and at the same time involving the many non-governmental bodies (RSPB, RSPCA, etc), through an organisation called the 'Partnership for Action against Wildlife crime' (PAW for short, and having a 'paw' as their logo); through a gripping account of how the many (at least 100 and growing in number) 'big cats' at large in this country will very soon become a real threat to humans; to an attempt by a Chichester wildfowler to apply logic

to the questions of 'animal rights' in relation to hunting - the logic showed that it was inevitable that the 'big cats' would eventually eat all the humans (my apologies for a slight over-simplification of a very complicated issue - I agreed with most of what was said on the subject, but disagreed that it is possible to draw simple conclusions - such as that hunting is right and animal rights are wrong - using logic).

The day started with a presentation by Colleen Mainstone, manager of the BTCV in Hampshire, on the many aspects of the BTCV's work, especially with local conservation groups. I was also reminded that, in the same way that the Wildlife Trust co-ordinates and trains Tree Wardens throughout the county, BTCV are now playing a similar role in relation to Pond Wardens.

We then had a presentation from Mick Neeve, chairman of the East Hants Badger Group, on how the group deals with the many problems that occur when the 'set' ways of Badgers (excuse the pun) come into conflict with human activities (housing development, roads, badger baiting etc). This included some interesting video film of Mick picking up wild badgers with his bare hands (he said gloves would give a false sense of security and offer no additional protection against bites) - he did however need a 'grasper' (a strong plastic loop on the end of a stout pole which has to be very skilfully slipped over the animal's head and drawn tight around the neck, preventing the head from turning back, while the bare hand grasps the fur at the back end in order to lift the badger into a metal cage). Three very positive points made by Mick were (a) the urgent need to ban metal wire snares by law (we were shown film of a Badger which had only died long after it had torn up the peg to which the snare was fixed and had gone off to live in a nearby sett with the metal slowly cutting into its neck all round until it died at the point where it had cut down to the spine on one side and the windpipe on the other); (b) the need to recognise that badgers have such fixed habits that they cannot be moved to another area away from a housing development; and (c) that if you want to catch a badger for baiting there is a very much quicker and simpler method of doing so than digging down into the sett.

The third presentation was by the Countryside Alliance and emphasised that the general impression that their sole aim was to prevent the abolition of Fox Hunting was created by the media, not by them - their concern was to prevent the abolition of human life in the countryside (i.e. to provide rural bus services, village shops, rural bank branches, and to deal with rural poverty so that people who have to work in the countryside can still live there - as opposed to the urban humans commuting daily or at week-ends to their 'country cottages'). That part of the presentation was given by their Southern Public Relations Officer, Alison Hawes, who was followed by one of their local members, a wildfowler from Chichester Harbour, who presented a heart-felt case for early death for all of us (the gist of his argument was that death is natural and that killing and eating are an inevitable part of the way in which humans live). While I shared many of his opinions (and have always greatly respected wildfowlers as people with a great understanding of, and interest, in wildlife, and as doing far more for wildlife conservation than the majority of people who denounce them for expressing the hunting instinct on which mankind has relied for its survival for thousands of years) I think the professional philosophers and logicians who once taught me at Oxford would demolish his logic in very short order.

Most of the rest of the day was taken up by 'police business' - updates from other recent conferences and the account of 'Paw' (see above). The high spot of the day was however kept till last, and this was a presentation by Quentin Rose, who had started his career as animal keeper in various zoos and had then learnt much about animal tracking from North American Indians, and who now describes himself as a 'Professional Dangerous Animal Trapper' and works in England with the Police, Landowners and Farmers in an attempt to deal with the 'Big Cats' at large in the English countryside. He claims that there are at least 28 LEOPARD territories and 32 PUMA territories in England, that these animals are the offspring of creatures that were kept as 'pets' by many pop stars and the like in the 1970s and which were released into the wild after Dangerous Animals legislation made it illegal to keep them. With at least 100 of these animals roaming the countryside and breeding successfully (the original released animals would have died by now yet numbers continue to increase) we can very soon expect an exponential increase in numbers and many cases of attacks on humans (especially if farmers try to shoot them as that is what turns them into man-eaters). Shooting them is dangerous and the wrong approach to control, trapping them is impractical as they roam a very large area continually and if you put a baited trap where they were last seen they may not return there for months, so the only effective way of dealing with them is to train packs of dogs to scent them and drive them to take refuge in trees where they can be shot with drugged darts that will bring them down where a non-fatal shot would turn them dangerous. The punch line to this

was that if it becomes illegal to hunt with dogs then we will all end up, as the wildfowler predicted, as meat for the carnivores that are above us in the natural food chain.

And finally, if you read this in time, you can hear Geoff Culbertson on Radio Solent tomorrow night (Dominic Busby's programme between 8 and 9pm on Thursday 18 Nov). If you miss that check out the Wildlife Rescue & Contacts page on my website for a new name and phone number for Badger and Fox problems – I now have a number for Brian Masterton who has taken over from Pete West who was the first port of call for such problems until he moved north from Fareham to Fleet.

WEEK 45 NOV 8 - 14

BIRDS

- 14/11 LITTLE OWL holds its own remembrance day parade near Warblington cemetery
- 14/11 ... and 1,500 BRENT give their version of a 'thousand bomber raid' at the same place
- 14/11 Garden FIELDFARES
- 14/11 Two FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Timsbury and the BLACK BRANT was at Farlington first thing
- 14/11 ... the American Plover still at Normady with its old friends plus 2 new SPECKLED TEAL
- 14/11 Some numbers on the wildfowl at Titchfield Haven at last
- 13/11 Basingstoke gets its first visit from a PEREGRINE
- 13/11 Pager news - Two-Barred Crossbill has vanished, Ferruginous Duck may also have gone, and a GREAT WHITE EGRET may be resident in Needs Ore area
- 13/11 It's that RUDDY SHELDUCK again (three of them in Pagham Harbour)
- 13/11 BLACK BRANT at Farlington with 3 AVOCET, 1 JACK SNIPE and 3 LITTLE STINT
- 13/11 Two COMMON SCOTER off Hill Head and male HEN HARRIER at Titchfield Haven
- 13/11 Ten PINTAIL on Hook Scrape with a garden BLACKCAP nearby, plus news from Church Norton
- 13/11 40 CORN BUNTING in flock near Brighton on the Downs with 50 Skylark
- 12/11 TWO-BARRED CROSSBILL in the New Forest (Bishops Dyke) and FERRUGINOUS DUCK still at Titchfield Haven
- 12/11 The suspect Aytha at Lyminster is a Scaup, the American plover remains, and 2 Peregrines fail to catch one racing pigeon
- 12/11 Diving SHOVELER at Budds Farm and wintering CHIFFCHAFF
- 12/11 Coates Common in Sussex - it's not where the maps tell you it is.
- 12/11 Latest Sussex sightings - VELVET SCOTER & RED THROATED DIVERS off Church Norton
- 12/11 ... and 'foresightings' - a prediction of Little Auks falling out the sky this weekend
- 12/11 PALE BELLIED BRENT (not Brant) at Langbrook mouth and a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER in Hayling Bay
- 11/11 BLACK BRANT off the South Moors? And has the OSPREY left Thorney?
- 11/11 Today's Hampshire news – FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Titchfield Haven, RED THROATED DIVER off Hurst Beach
- 11/11 ...and yesterdays news from Fleet Pond of Fieldfare & Redwing going north, and of an increase in Siskin & Redpoll numbers
- 10/11 Latest news from Sussex - Short Eared Owl and 14 Avocet at Pagham, 6 Little Stint at East Head, Crossbills near Graffham
- 10/11 ... and a Great Northern Diver off Selsey with several Black Redstart ashore there
- 09/11 One PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle and the BARNACLE GEESE back at Baffins
- 09/11 One OSPREY still at Thorney Island where a SNOW BUNTING flew over last Sunday
- 09/11 One SLAV GREBE in Langstone Harbour with two Goldeneye in the Oysterbeds
- 09/11 How to tell a true SCAUP from a rubber duck (the latter now banned by law so take care)
- 09/11 Ringing news from Farlington plus sightings of the AVOCET and several CETTI's WARBLER
- 09/11 Hayling Blackbird cleans its own birdbath
- 08/11 News from Emsworth, Thorney and Chichester Lakes where 164 CORMORANT were roosting
- 08/11 News from Normandy - that Golden Plover, a Long-tailed duck and a Scaup still present
- 08/11 WOODLARK still singing in a winter flock of a dozen at Hundred Acres near Wickham
- 08/11 ... and a couple of reminders about sick birds or lost raptors
- 08/11 Kevin Stouse's group at Titchfield Haven yesterday have a good morning's birding
- 08/11 13 BLACK NECKED GREBE at Broadmarsh today where there were only seven seen yesterday
- 08/11 Influx of thrushes in Havant causing a resident Blackbird to burst into song

PLANTS:

- 14/11 HOLLY TREES in flower together with BROAD LEAVED WILLOWHERB and FALSE BROME.

13/11 White Red Deadnettle, Field Woundwort and Hungarian Brome found on a wild goose chase
13/11 ... and CREEPING YELLOW CRESS flowering on Milton Common in Southsea
09/11 MUSK MALLOW still flowering by the roadside at Bursledon roundabout

INSECTS:

14/11 BUMBLE BEE searching for a winter home?
14/11 Butterfly Conservation volunteers arouse sleeping caterpillars at Yew Hill
14/11 ... and a BC member resists the temptation to dissect the genitalia of a Novmber Moth
13/11 One RED ADMIRAL in an Emsworth garden
12/11 Two RED ADMIRAL, a SMALL TORTOISESHELL, and a pair of COMMON DARTER egg laying today
09/11 12 RED ADMIRAL still out on Thorney and at least one on Hayling

OTHER WILDLIFE:

12/11 What is the smallest SOW and BOAR pair that you know of? (Radio Solent claims Moles)
08/11 Introducing the albino strain to new Squirrel populations.

BIRDS:

SUN 14 NOV

This afternoon I took a walk to Warblington Church and on to Nore Barn at Emsworth, partly to check on which fields the Brent Geese are using this winter, but before discussing that I had a very welcome sight of a LITTLE OWL perched on one of the old oaks in the field east of the Old Rectory. Years ago this was a regular spot for seeing one but I had no expectation of seeing it when I put my bins up for a quick check - but there was the bird in the first spot I checked, just below a large hole in the trunk level with the third branch from the ground on its west side (the tree was not the one nearest the road but one in the centre of the field). While watching it people were passing me on the road to the Church and cemetery for a Remembrance Day ceremony for which the owl was no doubt on parade.

.....Coming back to the BRENT I found a flock of 1,500 on the first field I came to (by Pook Lane, south of the Old Rectory). This large field (part of H24 in the feeding survey catalogue) had been sown with winter wheat and for about twenty yards in from the edge all round the field the wheat was well grown but beyond that peripheral strip the green blades had been stripped to leave almost bare earth over 90% of the field. Just as I finished my first estimated count of 1500 birds someone came up Pook Lane from the shore with a lurcher which must have shown itself at the field edge, putting up some 200 Brent from that end and starting a rolling take off of all the geese which wheeled above me and headed in huge echelons to the safety of the sea. Walking on east I came to the big field (H23D) abutting the north side of the Church Path east of the church and main stream and it was clear that the geese had given this field the same treatment (well grown wheat around the edge but the rest of the field almost bare). As I scanned this field I found there was a lone Brent on it and this bird was surprisingly a juvenile - the first flock with 100% juveniles (that should bring the statistics of the birth rate up a bit). Reaching the other side of the farm I found a single Egret feeding by the eastern stream, and as I watched it I saw the massive formation of Brent had regained their courage and were flying back to feed in yet a third field (another part of H23D) which was also sown with cereal - the cost to the farmer (Henry Young) must be devastating in these hard times.

Yesterday Rob Edmunds told me that two FIELDFARE had been in his garden (Fleet area), seeming to move with a Tit flock, and this morning when I went out early to replenish the bird food I heard the distinctive chacking of one in a neighbouring garden (never saw it but the calling went on for several minutes). Rob says he has had Redwing in his garden in hard weather but never a Fieldfare and my experience in past years has been that any pre-Christmas Fieldfare have been in flocks on the move, but this year it seems that at least one Fieldfare has been roaming our area for some time (reports from Nutbourne, Thorney, Hayling and now Havant) so maybe this species is beginning to learn that gardens are a good place to spend the winter, not just a haven of last resort.

Today's main item from the pagers was news of two FERRUGINOUS DUCK at the Timsbury gravel pits (one of them a drake) - I wonder if one has arrived from Titchfield as there is no news today of the one that has been on the Meon near the road bridge. Among the other duck at Timsbury is an Aythya hybrid which could be mistaken for a Lesser Scaup (presumably the same bird that caused controversy in December last year).

.....Also on Paul Winter's pager was news of the arrival on Normandy lake at Lymington of two

SPECKLED TEAL (escapes - this species does not merit a mention in British bird books and I cannot even find it in my visitors guide to Arundel - they aren't Marbled Teal, are they?). There is greater certainty in the news from the same area of the continued presence of the American Golden Plover, Scaup and Long Tailed Duck. Two Peregrine were also seen there.

Nick Mills took a walk down the canal from Titchfield village today and is the first to give me some idea of the numbers of wildfowl to be seen on the northern fields. Nick saw around 180 Canada Geese including the half size 'Minima' bird and at least one of the 'white headed' birds. Feeding next to this flock were some 150 Black Tailed Godwit and about 200 Wigeon. I would guess that the Canada Geese flock at Titchfield will grow (or may be there were others hidden on the reserve) as the flock of 395 that were on the IBM Lake in early Sept (still 301 there on Oct 9) is now down to 23 birds (and the only others I know of are 24 on Baffins Pond and 9 on Hayling (Verner Common) this week) - there are up to 200 'missing birds' somewhere hereabouts and they usually seem to end up at Titchfield.

SAT 13 NOV

A HOSLIST message from M J Pitt today reports a Peregrine over the A33 at Chineham, a little north east of Basingstoke, at midday - the first time this observer has seen one at Basingstoke. Until Basingstoke gets a cathedral spire for these proud birds to perch on I wonder if the old 'packing case on an electricity pylone' would work? Which reminds me that I would be interested to hear news of any success of such projects to get Peregrine to breed - I believe it was tried on pylons over Eling Great Marsh at Lower Test and possibly elsewhere.

Paul Winter's pager today told him the the American Plover, Long Tailed Duck and Scaup were all still in the Lymington area but that no one could find the Two-Barred Crossbill at Rowbarrow (have they tried Slufers?). In the New Forest the Great Grey Shrike was seen 500 yards south east of Ocknell Pond near a fork in the major tracks (SU237115). At Titchfield Haven some people failed to see the Ferruginous Duck but it was seen from the road bridge in the morning. A later message passes on an 'unconfirmed report' of a GREAT WHITE EGRET at Needs Ore Point (Beaulieu River mouth) which is rumoured to have been in that area for a week.

Martin and Margaret Baggs saw three RUDDY SHELDUCK feeding together on the mud south of the North Walls bay this morning. The approx gridref is SZ 875970 and the viewing point was near the hide on the Pagham village shore. We reported a single bird at Sidlesham Ferry from July 19 to Aug 8 this summer and a year ago there was a singleton at Farlington Marshes around Oct 31 and another report of one flying over Sinah Lake on Hayling on Dec 3 (when the course staff on the Hayling golf course said they had had two on the links). I presume these birds are all taking a break from some wildfowl collection to which they return (hence the large gaps between sightings) but as most of the sightings, and those listed in Birds of Hampshire, are in the autumn/early winter they could be escapees (which have just grown new flight feathers and not been pinioned by their owners) setting out in life as feral birds. I gather there are feral populations in the Netherlands and maybe any of these autumn escapes that do not end up feeding hungry winter foxes go to the continent in search of company. It would be nice to think that the three birds now reported contain a compatible pair and might set up home hereabouts but groups of four have twice been recorded in Hampshire (one set being on Langstone Mill Pond in Sept 1975) and at Pennington in Aug 1988 five were seen, and none of these settled down as feral populations. If anyone else sees these birds I would be interested to know if they can sex them (female has whiter head and no black neck ring?)

A BLACK BRANT was seen at Farlington Marshes (I think by the Deeps) today and at the lake there were three AVOCET, three LITTLE STINT and a JACK SNIPE - all courtesy of Paul Winter's pager. From the same source I learn that two COMMON SCOTER were on the sea off Hill Head and that the male HEN HARRIER was seen on the Titchfield Haven reserve.

News of ten PINTAIL on Hook scrape comes from Nick Mills who lives in the Hook Park area nearby and has a male BLACKCAP in his garden. At the mouth of the Hamble today he found some 500 Dunlin feeding near the College of Navigation with 30 Ringed Plover and a few Grey Plover on the same shore or on the Hamble side. Later Nick went to Church Norton and reports seeing 4 Red Necked Grebe there - I've not had a chance to check this with him and have no confirmation from others. As Nick was looking for the Velvet Scoter (which he didn't see) the Grebes may have been on the sea rather than in the harbour.

Over in Sussex Colin Law has seen up to 40 CORN BUNTING in the winter flock on the Downs near Brighton from where he reports the first SKYLARK flock of around 50 birds. Colin did not find any Harriers or Peregrine on his patch but John Newnham has told him that there have recently been three ring tail Hen Harriers in the Chantry Hill area, with a male having been seen over

several days at Stump Bottom (not places that I know of, but at a guess not far from Worthing)

FRI 12 NOV

A TWO-BARRED CROSSBILL was seen in the New Forest today, not in Slufters but in the Beaulieu Road station area near Bishops Dyke south of Rowbarrow Pond (nearest carpark is Pig Bush). From the description of the route the map reference given (SU 358 082) must be wrong and I assume it should be 358042 where the bird was seen in conifers by a five bar gate.

.....Two more messages on Paul Winter's pager today tell us (1) that the FERRUGINOUS DUCK can still be seen on the Meon from the roadbridge at Titchfield Haven with a male HEN HARRIER over the reserve, a Greenshank on the scrapes and two Dartford Warbler along the seaward edge of the reserve, and (2) that the American Golden Plover is still at Normandy where the Long Tailed Duck and a female Scaup are on the lake.

The above news from Normandy may have been contributed by Simon Woolley who was at Normandy Marsh today and saw the birds described. He concedes that the Aythya duck on the lake 'closely consorting with the Long Tailed Duck' is a Scaup. Simon says 'I've seen more convincing Scaups in my time! This bird seemed to sit ever so low in the water, appeared not so very bulky, and didn't seem to show as hefty a bill as many Scaups. Even the extent of black on the bill tip (nail), as discussed by John Clark earlier in the week, looked initially rather suspect to me, but on closer views, it did indeed look OK! Given that it showed no pro-Tufted features as such, and that there were no particular hybrid-type features to see, and that it did indeed show lots of pro-Scaup features (notably blaze shape and extent, and head structure/pattern), I think it was a Scaup.'

Russell Wynn has also been to the Lymington shore, but he was there yesterday (Nov 11) and saw two PEREGRINE both trying, and failing, to catch a single racing pigeon. Among his many other good birds were a RED THROATED DIVER, 7 SHAG and 2 AUK (flying west) seen from Hurst Beach, and at the marshes were 2 Avocet, up to 3 Merlin, 2 Med Gulls and the second winter Marsh Harrier. 10 Eider, 38 Merganser and 36 Little Grebe were seen with 12 Egrets, 3 Greenshank and 1 Spotshank as well as the Scaup and Long Tailed Duck

Brian Fellows was at Budds Farm today and saw the same group of ten SHOVELER which I noted but he observed something that I did not, namely that the Shoveler were sometimes diving. I think this is fairly uncommon behaviour but I have seen them do it in the past and what I remember is the explosive way the birds emerged from the water when I saw them. Another thing that I did not observe at Budds Farm, but Tim Timlick did (just before I met him), was CHIFF CHAFF song. One of the HOSLIST messages today comments on the presence of Chiffchaff at Winnal Moors in Winchester with a query as to whether these must now be wintering birds. I don't know the answer to that but certainly I would assume that all the migrants have now left, but at the same time would expect almost daily encounters with these birds which are very common in winter near our coast (it has been estimated that more than 20 spend each winter in Budds Farm and I certainly have one in the vicinity of my garden - it was calling loudly in the garden yesterday). Another pleasing sight in my garden this morning was two Song Thrush - presumably winter visitors.

On Wednesday (Nov 10) I passed on news on Crossbills and Woodlark on 'Coates Common' which I had not previously heard of and could not locate on my 'Cocking and Sutton' area map, and I am grateful to Jim Steedman for telling me where it is. Jim says there is a Coates Common marked on the maps at TQ 002174 but that when Sussex birders and other naturalists from that area refer to Coates Common they mean the area around SU 992172 some 400 metres south of Coates Castle. West Sussex county council have been working hard to restore this area to heathland interspersed with patches of mature conifers. He also tells me that there is a carpark (not marked on my map) at SU 990173 giving good access to the area.

Today's news on the SOS website is of an OILED GUILLEMOT at Pett Level (east of Hastings) out of our area but yesterday (Nov 11) there was local news from Pagham with perhaps the most exciting being of 2 VELVET SCOTER and 2 RED THROATED DIVER off Church Norton, but as yet not a single report of any Slav Grebe on the sea there. Inshore at Church Norton was a FIRECREST and a WHIMBREL that could, I suppose, be there through the winter. At Sidlesham Ferry there were 2 Spotshank and a HEN HARRIER

.....Determined to be one up, the Sussex website carries a prediction from Tony Wilson of Little Auks on passage this weekend. I thoroughly approve of people using their knowledge and experience to suggest what we should be looking out for and wish more people would offer this service to less experienced birders - well done, SOS, even if none are seen.

I went back to the South Moors shore to check out last night's twilight sighting of a very pale flanked Brent and found 8 PALE BELLIED BIRDS embedded in a flock of 79 Brent. I could only be sure

of six of the Pale Bellied birds which obligingly came out on the shore near me, but on the water the other two looked to be equally pale flanked - they were adults but the group that came ashore consisted of 5 juveniles and one adult (three of the juveniles already had fully developed neck collars and the first signs of a collar could be seen on the other two). One regular birder who walks his two dogs here daily told me the Pale Bellied birds had been in this area at the mouth of the Langbrook for about a week and that he had seen other groups of them in the Broadmarsh area before that - he also said that he had heard that the usual winter flock of Pale Bellied birds had failed to arrive in the Channel Islands this autumn.

.....This raises several questions in my mind about the Pale Bellied Brent. Firstly are all that have been seen in Langstone Harbour since Sept 8 ones that 'fell short' of the Channel Islands/Brittany? Second, have all the 33+ birds of the original flock now merged into Dark Bellied flocks? Third, if the answer to the previous question is yes - will they head for Siberia next spring in company with their new found friends?

.....The female GOOSANDER was with the Brent at the mouth of the Langbrook (sleeping on the small island/salting) confirming that this was what I saw in the dusk last night and also that, unlike the Merganser which all fly out at night to roost on the sea, this bird is happy to stay the night in the harbour.

While at the Budds Farm area this morning I met Tim Timlick who told me that a couple of days ago (Nov 10) he had watched a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER eating a crab as it drifted rapidly west along Hayling Bay and that prior to that, on Nov 4, he had watched a GREY PHALAROPE spinning on the water of the Kench and had had a BLACK REDSTART there on Nov 3. After speaking to Tim I checked out the Budds Farm pools where 10 or more SHOVELER were in the majority (just 2 Teal, 2 Pochard, 3 Tufted Duck and only half a dozen Mallard. The two Swans were present and the usual Coot and Moorhen - but even the Dabchick were down to 1. Coming home via the Hermitage Stream I found the Brent had deserted the grass on the Broadmarsh playing fields but about 50 of them had moved onto the remaining grass of the 'Archery Field' east of the Hermitage Stream - building work for the new 'Hi-Tech' industrial centre is under way and half that field is fenced off with earth-moving under way.

THU 11 NOV

Today's news from the pagers, courtesy of Paul Winter, tells of a FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Titchfield Haven throughout the morning (considerately showing to non-paying visitors by the roadbridge over the diverted mouth of the Meon) and of a RED THROATED DIVER going past Hurst Beach with 7 SHAG (I guess that means they were all flying, presumably the diver went west). Other new entries to the charts down in the Lymington area are, I think, a party of 10 EIDER - we were told of 4 Eider there on Sept 10 but no mention of any since so I assume this is a newly arrived group - and 2 AVOCET. Old favourites still there are the American Plover, female Scaup, Long Tailed Duck and Marsh Harrier

.....Yesterday's pager news which arrived just too late to go in the website update included another report of movements over Fleet Pond. 3085 Woodpigeon went southwest and 135 Fieldfare with 97 Redwing went north (tying in with my theory that these thrushes come south west from their arrival point on the east coast in autumn, hit the south coast (giving us brief views) and then bounce back north to spend the early winter in the midlands until hard weather brings them south to us again much later. 5 Crossbill also went north but a single Brambling, with 100 Siskin, went west. Remaining in the trees around the pond were another 200 Siskin with 70 Redpoll.

At around 16:45 this afternoon, with the light almost gone, I was at the mouth of the Langbrook stream enjoying a breath of fresh air and scanning the geese and ducks on the water when my eye was caught by the bright white flank of one goose among 150 Brent. This white patch was exactly like what I saw at this same spot on 2 Apr 98 (when I described the bird's flanks as 'Persil white') but on that occasion I saw the bird in daylight and could confirm that it was a BLACK BRANT. That April bird was in a flock on the move and did not stay for a second opinion but hopefully this one will be seen again, possibly at the South Moors shore, possibly at the Oysterbeds across the water. Also among the Brent this evening were a few Wigeon, 23 Shelduck and what I feel sure was the Goosander (by this time of day any Merganser would have flown out to the open sea). Two Little Egret flying east from Farlington or the islands towards the Thorney roost reminded me that I have heard no evidence of a night roost in Portsmouth harbour (suspected by Bob Chapman when all the Egrets from Farlington were regularly seen to fly west in the evenings) - Dennis Bill spent one evening looking for them at Horsea Island and saw nothing, and he wondered if they could be using the trees of Hilsea Lines.

.....Among other sightings today were two of Sparrowhawk seen from my garden - the first view could not be confirmed as Sparrowhawk as all I could see (using my bins) was a dark bird shape with closed wings falling at great speed diagonally across the sky away from me, but shortly afterwards a Sparrowhawk was high above the house, circling with spread wings and drifting south on the wind. A little before this, around mid-day, a small flock of large thrushes went over the house going slowly against the wind with a few rapid flaps of their wings followed by a short glide with closed wings - I assume they were Fieldfare but could not be sure.

A quick word from Barry Collins as he was cycling by my front door this afternoon told me that he had not seen the Osprey today but had seen a few Fieldfare passing over. Asked if there was a large flock of Golden Plover on Thorney airfield by now he told me there were only around 60 birds

WED 10 NOV

A last minute check of the Sussex Ornithological Society's 'Recent Sightings' webpage shows that a lot has been going on at our end of the county in the last few days. Last Sunday (Nov 7) a SHORT EARED OWL was over the Pagham North Wall area (with Peregrine and Merlin also seen) and at Selsey three BLACK REDSTART were seen with news of both Purple Sandpiper and GREAT NORTHERN DIVER passing 'recently'. On Tuesday (Nov 9) six LITTLE STINT and a BRAMBLING were seen at East Head (mouth of Chichester Harbour), 14 AVOCET were in Pagham Harbour and another BLACK REDSTART sighting came from Selsey. At Ivy Lake, Chichester, the two Black Necked Grebe remain and away to the north east, beyond Graffham on the north of the Downs, more than 27 CROSSBILL were seen at Lavington Common (SU 9418). There is also a report of 23 Crossbill and 17 Woodlark at Coates Common which I guess is by the village of Coates a few miles further east beyond Duncton and Burton Mill Pond (SU 9917)

TUE 9 NOV

Brian Fellows found a single PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle this morning – the tide was well up and the bird was on the last unsubmerged rock at the foot of the seawall, soon being forced to move to a higher metal post. Brian went on to find that the 13 BARNACLE GEESE and the lone SNOW GOOSE which has decided to flock with them had all returned (they could not be seen anywhere there last week). The presence of four Cormorant seemed to augur well for the health of the pond if not for that of the fish in it – otherwise things were much as usual for the time of year with 112 Mallard being by far the most numerous species (only 24 Canada Geese)

Barry Collins told me that last Sunday (Nov 7) a single SNOW BUNTING had flown over him on Thorney Island, giving just a repeated single note rather than the usual quiet musical medley of notes that they trill, but identifiable by their white wings as it went low overhead. He also has had a single OSPREY around the island for each of the last few days and had noticed that in the evenings it seemed to head north so today he laid an ambush for it a little way inland and was able to confirm that it preferred the trees of Stansted Forest to the exposed posts of the Thorney Channel as a place to spend the night (maybe the trees remind it of home, maybe they offer a warmer night than does the exposed harbour on chill nights. It is getting late to see these birds but Barry tells me he has had one as late as Nov 16 in past years.

A lone SLAV GREBE was fishing off the west Hayling shore south of the Oysterbeds on the incoming tide this morning and in the Oysterbeds lagoon there were 12 Merganser with two female GOLDENEYE. In the main pool the number of Shelduck had increased to 30 and great masses of Dunlin were settling on the outer bund walls of that pool. As I went south I heard the noise of a single FIELDFARE around the erstwhile Daw Lane orchards (the apple trees which once attracted large flocks of winter thrush have now been grubbed up along with so many of our English orchards). This could be the same single Fieldfare that I heard at Nutbourne last Sunday and which Barry Collins heard on Thorney yesterday.

I don't suppose people in the Havant area are too excited by news of a female Red Crested Pochard on a village pond at Crawley (just north of Winchester) nor about the identity of a possible Scaup on the Normandy Lake at Lymington but both have been the subject of some discussion in the HOSLIST messages and a contribution to the discussion from John Clark is worth passing on to all those who have maybe been too overconfident in saying that an Aytha duck in female plumage with a lot of white around the base of its bill is definitely a SCAUP – there is a more than even chance it is just a Tuftie with too much make-up on the lips or a hybrid. John tells us that there is only one certain criterion for being sure that the bird is a Scaup. In his words... 'The key thing in distinguishing female Scaup from hybrids is to look at head shape, and the bill. Scaup has a broad, blue/grey bill with just a small nail at the tip of the bill. Black does not extend across the tip of the

bill.' John does not define what to look for in the head shape but my understanding is that it is more domed (rounded) on top and the clean smooth line of the dome must show no hint of a tuft at the back of the crown.. (In case anyone is wondering about my joke reference to Rubber Ducks in the headline to this item it arose from news on the TV today that the Europeans have banned the sale of any products which young children may put into their mouths as many of them contain a poisonous chemical - among these products are rubber ducks to go in the bath where they might well be mistaken for Scaup by a young twitcher)

This morning (no doubt long before I was out of bed) Pete Potts was involved in a ringing session at Farlington where they caught 27 RINGED PLOVER – Pete says this is the first time they have netted this species at Farlington (no wonder, why waste effort catching them if they are already ringed) and that surprisingly they did not catch a single Godwit. While at the Marshes he saw the AVOCET, MERLIN, SPOTSHANK and several CETTI'S WARBLER

Continuing the run of very poor jokes have you heard the one about the Blackbird which carefully cleans the bath before it takes a dip? Rosemary Webb was fascinated to see one come to her garden bird-bath and carefully remove all the leaves which had fallen in the water before it got in to have its daily wash.

MON 8 NOV

This afternoon Brian Fellows was at the Chichester Lakes where 100+ Tufted Duck and 42 Pochard formed the majority of the ducks (only 21 Gadwall, 2 Shoveler and 1 Wigeon seen though Brian did not check out Runcton and Vinnetrov lakes). The Coot remained uncounted and innumerable but both the two BLACK NECKED GREBE were seen as were 22 Great Crested Grebe with three young still distinguishable (some were very late to hatch this year). As dusk was approaching the main attraction was the building up of the CORMORANT ROOST with 164 birds counted (78 on the Ivy Lake trees and 86 warming their feet on the power cables running over the West Trout Lake).

.....Earlier in the day Brian found that 6 Tufted Duck had returned to the Emsworth Mill Pond to join the Black Swan and its backing group of 51 Mutes plus 80 Mallard, while on the Slipper Pond 13 Coot was a considerable increase over the half dozen or so that have been there through the summer. Down at the Thorney Great Deeps (west) 22 LITTLE GREBE was an indication that inland birds have taken up their winter coastal quarters following the first hint of frost, and 10 GREENSHANK were also presumably wintering (on Saturday I may have misheard but I think I was told that there was a massive 55 Greenshank at the Chichester marina that morning - I wonder what the Chichester Harbour wintering total will be?). Two of 11 Egrets put on another shadow boxing display for Brian's benefit and on land by the deeps 136 Lapwing were another reminder of the fact that winter is upon us.

Paul Winter's pager reports that the American Golden Plover is still in the Pennington/Keyhaven area and that at least one Long Tailed Duck and one Scaup is on Normandy Lake today. Russell Wynn put out on HOSLIST a more personal account of the birds there over the weekend, seeing the Hurst Long Tailed Duck and Snow Bunting on Saturday with two Kittiwake and a first winter Shag. Over Keyhaven reedbeds the second winter male Marsh Harrier was hunting and several Cetti's and Bearded Tits were heard as were some Redpoll flying over to the north west. On Sunday Russell went rutting at Rhinefield or at least watched the Fallow bucks at it, one of them being a white beast.

John Shillitoe tells me that the winter flock of WOODLARK on the fields behind his house at Hundred Acres near Wickham in the Meon valley has now grown to 12 birds from the three which he told us of on Oct 16. I was surprised then to hear that at least one bird was singing, and that is still the case now. I would guess that if you were to walk the public path going south east at SU 597113 on a good morning you would have a good chance of hearing it and maybe locating the flock in which several of the birds seem to be still in pairs and showing signs of territorial behaviour.

.....The other news from John Shillitoe is that a sickly BUZZARD found at East Meon recently has possibly been saved from death by this website and Anne McMahon. Hearing of the bird's plight John checked Anne's address and phone number in our bird rescue info and was able to get the bird into Anne's care in time to give it a chance of recovery.

.....This is probably as good a point as any to mention that Radio Solent this morning put out a plea for help in locating a falcon lost from the Paulsgrove area of Portsmouth - they did not specify the species but if you see a falcon with jesses anywhere in the Portsmouth area you are asked to ring 01705-613970 (and don't forget the general number for reporting stray raptors in 01243-512472 for

the Sussex Falconry Centre at Birdham).

Kevin Stouse tells me that more than 60 bird species were seen by the group he led around the Titchfield Haven area yesterday morning. Highlights started with two WATER PIPIT on the flooded fields at the north end of the reserve and continued with a flock of 50 FIELDFARE and just two (difficult to spot) REDWING on a Lower Posbrook Farm ploughed field to the west of the canal. To the east was a flock of Canada Geese with the 'half size' bird standing out from the others - as I understand it this bird is at present classified as belonging to one of four 'races' of Canada Goose, this one being *Branta canadensis minima*. The others are called *B.c. hutchinsii* (small and pale), *B.c. parvipes* (medium sized and pale), *B.c. interior* (large and dark where *minima* is small and dark). I presume this bird (which we have seen on the IBM Lake in one past year) is the one referred to in one of the 'Rare Bird Alert' messages as a 'Cackling Canada Goose'. In the fields near the river north of the reed beds Black Tailed Godwit and Snipe were disturbed by the party. Walking on down the canal path they saw a Sparrowhawk fly over with Rooks in noisy pursuit and even had a glimpse of Cetti's Warbler as well as longer views of Tits and Goldcrest. Down near the shore Trevor Carpenter was the only one to see a Dartford Warbler as it emerged from gorse for a few seconds but others saw Stonechats and Bearded Tits. There were more than 50 Pochard on the river but they did not see the Bittern which was announced on the pagers. Bird of the day for Kevin was Great Spotted Woodpecker with two at the reserve and another raiding his garden nut feeder when he got home.

At breakfast time today I noticed at least half a dozen BLACKBIRDS in my garden where I usually see one or two, and at the same time saw and heard ten REDWING flying over so I guess there had been an overnight influx of thrushes into the area and the fact that some of the Blackbirds were intruders muscling in on the feeding territories of local resident birds was confirmed when I heard a lengthy burst of quiet Blackbird song as one of the locals resorted to its traditional way of telling the others 'this is my territory'

In the late afternoon I visited Broadmarsh where I counted 13 BLACK NECKED GREBE near the bend in the 'shipping channel' at the mouth of the Hermitage stream and in the same area saw my first male Merganser of the winter. I was too late to see the Goosander upstream but John Goodspeed told me it was still around and that his first sighting of it (last Tuesday) which he described as being in the Brockhampton stream 'between the two weirs' referred to the old 'Corn Wharf' pool which does lie between two weirs and also between the two bridges over the stream south of Harts Farm Way.

Yesterday morning Mike Collins walked along the Budds Farm shore and saw a group of seven BLACK NECKED GREBE out on the water with the female GOOSANDER steaming past Budds Wall. The bushes around the sewage works held single BLACK CAP and REED BUNTING (both females) as well as Green finches. There were at least three ROCK PIPIT on the shore where a small flock of eight or more spent much of last winter.

PLANTS:

SUN 14 NOV

Today's most unexpected flower find was of many white flowers on two HOLLY TREES growing in the eastern hedge of the Warblington Castle farm - presumably bird sown trees or at best offspring of trees planted long ago to make the field hedge. Earlier in my walk I had found BROAD LEAVED WILLOWHERB in flower near to where one flower showed blue from the small sessile leaves of remnant LESSER PERIWINKLE creeping over the ground, and also near to PELLITORY OF THE WALL which I have recorded several times recently but it still has flowers with visible anthers. In Pook Lane (the old part south of the A27) a clump of FALSE BROME was in the best of health and was also showing tiny yellow anthers protruding from its long green spikelets. Two other flowering plants worth noting were Cow Parsley and Thyme Leaved Speedwell.

SAT 13 NOV

This morning I walked round part of central Hayling to check for the presence of Brent geese on a set of fields had been allocated to me. There were a few Curlew and Lapwing on one of the fields but no geese yet the outing was not wasted as I found something that I have never seen before and later had two more good plant finds. The new discovery was RED DEADNETTLE with all white flowers growing by the roadside - there was quite a large patch of it and the plants were small and had no white blotched leaves so I assume it was the normal wild species. Later, in a field which appeared to have been set-aside (it was a grassy field covered with large plants of Prickly Sow-Thistle and with flowering Meadow Buttercups), I found several plants of FIELD WOUNDWORT

in flower and one clump of tall grass ready to flower but with no florets open which seems to be my second find of HUNGARIAN BROME (I discovered it for the first time recently on South Hayling).

The Havant Evening Class group descended on Milton Common in Southsea today and found CREEPING YELLOW CRESS in flower along with White Melilot (also known as French Lace – a name that goes well with another of their finds, Spanish Broom)

TUE 9 NOV

Pete Potts was pleased to find MUSK MALLOW still flowering beside the Bursledon roundabout today, and though the variety of flowers is now diminishing I could still find quite a lot of VIPERS BUGLOSS and STORKS BILL (both Common and Musk) flowering on Hayling today with a last yellow button of Tansy together with both SEA CAMPION and a HIERACIUM species in full fresh flower in a sheltered spot. The SPREADING OLEASTER tree by the roadside north of Sinah Lake was not flowering but was covered in bright red berries showing where its pale yellow flowers had once been, A single WILD ROSE flower, one plant of COW PARSLEY and one of ANNUAL WALLROCKET also went on my notepad. In St Catherines Road I checked the many hooked hairs on the edges of its leaves to be sure that I was looking at GUERNSEY FLEABANE still in flower and now that I can pick out this species from Canadian Fleabane with some confidence I find that it is remarkably common on Hayling and around all the shores of Langstone Harbour – is that true all along the coast?

INSECTS:

SUN 14 NOV

I have not seen a butterfly since Friday but today I did come on a large Bumble Bee still on the wing, going in and out of ivy on the ground at a hedge base - presumably a queen looking for somewhere warm to spend the winter. It was large and black with a tawny 'cummerbund' and off white tail and I guess it was *Bombus terrestris*.

Many Hampshire people know Lynn Fomison as the county expert on wildlife gardening and as one of the Noar Hill wardens, and many will have visited her garden at Ropley as part of the annual Apple Day activities, but nowadays the main call on her time is the task of keeping the county's Butterfly Reserves in good order in her role as Reserves Officer for the Hampshire branch of Butterfly Conservation. In this role she had a working party out on Yew Hill (just south of Winchester) on Nov 10 and I was amused to see that in the course of their work the volunteers managed to arouse three caterpillars that were trying to pass a quiet winter in the long grass - two of them were identifiable as Drinker and Large Yellow Underwing moths but the third awaits identification (I hope it is not kept awake too long while the Spanish Inquisition assembles to wring the truth out of it). More seriously Lynn would love to have your company on forthcoming conservation tasks at Bentley Station meadow (Alice Holt area south of Farnham) on Dec 5 and Magdalen Hill Down (east of Winchester) on Dec 19. If you want more details contact Lynn on fomison@msn.com or 01962-772251.

Quite a few moths only fly in winter months, earning themselves names such as Winter, December and November Moth. I did not know that the November Moth has two look-alikes (the Autumnal and the Pale November Moths) which can only be separated from it by dissection of their genitals. Rob Edmunds, who is responsible for the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website, found one of these three by the back door of his house in Fleet on Nov 9, and being kind-hearted he assumed its identity as a November Moth without resort to the knife. He says that Skinner's book on moths gives some clues that enabled him to feel confident just by examination of the pattern of lines on its forewing. Easier to identify was a COMMA seen at Ropley on Nov 4 by Lynn Fomison's husband Paul who also spotted a HUMMING BIRD HAWKMOTH on Oct 28. Finally, in this trawl through the Hampshire BC website news, comes news that may interest the mothers - a RED LINE QUAKER trapped in Fleet on Oct 26

SAT 13 NOV

At least one RED ADMIRAL was seen today by Brian Fellows in his Emsworth Garden on Cosmo flowers. I suspect it was not the only one on the wing and I was told of another one by an unknown lady with whom I fell into conversation while out walking.

FRI 12 NOV

Sunshine this morning gave me views of two RED ADMIRAL and Tim Timlick told me he had seen a SMALL TORTOISESHELL on the Budds Farm shore. In the small pond in the Brockhampton Road cul de sac on the south side of the A27 a pair of COMMON DARTER were flying in tandem

and egg laying.

TUE 9 NOV

There were still 12 RED ADMIRAL to be seen by Barry Collins on Thorney today, but no Speckled Wood or dragonflies

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 12 NOV

Pigs, Wild Boar and Badgers are all regularly sexed as Boars and Sows but I wonder if you agree with Radio Solent's claim that these terms also apply to male and female MOLES? This info did not come from any authoritative source - merely as a trivia question - but I would be interested to know if anyone has heard these terms used in relation to Moles - I certainly have not.

MON 8 NOV

I see from John Goodspeed's poster this week that one of Portsmouth's group of ALBINO SQUIRRELS which have been present for many years in Portsmouth's 'A3 corridor' through Cosham, Widley and Purbrook has been trapped in Cosham and then released in the Boarhunt area 7 or 8 km north west of where it was caught. As these white squirrels do not seem to suffer from colour prejudice when it comes to mating I wonder if we will soon be seeing a new population of albinos developing in the Boarhunt area and perhaps in the West Walk and/or Creech Woods sections of the Forest of Bere (both of these areas are easily accessible to a wandering Squirrel from Boarhunt).

.....This subject reminds me of something that I learnt from a recent TV programme about the mating habits of squirrels. I have often seen Squirrels making mad chases up and down trees and over open ground towards the end of winter and the TV told me that these occur when a female is ready to mate - any male in the vicinity soon scents her mood and when they approach her she leads them a merry dance until just one male is left in the race, so it seems that all that a successful male needs is stamina and good 'cornering' while all a successful female needs is the right perfume, in neither case does colour come into it. After mating the male plays no further part in family life - the female builds her breeding drey and rears the young as a single parent.

WEEK 44 NOV 1 - 7

BIRDS:

SUN 7 NOV

On Oct 24th Colin Law was asking where all the CORN BUNTINGS had gone after leaving their summer territories as there was then no sign of them on the Downs east of Brighton where he expects to find a large flock each winter - he had around 150 of them in March this year. Today he found the beginnings of that flock with about 30 birds present. Also on the Downs were two HEN HARRIER (a male and a ringtail), a Peregrine, a pair of Stonechat and a covey of 15 Red Legged Partridge. We may not have any local Hen Harriers in the Havant area but should be able to see the others - for Red Legged Partridge I suggest looking in the fields either side of the road coming south from West Marden and passing Oldhouse Lane going up to Forestside. A year ago I had 38 of them there on Oct 10 with other sightings around the Watergate estate during the autumn and early winter.

A BITTERN was seen to fly across the river Meon at Titchfield Haven several times just before midday today according to Paul Winter's pager. On the same report a sighting of 10 Bearded Tits was mentioned.

Mike Bending was at Farlington Marshes this morning and saw an AVOCET on the lake - hopefully it will stay around.

Today Paul Winter's pager re-assured him that the AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER was still to be seen in the Normandy area south of Lymington where a WHEATEAR was on the seawall. Three LONG TAILED DUCK on the sea here are presumably newcomers in addition to the two already present, one was on the Normandy lake with yesterday's Scaup

Andy Collins was in the Weston shore area of Southampton (between the mouth of the Itchen and Netley) today and found a single female or immature SCAUP on the water and heard a BRAMBLING fly over to the west (he had 2 CROSSBILL going the same way here yesterday). Around 1000 Woodpigeon streamed west in two hours and other sightings of interest were a couple of DARTFORD WARBLER in Westwood, a MED GULL at Woolston slipway and a LITTLE EGRET 'in ditch by flats' (I know they tend to move inland in winter - is this one trying to get

indoors?)

This morning I took a short cycle ride along the shore to Nutbourne where I went through the orchards in the hope of seeing winter thrushes on the apples or even flowers on the Dwarf Mallow which grows round the trees. I did not really expect either but found both. Near the Farm Lane end a single FIELDFARE chattered and then flew off west, and at the same time some 50 birds that might have been a mixture of Redwing and Fieldfare flew up into the poplars along the southern boundary of the orchards too far away (and against the light) to see exactly what they were, and no clue came from any sound they made - one or two seen in flight looked like thrushes and the way they perched, evenly distributed among the branches, where Starlings would tend to cluster together, reinforced this idea. Earlier I had been welcomed to Thornham Point by Stonechat and Reed Bunting but could not see an Osprey anywhere. Roosting Curlew and feeding Wigeon on the marshes were a normal sight whereas some 150 Brent here, some in the deeps and some on the marshes, were unexpected by me. Just east of Prinsted on the shore a Kestrel hovered and small groups of Brent (24) and Black Tailed Godwit (13) were in the field east of Prinsted bay. Some 20 Lapwing were on the advanced growth of winter wheat in the field west of the orchards, and later - going via Southbourne to Westbourne - I found them in three similar fields in varying numbers (flocks of 22, 40 and 150). From Westbourne I went down Mill Lane to Lumley, hearing and seeing a Green Sandpiper going overhead.

SAT 6 NOV

Paul Winter was at Keyhaven today, arriving just after the American Golden Plover had temporarily disappeared (never fear - it was back again on the 7th) but he did see a female SCAUP and female LONG TAILED DUCK on Normandy lagoon. The second (first winter) Long Tailed Duck was further west by Saltgrass Lane at Keyhaven, coming very close to the shore on the high tide. Back at home other news from that area came through on Paul's pager - someone had seen a SHAG off Hurst Beach where the Snow Bunting can still be seen, and 2 KITTIWAKE flew west. Over Keyhaven Marshes someone saw a MARSH HARRIER and identified it as an immature male.

Brief song from both Woodpigeon and Collared Dove welcomed a bright but windy day before I set out to count the birds around the IBM Lake this morning where there was nothing unexpected though a few points of interest. A lone Mute Swan was back and the pair of Great Crested Grebe were still present (no sign of their young), four Pochard had arrived to join the loner that was there last month (still only 1 Tufted Duck) and I reckon there were 30 Teal but no other duck apart from a low count of 33 Mallard. 45 Coot, now mainly in a flock, was unexceptional and just 12 Moorhen and 3 Little Grebe were low figures (probably partly due to the wind). The good news was that all but 23 of the Canada Geese had gone (probably to Titchfield) and as I remembered to take my wellies I could get out to the islands from which I put up three Snipe. The proportion of Great Blackbacks to other gulls had gone up noticeably but there was only one Heron where I would have hoped to see more. One of the Kestrels was hovering in search of food and one wintering Chiffchaff called loudly.

.....At Fishbourne I joined the second day (first was on Oct 30) of the 'Through the tide' count experiment in which counters, working in two hour shifts and continually monitoring the birds in their allotted sector of the mudflats, provide a record (on a map of the sector) of the birds present during each half hour. A methodology was set out by Anne de Potier, and after each day's work we were lured to the harbour education centre at Dell Quay by free tea and excellent cakes to discuss our experience and propose changes to make the exercise as practical and effective as possible. By the end of this second discussion today it seems that most of the details of the 'best method' have been agreed and it will be tested again in a different location at East Head/Ella Nore after Christmas. As the idea is to accumulate as much knowledge as possible about the use of the whole harbour by birds (feeding, roosting and loafing), and since both I and Brian Fellows (and I think most of the others involved) found that watching the changing pattern of the birds through a 2 or 4 hour period never became dull (except perhaps at high tide, though even then there could be interest if wildfowl or a wader roost were in view), both I and Brian are thinking of conducting our own experiments by watching our own local shores from one spot for period of two or more hours (rather than moving on after the first scan of the birds). My own feeling is that if we really want to build up an overall view of bird activity in the harbour we need to find volunteers to cover all the sectors of the harbour in the way we have been doing at Fishbourne, and when I put forward this idea there was some support for it, especially if each volunteer were allowed to choose their own dates and times - the only requirement being that they produce a minimum number of 'reports' each month during the winter (perhaps two a month).

Three PURPLE SANDPIPER were seen on Brighton East Pier today, possibly making another visit to Southsea Castle worth while in the coming week if other parties of these birds have reached the south coast. For Havant area birders it could also be worth a check on the coastal defence rocks at Sandy Point now that they have acquired a good coating of seaweed – in the past few years sightings have become more frequent there. Another place to look for them is at the mouth of the River Arun.

FRI 5 NOV

Brian Fellows news for this windy day is limited to the birds on the Emsworth ponds and harbour. On the Mill Pond the two identifiable Swans were both present (the Black one and the Mute with the big plastic leg ring) but the main item of news concerned a dispute lasting at least 10 minutes between two LITTLE EGRET, during which 'one of the two birds repeatedly chased and leapt aggressively towards the other one until eventually the latter flew off to another part of the channel'. Brian goes on to say 'This behaviour suprised me since I have (no doubt incorrectly) regarded Little Egrets as the most amicable and sociable of birds'. I would agree that they are normally happy to feed close to each other (unlike Grey Heron which jealously guard their private fishing beats - I remember hearing of a youngster that tried to muscle in on one its seniors and had its brains crushed by the older bird) but the raucous noises the Egrets make at their roost site do not sound like happy family conversation to me and only last week I watched two having a stand up fight on the edge of the Fishbourne Channel. I did not see any blows inflicted but there was sufficient jumping up and down, wing flapping, and shouting of abuse to make one of the two move off smartly - it then joined two others which were quite happy to prowl about in close proximity to each other, so I guess that something is needed as a trigger for aggression (perhaps both birds went for the same morsel of food? or maybe one was having a bad plume day)

Following the news of a SNOW GOOSE tagging around with a flock of Greylags in the Avon valley comes news of a genuine WHITE GREYLAG being regularly seen at the mouth of the Beaulieu River (Needs Ore point). John Clark comments that the flocks of Greylag on the two rivers do not move about much or intermix and I would add that we can consider ourselves lucky that the expanding tide of Greylag moving south and west over the country from northern and eastern strongholds has skipped around the Langstone, Chichester and Portsmouth harbours (they probably prefer clean water to our rich vein of sewage and mud)

Colin Law recently told us that one Sussex birder had been barred from viewing the SOS website from his workplace by the introduction of 'parental control' type software which detected the 'sex' part of Sussex in the old website title and assumed that all the news of birds in it was of a pronographic nature. Following hard on this comes a renaming of the website substituting the word 'susos' for 'sussex' (there are other good reasons for the change to a supposedly cheaper and better service) so if you find you can't get your favourite bedtime reading using the old URL try the revised links in mine.

THU 4 NOV

A single SWALLOW went west low over my house in Havant at 8am this morning just after a large flock of Woodpigeon (several hundred) went southwest so low that I could only see part of the flock between the houses. A little later a lone JAY went north east along the route by which I have seen several going south west in recent days. In the late afternoon, with dusk drawing on, I went to Broadmarsh and found 55 Brent feeding on the playing fields at a time when the Goosander had long ago left the stream for the night-time safety of open water, and Gulls and Starlings were streaming south to their night roosts in the harbour and at Budds Farm respectively. Looking for a supper among the 'motorway congestion' of the skies a PEREGRINE flew south over Broadmarsh towards North Binness then turned and flew back right over my head to the Bedhampton Mill area where I lost it among a crowd of Woodpigeons dispersing in all directions.

Paul Winter's pager today recorded some large movements over Fleet Pond early in the morning. 2,600 Woodpigeon went southwest but the rest of the birds went west. Just one WOODLARK headed the list followed by 14 REDPOLL, 40 BRAMBLING, 120 Chaffinch and 147 REDWING with 465 Starlings following to act as the dustcart to clear up any mess left by this Lord Mayor's procession. Further messages were from Keyhaven reporting the continued presence of the American Golden Plover and two TWITE heard flying over.

Nick Mills today went to the Ocknell Pond carpark in search of the Great Grey Shrike which he failed to locate but the trip was not wasted with a mixed flock of 30 to 40 REDWING and FIELDFARE plus an obliging pair of DARTFORD WARBLER, a Buzzard and several Kestrel. Two separate flocks of Lapwing, each around 60 in number with many Starling among them, provided some bulk and the topping was of Goldfinch and Long Tailed Tit flocks plus a few Reed Bunting.

WED 3 NOV

I have noted below my own sightings of Wood Pigeon and Jay moving over my garden this morning and I now hear that John Goodspeed had a dozen REDWING in his garden on Portsdown around 9am today, and more news comes from Southampton and Fleet Pond. Russell Wynn at Town Quay in Southampton saw 530 Woodpigeons, 100 Starlings and small numbers of Thrushes, Chaffinch, Goldfinch and Meadow Pipit all going west. Pager news from Fleet Pond reported 1200 Woodpigeon flying SW plus 114 Fieldfares, 21 Bramblings, 18 Redwings, 100 Chaffinches, 87 Siskins (all west), and 60 Siskin by the pond.

Further Pager news tells us that the American Golden Plover was seen this morning on mudflats at Keyhaven with 200 Golden Plover and that the Ocknell Great Grey Shrike was at SU 237115 today (there was also a sighting of WILLOW TIT in Ocknell enclosure). Another HOSLIST message tells of a WHITE GREYLAG in the Avon Valley at Ibsley and of a HEN HARRIER in the Lymington area.

The SOS recent sightings today tells me that an OSPREY which must be different from the juvenile on Thorney Island was still present on a Petworth trout lake on Nov 1 when the two Black Necked Grebe were still at Chichester Ivy Lake. It also reports the Pectoral Sandpiper and Jack Snipe which Alistair Martin has already described at Pagham North Wall on Oct 30. Miscellaneous 'out of area' news comes from Rye where a QUAIL and two TWITE were seen on Sunday (Oct 31) along with a Common Tern.

Yesterday (Nov 2) Brian Fellows found 332 BRENT back on the Southsea seafront playing fields (107 of them were young) and a slight increase in the Canoe Lake Swans (up to 59) but there was no sign of a Purple Sandpiper at Southsea Castle. At Milton Lakes he could only detect 5 Cetti's Warbler but across the Eastern Road there were 410 BRENT back on the Portsmouth College field with 115 young in that figure maintaining Brian's high percentage of young in all the Brent he has counted so far at over 27%. When he got to Baffins Pond all but two of the BARNACLE GEESE had disappeared (the two that were left are lame and probably can't fly) as had the lone Snow Goose. Keep a look out for these birds at Titchfield Haven - that's where they went in Nov 1994 in a similar exodus from the pond. One unwanted resident was a Terrapin (the summer botulism did not get rid of all these creatures it seems) but one welcome visitor was the first Pochard of the winter. The only species left in great number is Mallard with 122 present along with 22 Tufted Duck and 24 Canada Geese.

.....Brian's news today is of a rewarding visit to the Langstone shore where, in addition to the birds I saw and have noted below, he found the first flock of 36 KNOT for these mudflats. Later he went to the Hermitage Stream but failed to see the Goosander - to make up for that a KINGFISHER flew up stream towards Bedhampton.

Nick Mills tells me that a good 200 to 300 BRENT can now be regularly seen ashore at Gosport on the HMS Sultan playing fields visible from the south end of either Military Road or Grange Road and from the section of Privett Road between the other two. This is where Trevor Carpenter saw the first flock of 50 to come ashore anywhere back on Oct 24.

202 LITTLE EGRET arrived at the Thorney Island roost this evening to be counted in by Barry Collins. This is the highest number recorded there in early November and hopefully this good result helped to make up for a severe attack on him by biting mosquitos during the count (unusual at this time of year?) which came on top of the aches and pains resulting from a tumble from his motor-bike last Friday (he tells me he suffered no major injury or broken bones, the bike is OK and no one else was involved - just a slippery patch on the road - and I'm sure a lot of people will be wishing him well).

Barry was also on Thorney earlier today and tells me that the juvenile OSPREY is still present and could be seen at the east end of the Great Deeps today. Last Sunday (Oct 31) there was a late WHEATEAR on the island seawall.

Today the redhead GOOSANDER which arrived back in the Broadmarsh area yesterday was in one of its regular low tide haunts of previous winters, the Hermitage Stream between Harts Farm Way and the A27. Despite the narrow channel and low water with the tide out, when the Goosander puts its head under water to search the stream bottom for food the grey camouflage of its upper body feathers make it very difficult to spot even from the 'tow path' looking down onto the stream and had it not raised its head when I was looking I might well have missed seeing it. While here I had a look over the neighbouring Broadmarsh Playing Fields, currently out of action for re-surfacing, and was surprised to see 18 BRENT feeding happily on the fresh young grass growing on the rough surface of the ground where work has been suspended over winter so as not to disturb any geese

that choose to dine here. Later in the day I met Gary Stevens at Langstone where he had seen several hundred Brent fly in to feed on the coastal meadow immediately east of Pook Lane at Warblington - another 'first ashore' as far as I know.

.....From the Hermitage Stream I cycled along the Broadmarsh shore towards Chalk Dock, and between the small carpark and the A27 I was brought to a sharp halt by a distinctive 'churr' from one of the large Gorse clumps close to the shore path. I immediately thought of DARTFORD WARBLER and walked slowly towards the bushes hoping for a glimpse of the invisible bird but as I did so I became slightly puzzled to hear noises like the 'ticking' of a Robin attached to the end of some bursts of churring. Having got home I find the first two books in which I checked both mention this ticking - the Shell Guide giving just what I heard, 'Chirr-ik-tik' - so I am satisfied with the id even though I never glimpsed the bird. In Chalk Dock there were at least 60 WIGEON and hundreds of Brent but few Lapwing (not much over 25). Back at Broadmarsh Slipway I was amused to see one of the two young cygnets raising its wings to the 'busking' position and chasing off a passing adult (perhaps it had just made some disparaging remark about an 'ugly duckling'). Much more interesting to me was my first close sight of two BLACK NECKED GREBE in the dredged channel - one of them was much smaller than the other, reminding me of the disparity in size between two Great Crested Grebe chicks seen on the IBM Lake this summer and what Alistair Martin told me (see Sep 5) about the way the grebe parents each decide to feed one of their chicks and if both parents pick the same chick the other chick(s) get no food and die - does the same happen with Black Necked Grebe? Another first this autumn was a close up of a couple of KNOT on the mud across the channel

In the afternoon I took my scope down to Langstone to settle the question of the identity of the very large number of pale, medium sized waders I have been seeing in the distance there since Oct 15. Yesterday my binoculars showed me massed ranks of these birds (I estimated 800) roosting on the distant edge of the mud - today I could only see some 250 resting in the same place but there were at least that number more feeding around the area, but with a scope I could immediately see that they were BAR TAILED GODWIT. Until last winter I had always thought of those birds as being restricted to the sandy areas at the harbour mouths but the monthly low tide counts of this Langstone area showed me that they were coming here, though the highest count I had was of 84 on 13 Feb 99 and now we seem to have ten times that number. With the scope I could also check out the roosting GOLDEN PLOVER, counting at least 160. Another bird which seems to have picked on the Langstone area as a favourite this winter is Cormorant, with 14 of them in sight where I would hve expected perhaps half a dozen on previous experience. According to Brian Fellows, who happened to meet up with me at Langstone, there were at least 36 KNOT back on the Langstone shore but nearer to the main Hayling road bridge than I was.

.....A chance glance up while at Langstone this afternoon showed me two SNIPE heading west high overhead and this reminded me that erly this morning a flock of an estimated 500 WOOD PIGEON flew south over my house and at intervals during the morning when I happened to be looking three individual JAYS flew over in the same direction. Had I just seen one Jay flying over (as I have on two or three different days recently) I would have assumed it was a local bird moving around its winter patch but it begins to look as if my house is near one of their motorways along which they prefer to travel alone. In case anyone has not heard of BITTERN breeding success in the UK this summer I heard on TV (Blue Peter) this afternoon that a total of 22 juveniles have been raised in the UK this year, 13 of them at Minsmere which is now Britain's prime site for Bittern (I think it used to be Leighton Moss in Lancashire?)

TUE 2 NOV

John Goodspeed found a REDHEAD GOOSANDER back in the Brockhampton stream at 15:00 this afternoon. He says it was 'between the two weirs', presumably above the one where the stream runs into the gravel quay deep pool and below the one at the downstream end of the old Corn Wharf, which slightly surprises me as there would have been little water there at that time and I would have thought the bird would have been wary of the narrow channel and many boats alongside but I suppose if it has just returned from a breeding area in a narrow northern stream that environment may have been more homely than the open sea. It's worth keeping an eye open for this bird, which I guess is the 'old faithful' of many winters both here and in the oysterbeds and even at the mouth of the Langbrook where it has been known to 'haul up' at times. John also comments on the large nubmer of GREY WAGTAIL around at this time (he estimated there were at least 8 in the Borckhampton and lower Hermitage Stream area) and tells me he had 'great views of a female SPARROWHAWK' over his garden for lunch time entertainment.

Mark Litjens spent the final day of a house moving holiday well away from domestic duties, arriving early on Hurst spit to see several Egrets flying north from the Isle of Wight (he wonders if there is a night roost in the Yarmouth area?). Walking out to Hurst Castle he occasionally glimpsed the LONG TAILED DUCK at points along the full length of the spit (presumably on the west side) and describes it as 'mobile and elusive'. Back at the Keyhaven Marshes six BEARDED TIT flew about noisily in the reeds near the sea wall (is this a regular site or were these passing birds which had dropped in?) and a MARSH HARRIER quartered the same reeds late in the morning. The sewage outfall between Keyhaven and Pennington Marshes was the place to see the single SNOW BUNTING and a single PURPLE SANDPIPER roosted nearby. Mark did not get to Normandy point but his pager told him the AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER was still there with a LONG TAILED DUCK (presumably the second of the two reported on Monday, not the one seen off Hurst Beach).

On Sunday (Oct 31) John Clark was at the Blashford Lakes for his regular Avon Valley wildfowl count and has listed the results for all to see on the HOSLIST system (how I wish we got the same prompt news from other WeBS counts around the county - a big thank you to John). The item I found most interesting was the news that just three BEWICK'S SWAN had arrived back in the Hucklesbrook area north of Ibsley bridge on Oct 23 - an early date - but John only saw one (an adult) and my sense of humour was roused by the disappearance of all RUDDY DUCK from the area - can it be that the government's 'White-Headed Duck Task Force' has scored it's first success in maintaining diplomatic relations with Spain?.

.....More serious interest lies in the build up of winter populations of wildfowl on the Blashford Lakes, presumably reflecting what we should expect in other parts of the county. Most of the figures were roughly in line with those shown in the latest (1997) bird report (1280 Coot, 20 Cormorant, 126 Pochard, 182 Tufted Duck, 48 Shoveler and 186 Gadwall - this last figure will have to increase to reach the Nov 1997 count of 587 but is already above the 168 for Oct 97). 316 Wigeon was well below the 680 for Oct 97 and 838 for Nov 97 - perhaps these ducks are preferring other parts of Hampshire where the figures are already up on previous years (e.g. Cams Bay, Fareham).

Mute Swan were also down at just 54 against 103 & 113 for Oct & Nov 97 but Grebes are a little up with 63 Great Crested against 97 figures of 40 & 61, and 27 Little Grebe was well above 16 & 13 for 1997 (though this species is particularly difficult to count even when in a flock on open water). John only saw 8 Greylag and 36 Canada Geese and I assume there were more of these elsewhere in the area unseen. Other birds seen by John were 2 Green and 1 Common Sandpiper, and a juv Peregrine.

Alan Cokes is just back from a fortnight in Ibiza where there were plenty of birds to be seen from his daughter's garden where he was staying. Both HAWFINCH and TREE SPARROW were to be seen among the Starling, House Sparrow, Collared Dove, etc that made him feel at home. A pair of HOOPOE were resident, CRESTED LARK fed on the ground with them, and SARDINIAN WARBLER was common but he could not sort out the probable Melodious/Icterine Warblers. Not far from base at least two flocks of over 100 FLAMINGO were seen.

MON 1 NOV

Mark Litjens was today at Normandy Point (on the west side of the mouth of the Lymington River) and found the juvenile AMERICAN PLOVER still present with some 40 European Golden Plover. I am puzzled by the absence of an entry for this species in Birds of Hampshire - is it really a newcomer to the county within the last seven years (since publication of BoH) or is this yet another confusion of nomenclature? I assume the bird now at Normandy is *Pluvialis dominica* (which was called the Lesser and is now I think called the American, Golden Plover) and not *P. fulva* (still called the Pacific Golden Plover?). Can someone bring me up to date please.

.....From Normandy Mark went to Hurst Beach and found the single SNOW BUNTING still present. Offshore were two LONG TAILED DUCK (possibly the two seen at the mouth of Chichester Harbour last Monday, Oct 25).

Yesterday (Oct 31) Paul Winter was at the Lower Test marshes and found a few WATER PIPIT frequenting the areas of cut reeds along the Test Way boardwalk. If you are near the river there you may see a single female RED CRESTED POCHARD which was spotted by one of the HOSLIST contributors last Friday (Oct 29)

Rain and high wind did not deter Brian Fellows from his regular walk around the Emsworth Ponds today and he was rewarded with the sight of the BLACK SWAN back (after more than a week at some place unknown) on the town Mill Pond with 57 Mutes and 72 Mallard. Out in the harbour a flock of 104 Brent had 11 young with them bringing Brian's percentage of young to 26 based on

ageing a total of 450 geese. Shelduck were up to 36 in number and a single Greenshank was present but in general there were few waders (only 6 Blackwits seen)

Among the info passed to me by Dave Mead yesterday there was one item that I forgot to pass on and that was the presence of a male BLACK REDSTART in the valley between Old Winchester Hill and Hen Wood to the north east - Dave saw it from the path leading down from the hill into the valley and hopes it will remain for the winter as it did last year. Another piece of info that I failed to pass on was the presence of a small flock of a dozen Yellowhammer on stubble near Ladyholt (around 7516-83). Here in Havant there should be a similar flock enjoying the animal feed at the Leigh Park animal trail - they can usually be seen there in winter by going to the south end of the overflow carpark and looking into the field beyond.

PLANTS:

SUN 7 NOV

In the Nutbourne Orchards close to Nutbourne Bay there is, in the summer, a great display of DWARF MALLOW under the apple trees at the east end and when I stopped here to watch a Fieldfare this morning I thought I would see if I could still find any of it in flower. At first I could not even see any leaves (they are small and close to the ground) but soon began to find them and, in the third row of trees that I searched, there were a couple of small whitish pink flowers. Going from here towards Westbourne I went up Stein Road in Southbourne and glanced at the house where in the summer self-sown CROWN VETCH spills out of the driveway onto the roadside. At first glance I saw a small amount of dead vegetation but a glimpse of colour made me go and look at close quarters, finding half a dozen full heads of fresh flowers on plants at the base of the pile of dead ones. Later, passing Lumley Mill, I found many fresh flowers on LESSER PERIWINKLE which covers the ground across the lane from the building (near the gateway) and coming back through Emsworth on the main road, just after passing Highland Road on my right, the leaves had fallen from a large roadside Lime tree to reveal two large bunches of MISTLETOE which get bigger each winter.

SAT 6 NOV

Yet another unusually late flowering plant was BETONY found by Pete Potts today on the Bishops Waltham Moors. Francis Rose tells us that it normally flowers from June to September and my last record of it was on Sept 2nd but here it is again two months later. Pete also comments on a late Wasp which he saw on Ivy blossom.

At the IBM North Harbour site this morning there were a couple of flowers on the MARSH MARIGOLD (KINGCUP) which started to flower last month, and among many plants that are still flowering generally I came on some that I have not seen elsewhere. The first of these was YELLOW-WORT and the next PALE FLAX and finally STONE PARSLEY. Some others were difficult to find elsewhere - such as Ox Eye Daisy, Blue Fleabane, Hemlock Water Dropwort, Wild Celery, Doves Foot Cranesbill, Small Scabious and both White and Tall Melilot.

THU 4 NOV

Three more plants still flowering in November went onto my list today when I visited the Bedhampton/Broadmarsh area - these were WILD CELERY, WATER-FORGET-ME-NOT and STICKY GROUNDSEL

WED 3 NOV

While passing the Bedhampton water works this afternoon I decided to check out the Hermitage Stream where the overflow from the Bedhampton springs joins it. The overflow sluice itself is full of flowering Stream Water Crowfoot (*R. penicillatus*) and just upstream both Meadow Sweet and Meadow Buttercup were to be seen but the most interesting find for November was downstream where Hampshire's only colony of BUTTONWEED (*Cotula coronopifolia*) still made a carpet of tiny yellow buttons raised from the stream bed on short stalks. Over by the Broadmarsh playing fields I not only found the Wild Pansies (*Viola tricolor*) in flower but nearby were the small deep blue flowers of GREEN FIELD SPEEDWELL. Opposite the gravel quay, on the way to Broadmarsh slipway, LARGE BINDWEED caught my eye and when I went to check the flowers for size and calyx overlap I found the white petals had pink stripes on the outside - a new form of this plant for me. Heading north towards the A27 along the Broadmarsh shore I found the many plants of CHINESE MUGWORT (on the left immediately after turning west onto the seawall path below the A27) had many flowerheads with the majority now over but some fresh flowers still to be seen (it is exceptional for this plant to flower successfully in this country as it does not come into flower until October, but this colony is the exception to the rule). Nearby the Guernsey Fleabane still had some flowers and just over the motorway fence several plants of BLUE

FLEABANE were still out.

MON 1 NOV

Pete Selby has now been appointed by the BSBI as their new Plant Recorder for the South Hampshire vice county filling the position held for many years by Paul Bowman whose sudden death came as a great shock last summer. I would like publicly to congratulate Pete on being chosen for this task, and I am sure that the major factor influencing this choice was the tremendous amount of effort he has put into the job of co-ordinating, editing and submitting 22,654 records from south Hampshire for the national Atlas of plant distribution being compiled to record the plant life of the British Isles at the start of the new millenium. In order to be able to submit lists of all plant species currently to be found in the 30 hectads (10km squares) which make up the vice county he has had to enter into his computer 213,000 individual records, and these show 1,887 plant species have been found by a team of 195 recorders doing the field work. The average number of species for each hectad worked out as 755, more than was hoped for at the start, and had there been more time for searching (and in some cases such as my own, more experienced observers) that figure might have been even higher as some 25% of all the species that have been recorded in the vice county over the past 70 years were not found in the past three years of this current survey. I am sure Pete thoroughly deserves a rest from the mammoth chore of seeing this Atlas Project through to completion, but I am equally sure that next spring he will be welcoming further data in preparation for his next task which he sees as monitoring the populations of the more endangered species still to be found in the county.

INSECTS:

WED 3 NOV

Barry Collins walked around Thorney Island today and counted 16 RED ADMIRAL while doing so - he thinks there would have been more had the sun not gone in when he was part way round. There were still a few SPECKLED WOOD to be seen, and (while sitting still to count the Egrets at dusk) many MOSQUITOS to be felt piercing his skin - isn't it late in the year to be troubled by these?Last Sunday there was at least one PEACOCK butterfly and two Common Darter dragonflies on Thorney seen by Barry.

TUE 2 NOV

Mark Litjens saw single PAINTED LADY and SMALL COPPER at Hook near Warsash today and saw several Common Darter both there and at Pennington where there were 3 Red Admiral (the latter were seen by John Goodspeed and myself over here in the east - and reported from Ibiza by Alan Cokes)

MON 1 NOV

Late news this evening from Rosemary Webb tells me that she had a PEACOCK in here Hayling garden last Monday (Oct 26) when she also saw SPECKLED WOOD, SMALL WHITE and of course RED ADMIRAL

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 6 NOV

At the IBM North Harbour site the small snails called COCHLICELLA ACUTA (Pointed Snail) can be found by the hundred in the summer, especially in hot dry weather when they climb any stalks or posts to avoid being fried on the ground (just a few inches up there is a sharp drop in temperature even if there is no cooling breeze) but as these molluscs only live for one year they are now quite hard to find. Like the 'fat' orbweb spiders that very recently could be found on webs strung everywhere that rough vegetation can grow, these snails leave tiny eggs or minute young snails to overwinter and provide next year's population, so I was quite pleased to find at least three of the remaining adults easily visible (I suspect I could have found a lot more had I searched the ground and undersides of leaves). Also at North Harbour I saw my first GOAT MOTH WAXCAPS and among other toadstools saw the blackened final stage of the BLACKENING WAXCAPS that start life in scarlet and yellow dress.

WED 3 NOV

This evening Barry Collins told me that eight COMMON SEAL were newly back in Chichester Harbour off Thorney Island today. Seals are occasionally seen in the harbours all round the year but as I understand that there are only around a dozen of them along the whole southern English coast they are not an everyday sight. The last two sightings that I know of were of 4 on Pilsey sands at the beginning of August and just one swimming off Fowley Island near Emsworth at the end of that month. The most exciting news of them this year was when a new born pup was seen with six adults on Pilsey sands at the beginning of June. As far as I know this group of 8 is the largest group to have been seen together here.

When I was at Langstone this afternoon I met Gary Stevens and amongst other things he told me that he had recently seen a WHITE FALLOW BUCK in Stansted Forest in the north west area so the white strain is still being perpetuated in the local deer. When he told me this I expressed surprise at his seeing Fallow in the woods west of the road but I have since remembered finding in the past several of the bucks' rutting stands in this area (circular patches of bare earth where the buck has stood, scraping the ground with his feet and announcing his presence with loud grunts at this time of year)

TUE 2 NOV

Brian Fellows tells me that now is a good time to see the rings of SATURN in the night sky with that planet not far behind Jupiter in its nightly journey across the sky (look a little to the left of and below the very bright Jupiter in the eastern sky)

MON 1 NOV

Rosemary Webb has spent a busy half-term week photographing some of the local fungi (and you may see some of the results in her talk at the Havant Arts Centre on Nov 10). Among the many finds she told me of this evening I was particularly interested to know that BLACK HELVELLA can be found alongside one of the paths leading west from the Havant Thicket carpark to the main ride just outside the belt of trees in which the carpark lies - also within this belt of trees she found two uncommon fungi that are not much to look at (just very thin pale brown sticks coming up from the ground) but have the splendid names CLAVARIADELPHUS FISTULOSUS and C.JUNCEA. Much prettier were the yellow and claret coloured 'PLUMS & CUSTARD' toadstools growing under pines in the north west of Stansted Forest (not far in from the road at about 7511-48). With them were DOG STINKHORN and tiny but pretty MYCENA EPIPTERYGIA and a little to the west under Hazel the HORNS OF PLENTY could be found in their usual site. Near them an unusual brown cousin of the Yellow Brain Fungus (called TREMELLA FOLIACEA) was growing on wood. Further afield Rosemary found the large and elegant bracket called GRIFOLA FRONDOSA growing from the base of an oak trunk in the New Forest (where edible CHANTARELLES were also seen) and at Selborne there was a good show of the rare GIANT CLUB that appears there annually and near were I think examples of the brilliant SCARLET ELF CUP

COMMENTS:

7 Nov 99 - from Ralph Hollins - Were you put out in a pram in the fresh air when you were a baby?

Presumably anyone reading this would regard themselves as a 'naturalist' and the minimum definition of a naturalist must surely include something like 'a naturalist is a person who thinks that acquiring an understanding of the natural world is something to which it is worth devoting time and effort'. Once you start taking an interest in natural things you soon come to realise both how fascinating the natural world is and how important it is to our human well being that we allow the processes which have created our environment to continue to sustain it and to bring us our daily dose of wonder.

Although there will always be naturalists it seems nowadays that more and more people are failing to 'catch the bug' which has infected us, and this is worrying because the 'artificialists' (i.e. non-naturalists) do not value natural things and if they become the majority they have the power to destroy the environment which we value. Luckily, for the moment, there are sufficient people who, while they would not call themselves 'naturalists', do have an innate concern for the natural environment and by their numbers prevent politicians and businessmen from pursuing policies that bring immediate disaster.

Although on the face of it all is well and our many conservation bodies and our Agenda 21 action plans seem to be 'saving the world' I am not alone in observing that while we smile and say things are looking up (compared to the 1950s) they are in fact continuing to slide down under the combined effect of growing population, new technology and a feeling that humans are capable of controlling the environment as they can control a lab experiment.

This week I heard someone say that 'babies are no longer put out in the fresh air in their prams as they used to be' - they no longer have prams (just buggies) and people do not dare to let their young children out of their sight. Reflecting on this, and on the way in which our lives are to a great extent fixed by the experience of early childhood, I wondered if here was the Trojan horse which in the end will lose the battle to preserve the natural world. If children grow up in a totally artificial environment and are never left alone in the open air to experience the natural world around them how can we expect them to value it sufficiently to become naturalist when they grow up?

WEEK 43 OCT 25 - 31

BIRDS:

SUN 31 OCT

Paul Winter's pager this afternoon reported an AMERICAN GOLDEN PLOVER on Normandy Lagoon (SU 333938) just south of Lymington and a GREAT GREY SHRIKE on Ocknell Plain in the New Forest - prospective viewers are advised to park at Ocknell Pond (SU 232119 at the southern end of the old Stoney Cross airfield). A separate message on the excellent HOSLIST system today tells of a visit to Fleet Pond by the Surbiton Birwatching Society - two highlights of their visit were a DARTFORD WARBLER (presumably a bird on the move rather than a resident there) and a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER (may not be a great rarity but a bird that is so elusive that every sighting is an exciting pleasure - as with Water Rail). Redpoll and Siskin were also present but no numbers are given. If you ever venture into the wilds of Surbiton you may wish to visit this society's website at www.sdbws.ndo.co.uk in order to make contact with the natives.

Nick Mills was at Titchfield Haven last Thursday (Oct 28) and reports 'BEARDED TITS all over the show' - otherwise fairly quiet there with no Marsh Harrier or Temminck's Stint. Thursday was the day when Bearded Tits were reported from the Severals at Church Norton (which is not I think one of their regular breeding places) so I guess this report of unusual activity at Titchfield Haven also reflects the annual autumnal long distance journeys undertaken by these birds. Both the need to feed up prior to or after a long journey, or the arrival of birds in a new site which they have to explore, will bring them more to our attention as they move about in the reeds. Further evidence of Bearded Tit movement comes from Brian Fellows who today heard one at Sinah Lake on South Hayling.

Brian Fellows and John Gowen were among the volunteers counting birds on the Fishbourne Channel yesterday (see my entry for Oct 30) and I see from Brian's notes that he too enjoyed the unusual (for most of us) experience of sitting in one place for two hours or more and watching the changing pattern of birds at the edge of tidal water. After a first stint on the section which I later watched for four hours he moved to the top of the creek and saw a different spectrum of birds - more variety among the waders with Ringed Plover and Black Tailed Godwit and also large flocks of both Wigeon and Mute Swan (I believe both flocks had over 100 birds but have no actual figures)

News from Dave Mead this evening answered the question posed by Colin Law last Sunday (Oct 24) as to where any CORN BUNTING could be found in this period when they seem to vanish from breeding areas and have not yet appeared in their winter flock areas. Dave and some of his Portsmouth RSPB group were surveying some of the fields belonging to Hyden Farm (just north of the Bat and Ball pub between Hambledon and Clanfield) and came on a flock of Skylark among which were at least 7 Corn Bunting and there is a good chance of spotting them from the road going north from the pub. Even better news is that Richard Jones, the farmer, who has always been well disposed to wildlife is now trying to revert to organic farming methods that will increase the number of weed seeds available to support the birds - I wish Richard every success in this endeavour and hope that many other farmers will seek their salvation in more natural land management.

.....Among a number of other news items from Dave Mead was an account of how his RSPB group had this week looked down from the hill fort at Old Winchester Hill on two RED KITES circling above newly ploughed land and seeming to feed on worms taken from the soil. When on his own in the New Forest at Acres Down on Friday (Oct 29) Dave had come on 12 CROSSBILL and also found found BRAMBLING as well as Siskin in the woods at the foot of the down. News passed on by one of his RSPB Group added an actual sighting of one SNOW BUNTING at Pennington this week to the anonymous report of 4 SNOW BUNTING seen at Hill Head sailing club last Sunday.

One of the places where the first Redwing can be seen in our area is the Hollybank woods where the many Holly trees offer a rich crop of berries, as do the many Yew trees, so I took a stroll there this morning but my only bird interest came in the form of drunken song from a Song Thrush - I never actually saw the bird but the strange sounds were coming from a huge female Yew tree covered with red arils and I assume it had been over-indulging in their sweet taste. One Green Sandpiper which, hearing me coming, fled from the pools left in the otherwise dry bed of Aldsworth Pond, was more in control of its senses.

Yesterday a HEN HARRIER hunting in Falmer Bottom to the east of Brighton had a 'minor

disagreement' with a local PEREGRINE and today Colin Law completed a 'full house' of raptors to be expected in this area of the Sussex Downs with a male MERLIN seen over Woodingdean (Kestrel and Sparrowhawk were also seen this weekend). Also in the latest news from Sussex is the story of one visitor to the SOS website who has been unable to view the site from the computer at his workplace after the company that he works for installed some new 'parental control' type software. I quote Colin Law's amusing description of this .. "Net-Nanny' software installed on his company's computer system has blocked this person's access to the SOS web site, apparently due to the 'sex' in 'sussex', possibly aggravated by numerous references to birds. Whatever you do don't mention Parus major's or we will all be sent to bed early with no supper.'

SAT 30 OCT

Alistair Martin was one of those who responded to a call from Bird Line to visit the North Wall at Pagham Harbour in order to see a PECTORAL SANDPIPER which gave great views for the birders there in the afternoon. More surprisingly a JACK SNIPE also showed well in the open, showing the dark central stripe along its crown and the light coloured stripes on its back (slightly reminiscent of the V's on a Little Stint). My only views of this species have all been with the bird in flight when identification has to rely on the small size, short bill and silent, low flight to pitch within 100 yards or so.

I spent my day acting as a guinea pig for a new method of monitoring the waders feeding in Chichester Harbour. This was organised by Anne de Potier who had recruited volunteers to watch and map the birds on four 'midflats' covering the top 2.5km of Fishbourne Creek from the village down to Copperas Point just above the Marina entrance. The idea was for each observer to record on a map the position and number of all the birds present on their section, the sections being small enough to be covered from a single viewpoint with a telescope. Each observer was asked to do a two hour shift and to fill in a new map for each half hour as well as noting the time of any mass arrivals or departures of birds. A shortage of volunteers meant that I and several others did a double shift, spending four of the six hours of the overall count on the job. Thanks to good weather this was an interesting and pleasant way of spending the time and I had the added bonus of the two female COMMON SCOTER and the three female Goldeneye in my section and a 'half time' entertainment break as a BUZZARD flew over Oldpark Wood across the water from me and imitated a Rough Legged Buzzard by hovering (hanging motionless in the strong wind, its head held out and peering down like a Kestrel). One of the birds 'buzzing the Buzzard' was a Kestrel, but it seemed keener on showing off its falcon attributes, diving and soaring in the wind, rather than giving the Buzzard a lesson in hovering. Shortly after I started counting I found one small wader among the Curlew, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Redshank at the water's edge. It may have been a young Dunlin but the orangey neck feathers, taller slimmer look, and a hint of white seen as it was preening its rump area with its curved bill, strongly suggested CURLEW SANDPIPER – when I finished counting and tried to find it again I could not – the best on offer was a single Turnstone. Another point of some interest was that a flock of exactly 50 Brent close to me had 14 young (28%).

FRI 29 OCT

HOSLIST messages have recently been asking if anyone has seen many REDPOLL as they seem to be difficult to find so far this autumn. Today a message from John Clark tells us that he saw a flock of only 18 go south west over Fleet Pond on Wednesday (Oct 27) when there were a few more with some 90 SISKIN in trees around the pond. John is disappointed by the lack of daytime visible migration despite good conditions recently but he has seen 'a couple of BRAMBLING' (presumably in the Fleet area) and rather more Wood Pigeon moving over.

Brian Fellows walked the Ems Valley from Emsworth to Westbourne and back at midday today in warm sunshine with Robin, Wren and Dunnock all singing and many Long Tailed Tits on the move. Of special interest one EGRET was by the river near Westbourne for the first time this autumn (last year one moved inland here on Oct 22) and two GREEN SANDPIPER were in their usual place with just one of the regular Grey Wagtails.

Brian Fellows has passed me a message which he saw on the internet asking whether the 'pair of ALBINO COOT' which could be seen at Farlington Marshes several years ago raised young of normal plumage. I think this message is based on a mis-understanding though I may be wrong - yes there were two (or more?) ALBINO COOT but they were siblings, not a pair. They survived for two or more years (i.e. the other Coot did not hack them to death as might have been expected with this vicious species) but their sex appeal to other Coot was nil. One of them moved to other waters in the area in search of a mate but so far as I know they never bred. If you know better let us know.

A TEMMINCK'S STINT was at Pagham North Wall yesterday afternoon (Oct 28) and over at Church Norton 2 Dartford Warbler and 7 Avocets were to be seen with BEARDED TITS round the corner at the Severals (indicating that these tiny birds are once more airborne on their long autumn dispersal flights). There is also delayed news of a PALLAS WARBLER on private land in the Pagham Harbour area last Monday (Oct 25) - while you won't see that one it's encouraging to know they are popping up nearer to the Havant area.

THU 28 OCT

A note from Barry Collins today gives lots of good info about birds seen on Thorney so far this week, and with the note was a message that the BLACK BRANT and one OSPREY are still present today (Thursday). To start with some basic info Barry has recently checked through 897 Brent in various different places and found 209 of them were juveniles giving an excellent 24.9% young birds. The BLACK BRANT was with some of them in the Pilsey area on Oct 26, 27 and 28. Other good birds have been 2 LONG TAILED DUCK going south past Pilsey towards East Head on Monday (Oct 25) and Barry's first GOLDENEYE seen the same day. A juvenile OSPREY was perched close to the east shore footpath when seen on Monday and on Tuesday it was fishing in the Deeps before perching on a public footpath sign at Thornham Point. Also on Tuesday (Oct 26) 2 LITTLE STINT were on Pilsey sands with 17 Merganser offshore. On Wednesday (Oct 27) the high spot was the story told below but Barry also saw 14 BEARDED TIT foraging on the Phragmites seeds at the Deeps where there are now 3 CETT'S WARBLERS. A second winter MED GULL flew over the Deeps, the first wintering DARTFORD WARBLER was seen on the island and a late SWALLOW flew over Marina Farm

.....On Tuesday evening (Oct 26) Barry counted 174 Egrets going in to roost (better than the figure of 136 on Oct 12) and on Wednesday he witnessed an interesting aerial battle in which an Egret was saved by the most unlikely 'friend', a Herring Gull. In Barry's words .. 'an immature female PEREGRINE was having a go at the wader roost but broke off to harry a passing EGRET, forcing it into the sea on four occasions. While this was going on a Herring Gull was pursuing the Peregrine, eventually distracting the falcon from her attack on the Egret. This was lucky for the Egret which by this time was exhausted. The Peregrine then went to roost on the south east corner of Pilsey where it was joined by the juvenile OSPREY and the two raptors sat together, just three feet apart, for about 15 minutes with no interaction between them. Finally the Peregrine decided to show the Osprey what real flying was all about and went on the rampage again among the waders, but when the Osprey felt hungry it stuck with its traditional 'quarter and plunge' technique - no high speed stoops on the fish' (can you imagine what would happen to a Peregrine if it tried its method of breaking the neck of a fish under water? I guess the falcon would be more likely to disintegrate than the fish)

HOSLIST news today comes from Russell Wynn who heard the thin whistles of REDWING passing unseen over Southampton at 10pm last night and earlier yesterday Simon Woolleey was in the New Forest and came on around 45 REDPOLL in the Shatterford area between Beaulieu Road Station and Denny Wood.

I took a walk along the same stretch of Fishbourne Channel that Brian Fellows walked yesterday and I had a good view of one male GOLDENEYE still there (the other two may have been there - one flew off south and later another flew in from the north and another bird was seen diving in the distance). The same 22 Shelduck were present but the Swans were all out of sight at high tide. 120 Brent, 4 Great Crested Grebe and 250+ Lapwing roosting on plough near New Barn farm were my main sightings with a couple of wheezy Rock Pipits near the shore.

WED 27 OCT

The first LONG EARED OWL to appear on the South Coast was seen at Beachy Head in the past couple of days and up to 12 BRAMBLING are now in that area. Much nearer to Havant there were two BRAMBLING at West Wittering yesterday (Oct 26) and also seen there were 75 FIELDFARE, 2 WOODLARK and a SHORT EARED OWL. All these items come thanks to the excellent Sussex Ornithological Society's Recent Sightings website.

Brian Fellows today was in the Chichester area and walked south from Dell Quay along the east shore of the Fishbourne Channel as far as Copperas Point (where Salterns Copse begins with Chichester Marina just beyond it). The tide was rising and two juvenile/female COMMON SCOTER (with pale cheeks and longish tails 'sticking up slightly') were a surprise appearing in Brian's scope as he was scanning the small flock of Brent to age them, and also in the channel were three female GOLDENEYE which were almost certainly new arrivals (I have not heard of any in Chichester Harbour this summer). Among the other birds seen were 22 Shelduck and 51 Swans. Going on to

the Hayling Oysterbeds after high tide Brian found 3 Merganser on the main pool near another flock of Brent with young - Brian tells me that so far his counts of flocks with young show that 27% of the birds are young which is similar to my own observations but (in my case at least) the percentage is calculated only from those flocks which are considerable enough to come close enough for easy recognition of the young and is by no means an overall percentage of all the geese that have arrived in the harbours.

Yesterday (Oct 26) Brian Fellows was in Portsmouth and found the first single PURPLE SANDPIPER back at Southsea Castle - over the past ten years the average date for the first arrival has been mid-November though they used to be here earlier (in 1985 one arrived before the end of September, and the average arrival date for the 1971 to 1996 period is Oct 7th, needing some much earlier dates prior to 1988 to balance the November and December dates recorded from 1988 onwards). At Milton Common 7 CETT'S WARBLERS were singing, and with another 5 in the Great Salterns reeds the total in this area has risen to at least 12 (adding 2 to the record total heard on Oct 12). A male BLACKCAP was eating apples on a tree near the Milton Lakes and a female STONECHAT was nearby (Brian has not seen one of these here for several years) with a pair of Stonechat at Great Salterns where 2 Chiffchaff were calling. A Dunnock was singing in the sun and many Goldfinch and Linnet were feeding on the common.

.....5 SHOVELER were newcomers to Baffins Pond where the 13 Barnacle Geese were all present, though Brian points out that the 13 which recently appeared on the Scoteny gravel pits near Rye in East Sussex could possibly be some of the 15 which vanished inexplicably from Baffins last April (the further reduction to just 13 is due to deaths from botulism at Baffins). The Portsmouth Sixth Form College had 84 BRENT on its playing fields by the Eastern Road, and the St Johns College fields north of the A27 and Farlington Marshes had another estimated 50 Brent so the 'early ashore' move is not restricted to Gosport. On his way home Brian looked for the Black Swan at both Broadmarsh and the Emsworth Mill Pond but could not see it - the Emsworth Swan flock was up to 62 on the Mill Pond.

Two bits of interesting news from Tony Gutteridge were of yet more FIELDFARE seen by him yesterday (these were at Selborne) and more local news of a MERLIN seen at SU 7409(47) over the Holme Farm fields south of the Stansted Lyels Wood last Saturday (Oct 23). Tony saw it from Woodberry Lane, looking east from the bottom of the hill where the road emerges from the north side of Southleigh Forest, though it was probably just moving through the area.

A brief excursion to Broadmarsh and Budds Farm this afternoon had little bird interest other than the presence of two GREEN SANDPIPER feeding together in a favourite spot in the Hermitage Stream (just upstream of the water works entrance and south of West Street in Havant - you can't see this spot from West St and can only see it well by looking over the high brick wall on the north side of the Waterworks entrance gate at the end of Meyrick Road). While scanning Bedhampton Mill pool I noticed a Little Egret flying high above the Hermitage Stream as far as the 'right angle bend' in its course above the Mill - the Egret then wheeled and headed back downstream, but its flight made us wonder if the Egrets are now thinking of moving inland up the streams. At Broadmarsh neither the Goldeneye nor the Black Swan could be seen but across the water by the sewage outfall the Wigeon flock has now grown to over 30 birds (and one male was on the Budds Farm pools where I could not see the Pintail)

TUE 26 OCT

My trip to Hayling this morning started with three GOLDCREST passing through my garden as I was getting my bike out - these tiny birds are omnipresent at the moment and I heard them several times later in the morning. Stopping near Langstone pond I counted more than 100 Teal on the pools in the Wade Court meadow and out on the mud estimated at least 50 GOLDEN PLOVER back in their favourite daytime resting place strung out along a line of seaweed offering some disguise to their presence but with no other vegetation or other obstruction to their all round vision for at least 100 yards on every side. There were also the beginnings of the Lapwing flock along the edges of the saltings - some 40 birds out of the 200 or so to be expected later. Near Langstone Bridge a flock of 60 Brent had 21 youngsters (I later counted another of 165 in Stoke Bay of which 36 were young). Arriving on Hayling at the top of the old rail track I had my first positive ROCK PIPIT standing on a concrete block by the shore to show me his rotund body, dusky breast and flanks and black legs - I have heard several recently but this was the first I could be sure of. The usual flock of Great Crested Grebe were in Bridge Lake to the north of the Oysterbeds with more down the west shore of Hayling to the south - I probably saw 50+ in total. At least one Greenshank was in the main pool of the beds with the flock of Shelduck up from 10 last week to 19 today, but there

were no Merganser to be seen. The usual Meadow Pipits and Linnet around the edges of the pools and on the 'County Council field' I saw at least one Stonechat where there had been one last week (another one that seems to have settled for the winter was near the South Hayling Beachlands tarmac road south of Staunton Avenue where I saw it a fortnight ago). My only other item of birding interest came on my return journey when the tide was fully up - at the southern end of West Lane I looked east to the Manor House and Farm and found 90+ Curlew on the plough (the first time I have seen these roosting inland this winter)

.....At Sinah Lake this morning (where 8 Pochard and half a dozen Tufties were almost the only birds) I met up with Bob Hoare who was as usual full of news going back to his sighting of a Desert Wheatear in the middle of a fairway on the Golf Course earlier this year. Bob told me that he was in search of Pallas Warbler which he did not claim to have seen but earlier this morning he had seen the first five FIELDFARE and a late COMMON REDSTART. Sometime recently he had seen a single Goldeneye in the harbour and while he said it was 'in the usual place where the first always turns up' I am not convinced that these sightings of single birds are not of the 'late-summering' bird that completed its moult in the Hermitage Stream. A couple of other things which I remember Bob telling me were first, that the Golf Course staff at Sinah claimed there was a Short Eared Owl now on the course, and second, that the Southsea Canoe Lake Med Gull (with the O2K ring) had been seen once by him this summer when he noticed that the leg with the ring on it had been damaged (most of the foot torn off and the ring looking as if it would soon slip off). The final piece of information which stuck in my memory concerned the SAKER FALCON which has been giving John Badley so much worry through its destruction and disturbance of birds on his RSPB Reserve for about two years now (though I have heard nothing of it since it, or another Saker, caught a Pintail in flight at Pagham on Sept 23). According to Bob this bird had been owned by the two local men who were convicted of large scale egg-collecting and removed from home by the law - I can't imagine that they instructed the bird to take a particular interest in the RSPB reserve but I do find the story has an amusing irony.

Mike Collins saw his first FIELDFARE of the winter (just three with some Mistle Thrushes) in Goodwood House grounds today, probably part of the same movement that took five over Sout Hayling this morning. Usually we get a few along the coast at this time of year, but they generally 'bounce back' to feed inland until much later in the winter, so these sightings are no sign that they are here to stay. Other news from Mike is of three ROCK PIPIT at Langstone South Moors on Sunday (Oct 24) - last winter the shore by the Budds Farm outfall was a good place to see them with a flock of up to 8 present. The South Moor Stonechats are also probably there to stay as Mike saw the female by the Tamarisk pool on Sunday, and on Budds Farm pools he saw the single male PINTAIL but tells me he saw a single male there about a month ago before it had completed its moult.

HOSLIST news today came from Russell Wynn who was at Dibden Bay on Southampton Water this morning seeing 20 FIELDFARE plus a few Siskin, Redpoll and Grey Wagtail flying north (having 'hit the coast and bounced back?'). Also seen there were 4 Dartford Warbler, Blackcap and Chiffchaff.

MON 25 OCT

John Shillitoe recorded a new bird for the IBM Lake at lunchtime today (1pm) when an OSPREY flew west low over the lake. Even the Great Blackbacks scattered at its approach, but not so the Crows which forced it to gain height and head north towards Portsdown. (Later in the afternoon in Havant I met Bill Addison in the street and while we were chatting a small Sparrowhawk appeared high over St Faith's Church and a Crow felt duty bound to see it off giving us a display of some real Battle of Britain dog-fighting high in the blue sky - the only thing missing was the rattle of machine guns)

Brian Fellows was in the east of Stansted Forest this morning and heard a SONG THRUSH in full song. After lunch he went via the Emsworth Ponds to the Thorney Deeps. The Town Mill Pond had only 98 Mallard (during the gales of the last few days the number reached 117) and the flock of 59 Mute Swan was without the BLACK SWAN (anyone seen it elsewhere?). On Thorney a Stonechat was in the scrub north of the Little Deeps, 6 Pochard were on the Little Deeps and 2 KINGFISHERS were fishing from separate posts along the canal leading south. The saltings off the Great Deeps had 32 Lapwing (the first flock here) and 48 Brent had 8 juveniles in the harbour.

A HOSLIST message from Dave Pearson who was at Titchfield Haven yesterday (Sunday Oct 24) tells us that the Temminck's Stint was still present, the Marsh Harrier was grounded by the rain and

the 3 Little Gulls were 'on the board' but not seen by Dave. A CANADA GOOSE ('small but perfectly formed') of the 'minima' race flew past the Suffern Hide on the way to the meadow - is this the bird that was at the Lower Test on Sep 22 (seen there by Paul Winter)? And what is the current Canada Goose flock size at Titchfield?

Russell Wynn was in the Keyhaven area on Friday (Oct 22) and saw a RED THROATED DIVER and an unspecified AUK fly east as 40 SWALLOWS, a MERLIN and a MARSH HARRIER flew south. Non-migrating birds included a Little Stint, Curlew and Common Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, 23 Egrets, 14 Merganser, 2 Peregrine and a Dartford Warbler

.....back in Southampton this morning Russell found 3 ROCK PIPITS on the Town Quay with 21 Great Crested Grebe on the water, and 'his sources' told him that there were now 6 PALLAS WARBLERS in neighbouring counties (Sussex 2, Dorset 3, IoW 1) but none reported in Hampshire

Today's news on the Sussex website is of a Pallas Warbler, Ring Ouzel, Firecrest and Woodlark at Worthing, a second Pallas Warbler by Portslade railway station a few miles to the east, and a whole list of birds in the Beachy Head area - GREAT GREY SHRIKE, a 'Tristis' Chiffchaff, Wheatear, 2 BRAMBLING, 2 Firecrest, 2 Black Redstart and 2 Dartford Warbler

PLANTS:

SUN 31 OCT

For some time it has been possible to walk all over the dry bed of Aldsworth Pond but this morning was the first time I have done so since it dried up around August 5th. Along the west side of the pond, about 100 yards from the sluice by the road, there is a patch of MARSH YELLOWCRESS and several of the plants still had a few flowers open and nearby I collected a specimen of Water-Speedwell with particularly blue flowers - when I checked it out at home it seemed to be the 'true blue' species rather than the hybrid to judge by the flower colour and the presence of mature seeds where all the previous flowers had been. Not such good news was the presence of much New Zealand Pygmy Weed on the bed of the pond. Earlier, in Hollybank Woods, I had come on more of the Trailing Tormentil which Gwynne Johnson recently made me aware of.

A small, select group of the Evening Class went for a walk yesterday along Huckswold Lane which takes you from Chalton in Hampshire to Compton in Sussex. Halfway along this ancient track they turned north to Ladyholt which lies on the south side of the West Hartin Down woods and here, on the high open fields, still covered in stubble, they found many of the fifty flowering plant species which they recorded. The best of these was a single HAREBELL but also worth noting was CROSSWORT in flower on a south facing bank.

THU 28 OCT

Nothing spectacular in the way of plants on the shore of Fishbourne Channel south of Dell Quay today but I did get my first sight of buds of SPURGE LAUREL which is quite common in the Salterns Copse area, and I found a lovely mass of POLYPODY FERN under oak trees on the very edge of the shore immediately south of Apuldram House (alongside the new public path). Two other things noted were the very pretty sight of a large SPINDLE bush covered with pale pink arils and with nearly all its leaves the same pink colour, and a less pretty sight was of BLACK HOREHOUND on which half the flowers were so white that I at first thought that plants of Lemon Balm were mixed with the Horehound (but all the leaves smelt horrible). HEMLOCK WATER DROPWORT was flowering in a ditch to add another species to my October flowering list.

WED 27 OCT

While at Broadmarsh this afternoon I added a few more plants to my October flowering list with Lucerne and Hemlock still out on the seawall and Wild Celery in the Harts Farm Way roadside ditch where the COCKSPUR GRASS (now established here for at least three years and flourishing) still has new shoots that have not yet flowered. Looking in at the Broadmarsh playing fields to check if any Brent have yet come to feed on the grass now growing on the incomplete re-surfacing of these fields (the work has been paused for the winter) I found a mass of wild flowers on an area where the soil has been disturbed. Evening Primrose, Scarlet Pimpernel and Black Medick were three which caught my eye but did not add to my list, then I found one beauty which was new - the lovely WILD PANSY or Viola tricolor (definitely not planted here for ornament). One more for the list came as I was passing the Apollo Fire Detector buildings - STICKY GROUNDSEL newly flowering.

MON 25 OCT

Two of the 53 plants I found flowerings today are worth a mention, both being found in Stansted Forest. The first was something that I probably would not have noticed a few weeks ago before Gwynnw Johnson brought TRAILING TORMENTIL to my attention as a species that could be found here. What I saw this morning was three little clusters of Tormentil flowers appearing from the short trampled grass of the forest path I was on, with none of the procumbent plant stems and small erect terminal sections of those stems holding the flowers an inch or more above the ground. When I took a closer look I could only trace a short section of the stem before I reached the first rooting node after which it would have taken a toothcomb to find the ground hugging stems among the grass, and my only evidence for thinking that this was Trailing Tormentil (or the hybrid between Tormentia and Creeping Cinquefoil) was the absence of an 'erect' flowering head, the rooting at the node, and the long stems of the stem leaves. A little after this puzzling find I came on one I could instantly identify but which I have not seen in flower for months - this was GERMANDER SPEEDWELL.

INSECTS:

SUN 31 OCT

In the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth this morning almost the first thing I saw was two RED ADMIRAL sunning themselves on dry leaves, and both there and at Aldsworth Pond several COMMON DARTER were still in the wing. One Red Admiral was also out yesterday at Fishbourne in much less sunny weather.

THU 28 OCT

I saw just one RED ADMIRAL at Dell Quay today but was pleased to encounter yet another HORNET buzzing round an oak on which flowering Ivy was attracting the smaller insects the Hornet was after.

Insect info from Thorney Island this week comes from Barry Collins who saw 12 RED ADMIRAL yesterday (Oct 27) with one SPECKLED WOOD still out in the Thorney churchyard and several COMMON DARTER around. The last two MIGRANT HAWKER seen on the island were at the Little Deeps on Monday (Oct 25). Best news was of a single CLOUDED YELLOW at Pilsey on Tuesday (Oct 26)

WED 27 OCT

Just one RED ADMIRAL sat on my garden bench in the sunlight today, eventually gathering enough energy for a flight elsewhere.

TUE 26 OCT

The only insects which I saw today on Hayling were one SMALL WHITE over fields by West Lane and one MIGRANT HAWKER near Sinah Lake, but while at Sinah I met up with Bob Hoare who told me he had seen a Speckled Wood as well as Red Admirals there yesterday. Much more interestingly he told me that a HORNET'S nest was still active somewhere at the west end of the Golf Course. This is the first time I have heard of these insects on Hayling and supports a belief in their current expansion.

MON 25 OCT

I started my walk in Stansted Forest from the Sling (Rowlands Castle) in today's glorious midday sunshine and I had only just climbed to the extreme west end of the main avenue, where I had paused to examine the many fungi on a large fallen Beech trunk, when a noisy HORNET rushed past me showing its huge orange abdomen for identification (though the buzzing of their flight is quite sufficient to identify them on its own). Heading north west from here I had only just passed the driveway into the house on the west edge of the woods when I saw a second Hornet, then found one which looked large enough to be a queen hovering about three feet in front of my chest and obviously taking an interest in me. My instinct, whenever I disturb a wild creature, is to stand still and speak quietly to it to show that I mean it no harm, and that is what I did, backing off slowly. The huge insect soon 'buzzed off' but I then realised that I had probably done the wrong thing as I remember a TV programme in which the presenter (I think it was Simon King) was filming the comings and goings at a Hornet's nest and said that the insects will do you no harm so long as you remember one thing - never to breathe at them as they detest the smell of human breath. Normally the smell will drive them off, but at the nest they will react to it as a threat to the nest and will attack the source of the smell. As I had just stopped close to an old Ash tree from which the previous Hornet seemed to have emerged, and was searching it for a hole that might be the nest entrance, I thought after the event that by talking to the insect hovering in front of me I might well have been giving it intense displeasure and provoking the attack I was trying to forestall.

.....Later in this walk a male BRIMSTONE flew by and a few yards further on a COMMA rose from the ground to continue sunning itself on dead bracken, than a female COMMON DARTER flew by and settled on a log. Crossing the 'Rough Avenue' I paused to look at a tall and ancient False Acacia tree with a 'plantation' of Cherry Laurel at its base (why should either have been planted here?) and found a couple of RED ADMIRALS in the air above me and one of them found me attractive enough to land twice on my head in the sunshine. Eventually I came back to the starting point where I had seen the first Hornet and here were two more Red Admirals, but they were clearly more interested in each other than in me (they circled endlessly round each other for as long as I watched). Over in the east of Stansted Forest this morning another three RED ADMIRAL were seen by Brian Fellows.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 31 OCT

The first of the autumn WOOD BLEWIT toadstools was to be seen in my garden this morning, perpetuating specimens I must have brought home years ago and chucked on the compost heap. I found more of them in Hollybank Woods this morning where I also came on the first troop of CLOUDED AGARIC. On what was once the lawn of Holly Lodge in the woods were greenish Wax Caps which I assume to be PARROT WAXCAP though many of them had blackened with age.

FRI 29 OCT

Yesterday Brian Fellows found the remains of GIANT PUFFBALLS, by now brown and 'puffed out', on the Ems watermeadows and earlier this week I saw a fresh white one in a field at Warblington. I understand they are good to eat when young and the flesh is white and firm but I could not easily get at the one I saw. I see that, unlike smaller puffballs which sit where they grew and wait for rain and wind to create the pressure to expel the spores, these monsters are only attached to the ground by a thin cord of mycelium and when ready to scatter spores this cord breaks and the puffball rolls around at the behest of the wind, scattering spores as it bumps into obstructions to its passage.

.....Another new fact which I learnt today from Jon Cox's article in the new issue of British Wildlife on 'The nature conservation importance of dung' is that the tiny packets of spores which are ejected by raindrops from the cups of Birds Nest fungi and which then get entangled in surrounding vegetation as a result of trailing a tiny, sticky 'umbilical cord' behind them, do not just hang there until they burst and allow the wind to scatter their spores as I had previously thought. Their plan is to get eaten by grazing animals along with the vegetation to which they have become attached, and having warmed up in the stomach of some friendly cow and been ejected with its dung, they find themselves in an ideal situation to grow into new fungi wherever they land.

Foxes, their control and their habits, are an emotive subject but if you want to help towards a better understanding of their distribution, diet and preferred habitat it is not too late to join in the second year of a three year National Fox Survey in February and March next year. The organiser is Charlotte Webbon and you can write to her at the School of Biological Sciences, University of Bristol, Woodland Road, Bristol BS8 1UG (or email C.C.Webbon@bristol.ac.uk). Reading about this project in the British Wildlife magazine I learn that in 1994 over 90% of the Fox population in Bristol died of an epidemic of mange - I know Foxes suffer from mange, particularly when they become overpopulated, but did not know this disease was a killer of this magnitude.

WED 27 OCT

Two fungi which caught my attention at Broadmarsh today were SHAGGY INKCAP (these have been appearing for some time) and WEEPING WIDOW of which these were my first for the autumn.

TUE 26 OCT

Most people who are not anglers or golfers do not have access to the water of Sinah Lake but Bob Hoare has friends among the golf course staff who let him use their entrance to get to both the lake and golf course. When I met him this morning he was inside the fence and I was outside and among other things he told me that, in his opinion, the great decline in this water as a bird haunt was at least partially attributable to the presence of several huge TERRAPIN and a lot of large PIKE. Together these took the young of any wildfowl trying to breed there, and deterred the hundreds of Pochard and Tufted Duck that used to come in the winter - I don't know if there is any other evidence of Pike frightening off diving duck but if I were a duck I don't think I would like to meet those long lines of sharp teeth underwater.

MON 25 OCT

At the extreme west end of the Stansted Forest main avenue, on its north side just before the path leads

you down into the Sling, a fallen Beech trunk has been left lying with a section of its side cut out to make a seat for passers by. Today I found a great display of fungi on this dead wood - fresh glistening PORCELAIN FUNGUS was perhaps the most prolific but there were also tongues of OYSTER MUSHROOMS, and tiers of tiny yellowish fungi that looked as if they should be brackets with pores on their underside but in fact have cinnamon coloured gills - this is Pannellus stipticus. Several sorts of true brackets were present starting with the common Many Zoned Polypore and the less colourful, rubbery, white edged brown brackets with a name like a 'Swedish chef' (Bjerkandera adjusta). A large greyish white 'cushion' firmly attached to the wood was probably a young form of one of the large Ganoderma bracket species. On the roots of another tree nearby was a mass of Honey Fungus and on oak logs elsewhere I came on Black Bulgar and Stereum rugosum.

COMMENTS:

29 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins – ‘British Wildlife’ magazine celebrates its tenth anniversary

I am not a great buyer of magazines as I am not greatly interested in looking at pictures and reading advertisements for things that in which I have no interest, and when I do find some text in them it is usually either a rehash of something I have seen elsewhere or is about ‘foreign parts’ where the wildlife and scenery is very different from that which I enjoy and wish to know more about here in southern England. Not so with British Wildlife, and I would like to add my congratulations to them on their tenth anniversary of publication. Every two months another 75 pages of new information about the wildlife which I know and love arrives in the post, both broadening and deepening my knowledge. Yes, there are pictures and very good ones, but the content is principally well written and well laid out text, and no, there are no advertisements breaking the continuity of the text. Furthermore the magazine is not a one-sided view of nature (just birds, or butterflies or plants) but actually gives an account of nature in the round. The subscription (for those already members of a wildlife body) is £16-95 a year and if you want to know more email brit.wildlife@clara.net

When I opened the new issue this morning the first thing I saw was an answer to my previous comment on my own lack of information about Marine Conservation – on the first inside page is an advert for the Marine Conservation Society so I now know how to join that Society, and in the book reviews there is one for volumes 10 and 14 of a massive 15 volume project by the JNCC which will form a ‘Marine Nature Conservation Review’ of the entire coastline of the UK. At £40 per volume in paperback I doubt I will be buying, but at least I know that serious and comprehensive work is being undertaken on the subject by the government.

The editorial looking back over ten years records the growing success of the magazine and of the growth of conservation organisations, wildlife data recording, and ‘action plans’, but it also echoes what Bob Page had to say when he retired from the Directorship of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust – that while the number of words written on wildlife conservation, the piles of data, the expressed good intentions of government and business, and the membership of conservation organisations have all been growing the sad fact is that wildlife has continued to decline. The editorial hopes that there will be ‘a resolve to tackle the major issues of agricultural reform, pollution and fragmentation of the landscape’, and later in this issue an excellent article on agriculture and wildlife conservation talks of the money and publicity put into schemes to save particular endangered species and concludes ‘continually to fund such expensive schemes, amidst a fanfare of publicity and sponsorship from business or industry, followed by a deafening silence when they fail, is to squander the money which is needed to ensure the future of the ‘locally common’ species before they, too, become ‘scarce’ or ‘rare’ because the habitats on which they rely for survival have also disappeared’.

There are fascinating articles on Zander (an introduced and spreading pikelike fish), Cirl Buntings, Large Blue butterflies, Wicken Fen and one that I found really interesting on ‘The nature conservation importance of dung’ by Jonathan Cox who was at one time the NCC officer responsible for South Hampshire (and who introduced me to the colony of Medicinal Leeches which still I hope thrive in a tiny pond on the Cams Hall Golf Course at Fareham - within yards of your future electronic route to my website).

29 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins - [Sperm Whales hiding behind Leylandii, and a project to save the King of Spain's honour](#)

Our government does try to keep us informed of important matters and Brian Fellows has pointed out that a lot of information concerning wildlife and the countryside is available on the internet at the website of the Dept of the Environment, Transport and the Regions (DETR) which you can access at <http://www.wildlife-countryside.detr.gov.uk/index.htm> and he has sent me a long list of subjects listed in the index of material. Much of it is serious and important stuff but my sense of humour was tickled by the juxtaposition of two entries. One is 'Leylandii and Other High Hedges - Briefing Note' and this is immediately followed by 'Minimising Disturbance to Cetaceans'. I have heard many stories about the deep feelings which can be raised by the growth of these trees when they are planted by a neighbour and block out views and light from a garden, and I have often wondered what went on behind some of them but until now I had never thought of them as being there to protect the privacy of Sperm Whales. And if you find these subjects too serious you can read all about that Monty Python sketch of a government project - the 'White-Headed Duck Task Force'. When I last read about this great expenditure of taxpayers money designed to save the honour of the King of Spain by immobilising the British population of Ruddy Ducks before they could save up enough to purchase tickets on the Bilboa Ferry I believe the project had reached an impasse on the question of how to shoot the ducks using guns that could not possibly harm any other form of wildlife...

WEEK 42 OCT 18 – 24

BIRDS:

SUN 24 OCT

A check on the Sussex Recent Sightings website this evening tells me that yesterday there were 18 AVOCET in Pagham Harbour and an OSPREY at Sidlesham. Also yesterday Colin Law looked out of a window of his house in the Brighton area and saw a male MERLIN go slowly into the wind across his garden at hedge top height – in his own word ‘stunning’ . On Friday (Oct 22) 2 RAVEN were at Birling Gap near Beachy Head and it would seem likely that these are the birds which were seen in the near Exceat Bridge in the Cuckmere valley on Oct 9 and are ‘resident’ in East Sussex, not an eastward expedition by the two Raven that seem to wander between the Beaulieu River and Rowlands Castle. Also in the Beachy Head area on Friday 2 WHEATEAR, 2 FIRECREST and a RING OUZEL were seen at Belle Tout. Finally I am glad to see that Colin Law is trying to get people to use the Sussex sightings website to inform birders of a wider range of interesting birds than rarity sightings and to start the ball rolling he asks the question ‘Where are all the Corn Buntings at this moment?’ People know where to find them in the summer and where winter flocks can be seen but at the moment the birds are at some unknown ‘in between’ place or places. Do you know where the Hampshire birds are? Still in the Soberton area?

This morning Trevor Carpenter was at Stokes Bay and not only saw a single COMMON SCOTER flying east but also 8 SWALLOWS heading the same way. Coming inland he found 50 BRENT GEESE on the HMS Sultan playing fields by the south end of Military Road to the west of Gosport. Maybe the gale force winds encouraged them to leave the exposed shore but this must be one of the earliest dates for them to come on land (do you remember how less than twenty years ago they waited till after Christmas before risking it? and looking further back how Malcom Ogilvie gave evidence to a public enquiry about plans for Stansted airport in Essex in which he said that these rare and shy birds would never come ashore?). Birds of Hampshire tells us that the very first recorded ashore in Hampshire was a flock of 100 at Farlington Marshes in the 1969/70 winter, but they did not repeat this adventure until the new year of 1974 when 200 were seen. Grazing west of Langstone Harbour did not start until 1980/81 at the Beaulieu estuary and next year they invaded cereal fields in the Keyhaven area, and since then this habit of grazing onshore as soon as the weed supply runs out in the harbours has supported a massive growth in the world population of these geese.

.....Yesterday evening Trevor counted 366 WIGEON in Cams Bay (mouth of Fareham Creek) and found over 100 Brent there (no doubt summoning up courage to feed on the new Cams Hall golf course where the golfers have difficulty in pushing through the feeding birds later in the winter)

3 LITTLE GULLS were reported at Titchfield Haven on Paul Winter's pager today along with the continuing presence of the Temminck's Stint, Marsh Harrier and Peregrine. In the same batch of news was a report that yesterday there had not only been a LITTLE STINT at the Haven but that 4 SNOW BUNTING had been seen near the Sailing Club east of the reserve.

In addition to the late WHINCHAT at Farlington Marshes which Sonia Bolton told me about

yesterday Brian Fellows' fuller report of yesterday's visit there by the Evening Class tells me that SKYLARK were singing overhead, at least 40 SHELDUCK were seen and the notice board recorded 2000+ BRENT (many juveniles among them). Dunlin, Grey Plover, Black Tailed Godwit and Curlew were very much in evidence, but Brian's group did not spot the Avocet, Bearded Tit, Water Rail, Stonechat or Ring Ouzel noted on the board (the RING OUZEL was seen on Wednesday Oct 20).

.....Brian also reminded me that when Bob Chapman was giving his talk about the Marshes in Havant last Wednesday he told the audience that Lapwing had had a poor year for breeding at the Marshes this summer with the number of pairs down from around 35 to 20 and few young raised. I seem to remember that Bob told us this when commenting about the delicate balance of maintaining a grazing regime on the main marsh which keeps the grass low in the spring and summer for breeding Lapwing and Skylarks, leaves tufts under which Redshank can hide their nests, and in the autumn (when the cattle leave and the Brent arrive) leaves the marsh clear of tall vegetation in which predators could creep up on the geese but also leaves them plenty of fresh young grass to eat. Bob has just about worked out how to do this but he has been unable to cope with a particular vixen which has taken a liking to Lapwing eggs and can be seen endlessly quartering the marsh in search of Lapwing nests, finding far too many of them for Lapwing breeding success.

.....Brian went on to spend the afternoon at the Arundel wildfowl reserve where he not only enjoyed the great display of captive wildfowl but also spotted at three RUDDY DUCK which he believes were feral, and heard song not only from Cetti's Warbler but also subsong from SONG THRUSH. Two male GOLDENEYE were seen at Moor Green (on the Hants/Berks border) last Sunday (Oct 17) according to Bruce Archer, making it likely that the first arrivals in Hampshire this year will be in the north of the county rather than on the coast. Bruce also reminded me of a story he told me some time ago when we were discussing 'one legged waders' and tells me that 'HOPPY', a one legged Woodpigeon, has just returned to his garden for the third winter in a row. The bird first appeared in Bruce's garden in January 1998, came back last winter and is now back in the same garden. I find this interesting not only on account of the birds survival, competing with others for food, but also for his faithfulness to the one garden (though that may not be typical of Woodpigeons, just that this one knows where food and friendship is guaranteed). Bruce comments that the birds disability may present one problem when it is roosting for the night - any strong wind is likely to blow him off his perch.

The first male PINTAIL was back on the Budds Farm pools this afternoon along with four Pochard, and on the shore by the sewage outfall a flock of 108 Brent contained 26 young birds. Further up the Hermitage stream I looked for the lone Goldeneye but could not see it - I have not seen it there for a couple of weeks, nor have I heard anyone else comment on its presence so I still reserve judgement on Bob Chapman's claim that the first of these duck flew into the harbour last weekend (he could just as well have seen the Hermitage Stream bird out in the harbour for a change). I was at the South Moors long after high tide but could see that one small dingy had been swept right over the seawall and was stranded on the track below the wall on its inside, and that the area around the Tamarisk Pool and the small stream which feeds it were flooded with water that came right up to where the east west path across the Moors crosses that tiny stream (today it was necessary to use the plank bridge across the water where there has been no water for months).

SAT 23 OCT

In between the showers today Pete Potts saw a late SWIFT with half a dozen HOUSE MARTINS over the Claylands nature reserve at Bishops Waltham. At Farlington Marshes Sonia Bolton tells me that a female WHINCHAT was still present when the Evening Class group were there this morning. My own news today was of brief CHIFF CHAFF song heard from my garden this morning and of a JAY flying over later in the day, but a three hour walk in the area east of the QE Country Park produced no special birds unless you count my first swarm of winter WOOD PIGEON (at one time over 80, probably well over 100, were swirling over the West Harting Down woodland). A couple of things that I missed from Mike Collins news when he told me of the Black Redstart at Goodwood (see Thursday 21 Oct) were that more than 30 GOLDFINCH can now be seen at Goodwood regularly feeding on seeds and that on his way home he has noticed winter LAPWING starting to arrive on the pig fields to the west of Funtington. Mike also says that if he had not seen my report of a Song Thrush attempting to sing here in Havant (see Tuesday 19 Oct) he would have rejected the evidence of his own ears when he too heard faint and disjointed notes that sounded like Song Thrush recently.

The TEMMINCK'S STINT could still be seen from the Meonshore hide at Titchfield Haven today

according to Paul Winter's pager which also carried news of four CHIMNEY SWIFTS in the west country. In addition to the one in the Scillies and one in Cornwall a second has been seen in Cornwall and a new one is reported from the Axmouth area of Devon. Are they heading our way?

FRI 22 OCT

Titchfield Haven news on the pagers today was of one newcomer (SHORT EARED OWL) and of two birds staying on (TEMMINCK'S STINT and MARSH HARRIER). Much more twitchworthy news came from the Isle of Wight where a BALTIMORE ORIOLE and a PALLAS WARBLER have both been seen in the Culver Cliffs area (between Bembridge and Sandown, just a short way south west of the Foreland). These items all came courtesy of Paul Winter and his HOSLIST, while the Sussex Recent Sightings ran out of local news today but thought two CHIMNEY SWIFTS (one in Cornwall and one on the Scillies) would be of interest. The previous item on the Sussex news was of JACK SNIPE and SAND MARTIN seen at Rye on Wednesday (Oct 20) - could mean that we will be seeing Jack Snipe in Hampshire soon. Yesterday I passed on Bob Chapman's news that a first GOLDENEYE had been seen in Langstone Harbour and that ties in with a report sent to me by Ed Griffiths of the first two Goldeneye appearing on the Tring reservoirs on Tuesday (Oct 19)

20 SHELDUCK were back on the mud between Langstone village and Warblington church late this afternoon and at least 100 Brent were on the water beyond them, and when I turned back from my walk along the shore before reaching Emsworth I could see plenty more Brent on the mud there. As the setting sun eventually broke clear of the clouds to the west of me, with light rain falling from the clouds above me, a magnificent rainbow (partially a double one) stood out against the black clouds to the east and between the two arches of the double rainbow an echelon of gulls returning to the coast from inland fields, their sunlit white plumage making a further brilliant contrast to the gloomy clouds that had been over us all day. A final encouragement before I left the coast was the sight of just 5 LAPWING flying south - so far we have had no major influx of these at Langstone to amplify the few which have been with us since they first arrived in July.

Yesterday (Oct 21) Brian Fellows took a brief glance at Emsworth harbour around 6pm when the light was already fading and could make out 52 Brent in the harbour (had he checked the Emsworth shores this evening I reckon he could have found two or three times that number) What did impress him was the number of STARLINGS gathering around their night roost site in the Thorney Little Deeps reedbeds. He says ... 'Looking across the harbour to Thorney I watched for several minutes the amazing pre-roost display (rivalling that of the Little Egrets a little further down the coast) of a large flock of about 2,000 Starlings as they swept and swirled over the Little Deeps like a great black cloud. Smaller flocks of several hundred birds would occasionally break away for 30 seconds or so, only to be sucked once more back into the main flock. Quite a sight!'

.....Brian goes on ... 'Note on Starling roosts: Post-breeding roosts, initially consisting mainly of juveniles, build up from late May onwards, but the largest roosts are seen in winter from October. In winter Starlings live in flocks throughout the day, often with less than 50 birds, though at particularly attractive feeding sites these flocks can be much larger. In the evening flocks from different feeding areas coalesce as they make their way to their night-time roosts. The largest recent flock in Sussex was 75,000 at Lancing in 1968; locally, the largest was 20,000 at Thorney Deeps in Dec 1990 ('Birds of Sussex'). In Hampshire the largest roosts have been recorded in urban areas such as Portsmouth (St James hospital grounds at Milton) with 100,000 in 1984. However, these figures are dwarfed by records in the 1950s when an astounding 1 million birds were recorded at East Worldham in 1956 ('Birds of Hampshire'); as a young man living near Birmingham in the 1950s I can vividly recall the sky getting dark as literally hundreds of thousands of Starlings passed overhead towards their roosts in the city centre. Nationwide, BTO breeding census figures show that Starling numbers plummeted alarmingly by 41% between 1988 and 1997.'

THU 21 OCT

Mike Collins had a female BLACK REDSTART in Molecomb valley on the Goodwood estate today and was told that it had been there for a couple of days - he hopes it will stay for the winter.

Pete Potts had one of the CROSSBILLS now wandering over Hampshire at Bishops Waltham last Monday (Oct 18). Keep your ears open wherever you are and let us know if they settle anywhere.

A quick look at the Sussex recent sightings this afternoon told me that a PALLAS WARBLER had been seen in a garden at Seaford (half way from Brighton to Beachy Head) and that two BITTERNs were at Castle Water at Rye even further east

WED 20 OCT

Since August a single GOLDENEYE has been in the Hermitage stream around the Brockhampton gravel quay (we think it was drifting about along the South Coast during the summer and just happened to paddle into Langstone Harbour) but when Bob Chapman was giving a talk to members of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust in Havant this evening he mentioned that the first 'genuine' GOLDENEYE had been seen in the harbour last weekend. In my mind Oct 25 is the day on which I expect Goldeneye to start arriving but that is quite arbitrary and the first should now be turning up. I did not get the opportunity to check with Bob as to whether there was proof that this bird was in addition to the Hermitage Stream bird as that one is in good plumage now and could well have moved out into the harbour.

The SOS Recent Sightings website tells us that on Monday (Oct 18) 5 FIRECRESTS were seen at Church Norton where there had been 3 on the previous Saturday. A wandering RED KITE was also there on Monday and on Sunday (Oct 17) a SPOONBILL spent all day in Pagham harbour (but has not been seen since) and a RING BILLED GULL put in an appearance. Yesterday (Oct 19) two WOODLARK flew over Selsey and another over the Witterings, and today the latest news is of two BLACK REDSTART seen at Westfields 'Go Kart' circuit at Selsey. A MED GULL continues to sit on the beach at Selsey and the 2 BLACK NECKED GREBE continue to reside on Ivy Lake at Chichester. Interesting sightings further afield include a PIED FLYCATCHER ON Oct 16 at Hollingbury (which is I think part of Brighton) and 13 BARNACLE GEESE at Scoteny Court GP which is I think on Romney Marsh - I only mention these in case Brian Fellows finds his tame flock at Baffins Pond (also numbering 13) have gone walk-about as they sometimes do.

The Titchfield Haven TEMMINCK'S STINT continues to be seen from the Meonshore Hide and this morning there was also a single MARSH HARRIER at the reserve according to Paul Winter's pager

Brian Fellows thought today a good one for watching the birds from behind the glass of his home windows and enjoyed the sight of the first GOLDFINCH he has noticed in the garden, and also his first feeding Dunnock of the winter. Brian says that garden feeders have had a noticeable effect on the migratory habits of Goldfinch - the majority still tend to move off at this time of year but more and more are staying the winter and relying on a regular seed supply in gardens, and in America the northern line of their winter range has moved north for the same reason - Brian gets this info from articles published by Chris Mead. Feeding does not only attract the birds we enjoy most and a flock of 60 Starlings soon arrived to clear up everything that remained in the way of bird food. Personally I find both Starlings and Magpies more interesting to watch than the Hoover-like Woodpigeons but with all three of these species I tend to go into the garden after a short time to prevent them over-eating (it's not good for their digestion).

TUE 19 OCT

My weekly trip to Hayling started with the surprise of hearing disjointed notes of SONG THRUSH song from trees in Havant (Denvilles House grounds). Looking back to last year I see I recorded similar brief attempts at song on Sep 27 and Oct 7, and another bird on Nov 27 before they really got going from Dec 8 onwards. Reaching the shore at Langstone today, wearing coat, scarf and gloves for the first time this autumn, the shoreline had a distinctly wintry look in terms of number of species and number of birds feeding along the tideline and on the mud. At the Oysterbeds not only where there 9 MERGANSER where I had previously seen just one but also 10 SHELDUCK (later I saw another group of six flying by Langstone Bridge)

When making his rounds of Southsea and Portsmouth sites today Brian Fellows found five families of Brent Geese in Eastney Lake (west of the Hayling Island ferry) - 3 pairs of adults each had 2 young and the other two pairs had one youngster each. At Baffins Pond the 13 Barnacle Geese were present (see entry for 20/10 re 13 Barnacle Geese on Romney Marshes) and the number of Canada Geese had increased to 30 (hopefully that means that the large flock on the IBM Lake is now splitting up as it usually does at the onset of winter - most of the birds I think go to Titchfield Haven so I will be interested to hear of any large increases there)

MON 18 OCT

David Parker visited the Hayling Oysterbeds yesterday morning (Sunday 17 Oct) and had two sightings of a KINGFISHER for the first time there this winter. Just one Merganser was present and offshore at least 40 Great Crested Grebe were to be seen - no doubt these were not the only ones in the harbour and I have heard it said recently that there are over 100 in Langstone Harbour at the moment.

Trevor Carpenter enjoyed a longish cycle ride yesterday from North Fareham through Funtley and Whiteley to the River Hamble where he saw a small flock of 22, and then a much larger flock of

over 150 GOLDEN PLOVER . The pleasure of the birds and sunny scenery was unfortunately ended by a drawing pin in his cycle tyre when near the Rising Sun pub. I know Trevor to be an enthusiastic long distance walker but strangely enough his message does not dwell on the pleasures of the return journey from Warsash - a good ten kilometres. Trevor's message includes his reflections on changes to the scenery at Whiteley since he was last there and I have included these in my Comments page in the hope that others will want to add their views on the continuing development of our countryside - Mark Litjens should be well qualified to do so as he has been living there for the last few years but may by now have escaped to the rural charms of Hedge End.

Also on Sunday news of a possible ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARD seen north east of Fareham near junction 11 of the M27 came up on Paul Winter's pager. If Trevor Carpenter heard it this news was no doubt the end to a perfect day for him - missing a bird that he might have seen from his own garden on top of his puncture (earlier this year the pagers carried news of a White Stork supposedly seen just across the M27 from his house where it should have been easily seen by him had he been looking but neither that nor this current sighting have been supported by other sightings so far)

At Emsworth today Brian Fellows recorded 74 Mute and 1 Black Swan on the Mill Pond and on the harbour found the first two SHELDUCK back with 20 adult Brent plus 7 young birds in two families of 4 and 3 young. 22 KNOT were also on the mud with the Oystercatcher, Dunlin, Redshank, Grey Plover, Curlew and Black Tailed Godwit but no Ringed Plover or Turnstone, nor have Wigeon or Pintail yet returned to the West Emsworth shore. Other birds seen were a couple of Cormorant and 3 Little Egret with one Great Blackback gull among the Black Headed, Common and Herring.

An afternoon walk took me down the Langbrook stream to the Langstone South Moors where at least 300 Brent were feeding along the northern shoreline of the harbour and there were young birds among all those that I could see well enough to tell - in one group of 63 birds close to me I counted 14 young but they all took off and flew south before I could age any other groups. It could well be that the late return of the large mass of these geese is due to a very good breeding season causing the majority of the birds to travel slowly, allowing their young to feed en route, but it is far too early to be sure of the breeding situation (it could have been that the 22% of juveniles in the small sub flock which I counted was quite unrepresentative of the rest of the birds). Wigeon were also back at the mouth of the Langbrook (more than a dozen) and later I found another 70 Brent and 52 Teal on the Langstone village shore.

.....On the South Moors I put up 4 Snipe from the channels and watched a pair of Stonechat that seem settled there, and on my way down from Havant I saw three separate Mistle Thrush (this species has been totally absent from the Havant area for a couple of months or more). Three or four Chiff Chaff were calling from trees near the Langbrook stream, and when checking out the half dozen Egrets in the Wade Court yew tree I also saw twelve Grey Heron in the saltings close offshore and the unusual sight of more than ten Cormorant resting on a mudbank further out by Swear Deep

PLANTS:

SUN 24 OCT

Today's walk was a short one from home to the Brockhampton Stream, across the South Moors and back into Havant up the Langbrook stream, but during it I added 30 flowering plant species to the 60 which I found yesterday. By far the best in my opinion was a cluster of plants of TREACLE MUSTARD whose yellow flowers caught my eye as I took an unorthodox route across the old IBM Playing Fields (after coming down off Budds Mound I turned up Southmoor Lane and climbed the first gate into the field to save the walk up to the stile in view of a huge raincloud rapidly catching up with me). I was surprised to find this plant growing in what appears to have been well established playing field turf but this particular section of the field south of the IBM Club overflow carpark was in fact never turfed and was actually 'ploughed up' for some reason when IBM were still managing the land (and since then patches of this field have this year been 'disturbed' by the arrival of a travellers camp and the use of a digger to clear up the rubbish they left behind). In this same field one flower of Common Vetch was out and in the Langbrook stream (in the section just below the A27) a huge stalk of MEADOW SWEET waved massive fronds of creamy flowers above the bright blue of WATER FORGET-ME-NOT. Earlier I found Hybrid Water Speedwell still flowering in the Brockhampton Stream pond and even found two clusters of blossom on a Hawthorn tree. Not in flower, but likely to be so soon, is the clump of Greater Celandine on the bank of the Langbrook stream where it passes the new Tesco store - today there was much growth of very fresh leaves and this plant has a history of winter flowering.

SAT 23 OCT

A walk from Woodcroft Farm (south east of the QE Country Park, by the Portsmouth rail line) up onto the downs by Ditcham School and down past the Coulters Dean Bank nature reserve, then back through Head Down plantation, gave me a list of 61 plant species in flower. Most unexpected of these was CHINESE MUGWORT, found alongside the South Downs way where it passes Coulters Dean Farm (builders were working here to complete an extensive upgrade of the accommodation from that into which many visitors to Coulters Dean Bank nature reserve will have been invited in the past to have tea with Frank Gourlay - always dressed in shorts despite his 80+ years - and to hear of the worldwide architectural achievements of his brother - one of these was the construction of the Mersey Tunnel at Liverpool).

.....The Coulters Dean reserve was being grazed by 16 dark brown sheep of some ancient breed favoured by John Durnell as Wildlife Trust volunteers (did they have a choice?) and had Devils Bit and Small Scabious in flower with Burnet Saxifrage, and the Ditcham School conservation area had Oxeye Daisies and Corn Marigolds out. Elsewhere Honeysuckle, Nettle Leaved Bellflower, Field Forget-me-not, and several plants of Red Campion were seen. Among the umbellifers I not only found fresh Cow Parsley in flower in two places but also recorded both Wild Parsnip and Upright Hedge Parsley as well as lots of Hogweed. Marjoram and Wild Basil provided their colour, and a bright yellow field of White Mustard dominated a stretch of the South Downs Way.

WED 20 OCT

Back on Oct 4 I mentioned that I knew of two CORK OAK trees - one in Havant and one near Funtington - and asked if anyone knew of any more in the area around Havant. Today a note from Maragaret Baggs tells me that one should still be found on the north side of Havant Road in Farlington (between Gillman Road and St Andrews Church). When it was planted the tree would have been an adornment to the grounds of a large house that Margaret can remember but which has now been pulled down and replaced by blocks of flats accessed from Copper Beech Drive (no doubt in honour of other trees in the grounds).

TUE 19 OCT

Earlier this year (Feb 21) Paul Stanley and Pete Selby told me they had found MUSK STORKSBILL flowering in the verge of the Seafront Road outside number 164, and in the summer I found the site covered in bulders rubble as work took place at the property. Going back today there is no sign of rubble and the plants are flourishing (still in flower). Another pleasant surprise at the south end of Langstone bridge on the trip home was to see a few new birght yellow flowers on the mass of GOLDEN SAMPHIRE which had been looking totally defunct for several weeks.

MON 18 OCT

A walk around the Havant and Langstone areas this afternoon gave me a list of more than 50 flowering plant species among which GREEN FIELD SPEEDWELL, PELLITORY OF THE WALL, SPOTTED MEDICK and SMALL FLOWERED CRANESBILL are probably worth a mention. Others of interest were Green Alkanet and Water Forget-me-not plus a couple of Wild Rose flowers on one bush

INSECTS:

FRI 22 OCT

Despite the rain and gloom today one RED ADMIRAL was 'flying the flag and doing what England expects of a butterfly' in Brian Fellows Emsworth garden - little did this admiral know that it was a day late for the 194th anniversary of the death of Nelson at the battle of Trafalgar.

THU 21 OCT

Despite dull weather and the east wind one SMALL COPPER was on the wing at Bishops Waltham Moors yesterday (Oct 20) where it was seen by Pete Potts

TUE 19 OCT

Cycling to Hayling and back this morning with a strong, chill, northeast wind blowing I did not expect to see any butterflies but at the very end of the trip, around midday and in the shelter of trees in Havant along the Billy Line, I encountered three RED ADMIRALS

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 24 OCT

Fungi are frustrating things to identify as they are forever changing size, shape and colour as they rapidly grow and decay but as I was walking down by the Brockhampton stream today with Budds Farm on my left I came to the point where the path goes up a slope and there is an open area on the

left from which you can look into the long filter beds and hope to see Water Pipit. Here I noticed a cluster of tiny orange/red 'buttons' on the mossy ground and having brought one home and had a look at it I think it is an EYELASH FUNGUS. In perfect condition these form a shallow bowl about 1cm across with many black 'eyelash' hairs standing up around the rim of the bowl. There are several similar fungi which do not have the black hairs but have a whitish slightly woolly look to the outside of the bowl. This one did not have erect black hairs, not did it have whitish felted hairs on the outside, but it did have a lot of black marks near the rim on the outside which I think might have grown into eyelashes within a day. If this fungus was too young to identify then at the point where the Hermitage stream meets the sea there was a mass of huge AGARICUS BITORQUIS mushrooms which would have made excellent eating a few days earlier but when I saw them they were pock-marked by heavy rain and looked too battered and old to be appetising

SAT 23 OCT

The whitish caps of Hebeloma crustuliniforme, better known as POISON PIE, were trooping on the floor of the Ditcham Woods today, and up at the top of the hill at the crossroads where one turning takes you into the grounds of Ditcham School, a large tree stump was covered with masses of fresh HONEY FUNGUS - the first I have seen this autumn. On another log were my first troop of the largest common Mycena species (M. galericulata, usually called BONNET MYCENA)

WED 20 OCT

WATER VOLES can still be found in the tiny stream running across the wet meadow near Fishbourne Church at Chichester - the fresh water and mass of green vegetation is just what they want - but I have not heard of them elsewhere in our area until tonight. Quite a few casual observers claim to have seen them at Langstone Pond but I know that there are plenty of Brown Rats that can be seen scuttling around the seawall by the pond and helping to clear up the excessive mass of bread thrown to 'feed the ducks' and I suspect that most of those reports are from people who do not know the distinction between the two species. The now rare WATER VOLE ('Ratty' of Wind in the Willows) is about the same size as the very common BROWN RAT (Rattus norvegicus) who is by no means restricted to sewers and dirty places - they probably prefer clean fresh water and will swim in it like the Vole. The things which distinguish the Vole are principally in the shape of the head - a snub nose where the Rat has a long nose, a domed head where the rat is flat, and ears which are small and hidden in fur where those of the rat are prominent. The tail of the vole is shorter but that is just something to back up the evidence of the head. Water Voles inhabit a short stretch of river/pond bank which must offer them plenty of green vegetation (their sole diet) and some sort of bank in which to tunnel though I think the entrances can be below water.

.....What I heard tonight to encourage my hopes that they are still at Langstone came from John Chapman who had been along the seawall at dusk to see if he could find any Egrets roosting in the Wade Court trees - on the way out he noticed a 'rat' plop into the water from the tiny bit of bare pond edge just beyond the pond sluice bridge (not the one above the actual mill stream but the one on the exposed seawall) and coming back he saw it in the same place and was pretty sure of it's Water Vole shaped head.

TUE 19 OCT

On my way to Hayling this morning I checked the pine tree stump in the grass across the road from the Texaco Garage near Langstone Bridge and found the PHAEOLUS SCHWEINITZII fungus in good health, looking like a small round dark brown velvet cushion with gold edging. Arriving home after this trip a plastic bag left on my doorstep also contained a specimen of this fungus with a note requesting ideas on identification. As I was told this specimen had been collected in Havant Thicket from a conifer log and as it still had the uneven concentrically ringed and hairy looking cap surface I was pretty sure it was this same species (though all trace of gold edging had vanished and the brown velvet had progressed towards a look of brittle charcoal). The best confirmation of its identity (after checking its fibrous, rusty coloured, 'flesh') came from an inspection of the pores - in most pored species the books give you an idea of the size of the pores by counting the number to be found per millimetre but with this species the pore diameter can be as big as 4mm (in this case they were about 1mm). This Phaeolus species is the only one of its sort with such big spores, and even without other info it ruled out the possibility of e.g. Innonotus hispidus.

COMMENTS:

23 Oct 99 - from Ralph Hollins - MARINE CONSERVATION

This afternoon the arrival of Richard Cooper on his wind-surfing board at Stokes Bay, Gosport, attracted the well deserved interest of the national media. The event was the completion of a complete circum-navigation of the British Isles by Richard - yes, starting from Gosport he had been blown west along the south coast, headed out to the Fastnet Rock, continued around the west coast of Ireland and up to Cape Wrath to go around Scotland before making his way south along the east coast. This was not a non-stop trip (it is not possible to sleep on a surf-board and difficult to eat while holding on to the sail with both hands) so his exact position was recorded at each stop before he climbed aboard his support ship, and after rest and food he resumed his solo journey from the place where he had stopped. I think the trip took nine weeks to complete.

The trip was intended to raise public awareness of the need for Marine Conservation and the work of the Marine Conservation Society, but so far the media have failed to tell me anything about either matter which is a pity as the sea is such a hugely important part of our environment. I think my present knowledge of Marine Conservation could be stated in three sentences. First, there is a Marine Conservation Society. Second, it has set up an underwater nature trail somewhere along the Dorset coast. Third, our Hampshire Wildlife Trust has in the past had discussions with the Marine Conservation Society about the possibility of declaring the Solent as a marine nature reserve. Alongside these tiny scraps of information are three others. The first being that there are people who sit in a hut at Durlleston Head, and others who travel back and forth on ferries to Spain, dedicating their time to logging their sightings of whales, dolphins and porpoises. The second is that I believe the Marine Conservation Society runs annual beach litter surveys with people counting condoms rather than porpoises. The third and most valuable is that there is a BRITISH MARINE LIFE STUDY SOCIETY which has a website (link to it on my What's New page) giving a lot of information about marine life, but the BMLSS is not, I think, connected to the MCS and is a study, news and information service rather than a conservation body trying to take action on the issues raised by the information gathered.

I am fairly sure that I am not alone in my ignorance and failure to support a vital branch of wildlife conservation so if you know more than I do please pass on what you know.

One final thought - in my youth seagulls fed at sea or along the shores, nowadays they troop inland in their hundreds of thousands every day in search of food. Is that a measure of the degradation of life around our shores?

22 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins – What is the government proposing in the way of relaxing rural development controls?

Everyone must by now have had their fears roused by the media that the government is about to give carte blanche to farmers to build houses and other money making attractions in every beauty spot and SSSI throughout the kingdom. That cannot be true, but what do they have in mind? We all know that existing planning regulations allow any old shed that can be classified as an existing agricultural building to be rebuilt as a much larger 'mansion' of a dwelling, and for huge tin sheds to be built as barns in positions where they dominate the landscape, but we also know the strength of opposition to many developments that do have to go through the planning process (such as the erection of mobile phone masts on hilltops) or to proposals for wind farms. I can see that a relaxation of controls which allowed a farmer to build (in a suitably screened location on his land) some enterprise of his own, or perhaps a collection of small buildings to be let to small businesses, might save him from bankruptcy with no more harm to the environment than the extra traffic to and from that location, and that in some cases the strict rules which now prevent development on good quality agricultural land could be relaxed without detriment to this country's ability to feed itself in a world that is no longer a set of independent states that can haul up their 'drawbridges' and live in isolation.

My own re-action to the general idea of changing rural planning rules is that a change away from rules designed to protect land according to its agricultural value, and more towards its nature conservation/aesthetic value, might well be a good thing. Land of high agricultural value is usually the most intensively farmed and of the least value to wildlife, so wildlife and the environment should both benefit from changes which reduced the acreage of 'agricultural deserts' and gave more protection to the poorer land which supports more wildlife.

The big unanswered question in my mind is how you support the farmers with the poor land and pay them for running 'nature reserves' and preserving the look of 'views', and the biggest worry that I have about what I have heard so far is that the government may be thinking of abandoning its support for all farmers and taking the position that those who cannot find some way of developing their land should go to the wall. That

might result in a lot of abandoned fields – but leaving land management to nature is usually the worst recipe for preserving wildlife habitat or the aesthetic quality of a landscape.

Have you got more idea of what the government are really thinking of doing? Or have you got the solution to all the problems faced by farmers and government? If so do let us know...

18 Oct 99 – from Trevor Carpenter – Thoughts on the changing scene at Whiteley

The following paragraph is taken from Trevor Carpenter's account of a cycle ride around the 'Western Wards' of Fareham yesterday ...

'I explored the horribly sterile Whiteley area with its small remnants of Woodland now managed as a reminder of what used to be there. Interestingly there are some birds on the remaining fields, open spaces and areas under development. Meadow Pipits, Pied Wagtails and Linnets are all fairly abundant. I seem to remember that parts of the Segenswoth estate were popular with the same species during development. The new shopping centre on Whiteley is going to be huge and I can't see that there is any alternative to Gridlock on the roads with the additional traffic that it will generate. The thousands of people who live there must think its nice but there must be some people who can see the folly of destroying one of the last major wooded areas in our our region.'

I have not been here for a good few years but have good memories of a great stand of several hundred Early Purple Orchids flowering in Round Coppice at around SU 532095. Is there still a wood there? From what I hear there is perhaps a little compensation in the creation of new ponds attracting birds and dragonflies, and in the creation of a 'Whiteley Pastures' nature reserve in the edge of the main Botley Woods. As Trevor says some of the people living there, perhaps after being brought up in a city, must think it is a nice place (when they are not trying to drive in or out), and any who are prepared to walk a mile or so into the woods can hear quite a few Nightingales singing in May and see a good number of butterflies (but if too many of the people start to walk the woods, and their dogs, cats and children to use the woods as a playground will the wildlife stay?). Your comments on this or similar scenes of changing countryside will interest me and hopefully many others.

WEEK 41 OCT 11 - 17

BIRDS:

SUN 17 OCT

Recent sightings from the SOS website include a FIRECREST in Church Norton churchyard yesterday (Oct 16) when another Firecrest was in the Beachy Head area with 3 BRAMBLING and 2 BLACK REDSTART.

Paul Winter's pager carried news of the Titchfield Haven TEMMINCK'S STINT still being present at midday today (on the South Scrape).

The report of two White Winged Black Tern being seen all day on Sunday Oct 10 at Ivy Lake, Chichester has given Brian Fellows a severe bout of remorse as he was there on that day and reported seeing two Black Tern. In case it helps others such as myself to avoid a similar attack in future this is what Brian tells me ... 'The only time I have seen a White-winged Black Tern in this country was on 16 Sept 1998 also on Ivy Lake. My identification then was assisted by several other birders who were also looking at the bird. This time I was on my own. Also, on that occasion the bird was a juvenile with a distinctive dark saddle. I did not notice any such saddle on the birds last Sunday which would have alerted me to the possibility of a White-winged. Maybe I should have considered the possibility of a White-winged adults in winter plumage, but I didn't. Looking through my various Bird Guides I can see that the distinction between the two adult terns in their winter plumage is very subtle indeed and one which I was not aware of.'

.....Keith Vinnicombe describes some differences between Black and White Winged Black Tern. ... 'White Winged is slightly shorter billed than Black (recalling Little Gull), has slightly shorter and rounder wings and slightly stiffer wingbeats' He goes on to say that, in adults ... 'White Winged lacks the Black's dark breast patches, upper wings are paler than Black's and at this time of year should contrast with blackish outer primaries and inner secondaries, the rump should be noticeably whiter than Black Tern, and there should be less black on the head (just a small patch behind the eye and streaking on rear crown of White Winged)

Brian Fellows outing today took him to Snow Hill at West Wittering where there were only 11 Brent on show with 200 Dunlin and a few Oystercatcher, Lapwing and Redshank. At the end of last

winter this is I think where the Black Brant could be seen and it may return here and bring more Brent with it as Barry Collins is of the opinion that the Brant which he now has on the Thorney southern shore is probably the one that was in Chichester Harbour before – this time it arrived as part of a flock of 44 Brent but they have now merged into one of 278.

.....Brian's next call was at the hide overlooking the marshy fields north of the Chichester Marina. I did not know those fields had a special name but Brian tells me they are known as Apuldrum Manor Farm Marsh and that the hide (in memory of Peter Catlett) has a record in it of 102 different bird species seen from it so far. At present the marsh is dry but despite the lack of water a Kingfisher was logged there yesterday along with 4 BEARDED TIT in the reeds (I assume these were just passing through but maybe they are regulars?). If you are in the Wittering area next Thursday evening you would no doubt be welcome to the meeting of the Chichester RSPB Group in West Wittering Memorial Hall at 7.30pm for a double bill of Anne de Potier talking about Chichester Harbour and John Herring on the Birds of Sussex.

Although REED BUNTINGS prefer to nest in wetland situations, and may also be reliant on reed beds for large communal night roosts in winter time, they can be found searching for seeds on the ground almost anywhere in winter and are regular visitors to any gardens where seed is regularly spread on the ground. In hard weather our Hampshire population is much increased by birds driven from other parts of England or the continent where snow cover or frost makes ground feeding on farmland impossible. A message from Paul Winter this evening notes the arrival of one today in his father's garden at North Baddesley (where seed is put out on the ground) and Paul says that, though half a dozen Reed Bunting turn up there each day from January to March today's bird is the earliest arrival by a good month over the years in which his father has been keeping records. Is this just chance? or are Reed Bunting also arriving in other gardens earlier than usual - and if so, why?

SAT 16 OCT

Kevin Stouse led a walk around the Cobnor peninsula (between Thorney and Bosham) today and recorded 58 bird species which started with a pair of Stonechat and went on to give give views of around 300 each of Brent and Wigeon (no Pintail yet in Nutbourne Bay but there were 2 Greenshank). 5 MERGANSER were probably the first that most of the party had seen this autumn and the single Wheatear and Sandwich Tern may well have been their last for this year. A Kingfisher gave some of the party good but brief views, while all could enjoy a flock of over 100 Linnet and many Meadow Pipit on the fields which also had 10 Grey Partridge (which I suspect may well be intended for shooting though I have never come across shoots taking place here). Kevin adds a footnote saying that he omitted to mention the noisy presence of a Cetti's Warbler in the reeds along the stream at Farlington Marsh where last week's walk took place.

Brian Fellows was in new territory when he joined the Evening Class walk in the Head Down (Buriton) fungus foray today - I suspect that others who have been there before will have found changes to the scenery due to extensive logging that has been going on since mid-summer, and Brian may find a similar change to his BBS square SU 7409 where much timber is being taken from the Southleigh Forest at this moment. Brian reports that the only bird interest was in a couple of vocal Marsh Tits and a Dunnock which favoured him with a burst of autumn song - I find Dunnock very reticent to sing in the autumn and this year have only heard them three times (Sept 21, 28 and Oct 14) - mid-January is the time they really get going (this year Jan 21)

Barry Collins this evening brought me up to date with birds on Thorney, starting with the arrival today of the first three families of Brent with young - two families with 3 young and one with 2. The BLACK BRANT is still present but now you have to search for it among a flock of 278 Brent - it's a lot easier to spot the 3 Peregrines which harass other birds around the island.

.....The last OSPREYS seem to have gone - Barry Collins had two still present on Oct 11 and one remained till the next day but that one on Oct 12 was the last seen. Summer migrants are still trickling through with one REDSTART and one SEDGE WARBLER seen on Oct 14 when a single WHIMBREL was present, possibly thinking of staying for the winter.

Mark Litjens found the Temmick's Stint still at Titchfield Haven this afternoon (and had a Common Sandpiper at Hook with lots of butterflies). Further up the Meon Valley (on the east side of the West Walk woods) John Shillitoe heard WOODLARK SONG this morning and spotted three of these birds in a Rhubarb patch in the market garden fields behind his house at Hundred Acres - later he flushed three more (?) from a pony paddock a couple of hundred yards from the first three. Two Stonechat are also in that area, probably for the winter as are Lapwing, several of which gave a Buzzard a severe harrying near Soberton this morning. John also tells me that there have been several sightings of both RED KITE and PEREGRINE around Old Winchester Hill recently.

One SWALLOW going over my garden early in the morning made me look up to see what looked like 20 House Martins going east with it but they could even have been other Swallows as they were high up and I had not got my glasses on. Later I was in Havant Thicket and had one party of five CROSSBILL heading north overhead, and heard one SISKIN. Goldcrest were numerous with other tits.

FRI 15 OCT

This morning Tim Timlick was in the Stansted area and had a good view of a single RAVEN flying west over Lumley Seat (square SU7611 – offset 81 within it) which he described as huge ('making a Woodpigeon flying close to it look like a Goldcrest'), black and having a very wedge shaped tail I heard this from Tim when I met him on the seawall by Langstone Pond where he had just seen four GOLDEN PLOVER among a mass of Grey Plover (I saw one of the Golden Plover which flew close to me as the flock took off). Chris Packham happened to be in the Royal Oak having lunch during a break in trying to film Little Egrets for a new TV series of Birdwatch with Chris Packham, and he told me that Ravens are now breeding 'somewhere in the Avon valley' so we are almost certainly seeing a return of these birds to Hampshire where they bred in good numbers up to around 1850 (last recorded nest in 1887)

Paul Winter's pager today reported a TEMMINCK'S STINT at Titchfield Haven from around 10am to 4pm, but with no news of it flying off so there is a good chance it will stay overnight

Two good birds which it seems have now moved on were WHITE WINGED BLACK TERN which spent all day at Ivy Lake, Chichester on Sunday Oct 10 but were only reported on the Sussex recent sightings website on Thursday Oct 14

News of recent Sussex sightings today was of a SHORT EARED OWL at Pagham harbour with Hobby, Wheatear, two Curlew Sandpiper and a Dartford Warbler.

Brian Fellows walked from Emsworth towards the Thorney Deeps this afternoon with the tide up and consequently no waders in the harbour. He did however hear a CETTI'S WARBLER shouting from the thick scrub along the path which runs from the west shore to Thornham Lane through Marina Farm. In view of the number of these birds now being found in our area this is probably a newcomer, different from those recently noted at both Little and Great Deeps

THU 14 OCT

The Sussex recent sightings web page reports some good sightings at Church Norton today. The first BRAMBLING and some late YELLOW WAGTAIL were there and 5 WOODLARK flew over as did a HOBBY and a MARSH HARRIER.

Today Brian Fellows walked the fields beside the River Ems south of Westbourne and into Emsworth. The water level was low, attracting two GREEN SANDPIPER to paddle and feed, and five GREY WAGTAIL which flew over, presumably a family, will also benefit from the chance to catch insects on the exposed shores which have recently had the vegetation cut back. In Emsworth a dog walker told Brian of a recent sighting of a KINGFISHER perched on a branch above the river.

This evening the harbour off Broadmarsh was choppy but the RED NECKED GREBE was still present with 2 Great Crested and 10 little Grebes (a pity none of the Black Necked showed up to make a full house)

A walk around the Idsworth area (north of Rowlands Castle and south east of the QE Country Park) produced some excellent flowers but few birds. A male WHINCHAT on the slopes of Idsworth Down was the best bird, and a DUNNOCK in the next bush thought the occasion worth a celebratory song. The other interesting sight came when I was on top of the down with magnificent views east into Sussex and west over the Forest of Bere towards the New Forest – I was roused from contemplation by the sharp calls of a Kestrel and for a moment thought it had a mate and was in courtship mode but I soon saw the second bird to be a female Sparrowhawk whose flight path along the ridge happened to co-incide with that of the Kestrel. They continued together for some way, then presumably came into a good updraught in which the Kestrel decided to hang and look for food below while the Sparrowhawk began to circle and soar – no doubt keeping its eye on the woods and hedges in the valley below, but as the only flock of birds I had seen there was just one of some 30 Linnets she was wise in saving her energy. Later, coming down past Heberdens Farm to St Hubert's Chapel, I was surprised to find not one Collared Dove in sight – there is usually a flock of more than 20 on or around the farm buildings (perhaps the Sparrowhawk has had the lot).

Three people told me of an error in yesterday's note of a Raven in Sussex – it appears that it was seen at Eastdean in the Cuckmere valley near Beachy Head, not at East Dean near Goodwood. My apologies if I caused anyone a fruitless journey to the downs but perhaps we can all learn from it the usefulness of map references, and while on that subject I would like to propose that other

people consider adopting my own way of writing map references. Leaving aside the two letter prefix which defines the 100 km square the normal way to write a map reference is as six digits which you have to carry in your head while searching the map to find the position referred to. Being lazy I find it much easier to split the reference into two parts – first the four digit number which defines the 1km square (I find it much easier to carry four digits in my head while finding the appropriate square by looking at the numbers printed on the edge of the map) and to deal with the other two digits which define the offset within that square separately (you have to use a different technique with these as they are not printed on the map – I use the scale printed on the clear plastic surround of my compass, others may just estimate the offset by eye). So I consider that there are two good reasons for writing the map reference which would conventionally be written as e.g. 123456 as 1245 – 36. Try it and see – maybe you will come to think how much easier it is.

WED 13 OCT

A visit to SOS Recent Sightings website today produced the following items. Several reports of YELLOW BROWED WARBLER - none near us but keep your eyes and ears open. At Selsey Bill yesterday (Oct 12) there were six Med Gulls on the beach and in Pagham Hbr there were 29 Little Egret, 12 SPOTTED REDSHANK, 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 2 Avocet and 2 Dartford Warbler. Over at Brighton Colin Law had a wing tagged HEN HARRIER on the downs which attracted a comment from Brian Etheridge of the RSPB in Inverness who identified it as a juvenile male that had had the benefit of supplementary feeding (part of an experiment to see if extra food will stop them taking Grouse - half the Harriers in the area are being given extra food and half are not, and the tags help to show which birds take the Grouse).

.....Last Saturday (Oct 9) a RAVEN was seen 'over New Barn, between Exceat Bridge and East Dean' where one had been seen ten days before. I cannot find Exceat Bridge on the map but there is a New Barn just north of East Dean at SU 907136 which is just over the hill north of Goodwood. Could be our Hampshire roving Ravens ... On Friday 8 Oct a LAPLAND BUNTING was in a stubble field behind the Severals at Church Norton

Anne de Potier tells me today she has checked with the Army on Thorney Island and they tell her that both gates in the military fence are working again at present so if you want to walk around you should be able to do so and many have. If you want to make doubly sure, or are leading a party, why not drive down to the guard post on the main road and check on the situation before driving back to park at the Thornham Lane junction (to avoid blocking other traffic pull in before you reach the guards)

The Broadmarsh RED NECKED GREBE was seen this evening by Brian Fellows who says that when he got there 'the sun was low in the sky, but visibility was very good and there was still plenty of water in the channel. The Red-necked Grebe was on the water in the area marked on the OS map as Storehouse Lake. The bird was still very well marked with its contrasting black crown and white cheeks and fairly thick yellowish bill. It did not appear to have any red on its neck, but I will have look at the bird another day with my scope.' When I was there looking for it yesterday I did note one male Wigeon in a party of 13 which had its beautiful head stripe fully feathered.

TUE 12 OCT

Russell Wynn was the the Itchen Valley CP this morning and came on four CROSSBILL and a CETTI'S WARBLER while a moderate number of Redwing, Song Thrush and finches passed overhead. Another CROSSBILL flew over Brian Fellows at Soberton in the Meon Valley (though this was on Wednesday afternoon - Oct 13)

Andrew Gibb had a good visit to Pennington yesterday (Oct 11) during which he ticked 59 species in four hours including Pintail, Peregrine Falcon, Greenshank, Little Stint, Arctic Tern and Kingfisher. One species that he could not tick with confidence was a Common Scoter, seen out at sea with the sun behind it.

Today I was at Hayling Oysterbeds and saw my first MERGANSER, then heard a FIRECREST in scrub behind the Esso Garage. I had a brief view showing some of that lovely green on the body and a pale side to the head rather than a brilliant eyestripe so it must have been a juvenile. As it flew off Tim Timlick appeared on the scene and told me that he had seen his first Merganser on Oct 6, and that he reckoned there were now 1,500 BRENT in Langstone harbour though I could only see 500 from the Hayling Billy line as I went on down it. At Sandy Point Pete Durnell confirmed that last Sunday (Oct 10) Andy Parfitt had seen a RING OUZEL on the reserve and also told me there was a Red Necked Grebe at Broadmarsh.

.....Before I could go there I met Grant King in Havant and he said the Red Necked Grebe had been

showing well for about a week. He said it was a well marked adult, and could generally be seen in the evening in the main channel used by gravel ships coming into the Brockhampton Quay (often around the post marked J) and could be seen from Broadmarsh Slipway area. Among other things which Grant told me was that one of the four Black Necked Grebe currently in Langstone Harbour one has a 'flat head' and could easily be mistaken for a Slav Grebe - you have been warned. He also said he had heard that a BARN OWL had recently been seen in fields close to West Town Station on Hayling (the southern end of the Coastal Path) while further up the Coastal Path, just south of the path to the West Lane bends, the Little Owl can still be seen with luck near the dead tree in the hedge of the field between what I call 'Aston Villa' (the house on West Lane) and the old railway.

..... While on Hayling I found a Mallard in the Fishery Lane lake with 11 newly hatched ducklings and above the West Lane fields I heard my first SKYLARK song (Brian Fellows had his first yesterday). At Beachlands a male Stonechat was on the gorse and Pete Durnell told me he has seen a lot of these on Hayling recently. Back at home a pair of Collared Dove have taken up residence in the garden again after their autumn holiday - like the Mallard they breed almost any time of year and maybe these two are thinking of nesting again though they are probably just after the seed I put out.

Brian Fellows was in Portsmouth today and, in addition to 52 Swans at the Canoe Lake and just one Snow Goose at Baffins (confirming the demise of its partner), his highlights included his first decent flock of RINGED PLOVER (72 in the 'Glory Hole' now called Eastney Lake) and the biggest tally of CETTI'S WARBLER so far in the Milton area where a female REDSTART was also seen. On the subject of CETTI'S Brian says 'I confirmed last week's sighting (hearing actually) of 6 Cetti's Warblers singing on the lakes - with 3 on Swan Lake SU676005, 1 on Duck Lake SU676009 and 2 on Frog Lake SU675012. The only change from last week was that one has moved from Frog Lake to Duck Lake.' Moving on across the Eastern Road to Great Salterns he heard at least 4 Cetti's singing, increasing the overall total for the area to at least 10 birds. Incidentally Brian has told me that the figure, given in my notes for Oct 6, of 7 Cetti's territories in this area in 1998 reported by Bob Chapman should be corrected to be for this year 1999.

..... Going on to Farlington Marshes there were plenty of waders on the lake but the best views were of a perched KINGFISHER and a WATER RAIL showing well for 15 minutes. From the marshes only 220 Brent could be seen - probably the same flock Brian had seen from Eastney - and the notice board reported a maximum of 600 Brent in the harbour so it seems that Tim Timlick's count of 1,500 must have been of a short stay flock on route further west. Our birds certainly are latecomers this year.

MON 11 OCT

Brian Fellows cycled down the Thorney seawall from Emsworth to the Great Deeps today and enjoyed the first brief SKYLARK song of the winter as he did so - probably the song was more of a 'keep off' to continental immigrants than a 'come on' to any female but to our ears it is a welcome and cheering sound. Other cheering things were a Kingfisher seen over the Little Deeps and Bearded Tit heard pinging in the reeds - this is the time of year when these birds fly to distant places to spread their numbers more evenly across the available habitat and prevent exhaustion of the food supply during the winter as would happen if all this year's young stayed with their parents. Kevin Stouse noted some flying high overhead at Farlington yesterday and no doubt we will soon see them towering above these Little Deeps - they may well funk it for the first two or three attempts and fall back into the reeds from which they started but eventually they will be off on what must be an astounding adventure for a young Bearded Tit that has never seen beyond its home reedbed until now.

..... Before going to Thorney Brian had checked out other parts of the Emsworth shoreline and ponds, and had watched a party of three Brent fly north towards the town, wheel around and head back south at high speed. Possibly these were outriders of a bigger flock but I still have no news of any major arrival either of Brent or Shelduck. On the Mill Pond the Black Swan remains with just 52 Mute Swan and 70 Mallard and the only newcomer to any of the ponds was a single Cormorant on the Slipper Mill (these birds are now occupying most of the available perches around Langstone at high tide and I suspect that this is true all along the coast. In Emsworth Harbour the number of waders remains low with 103 Black Tailed Godwit being the only numerous species - for the rest there were 38 Redshank, 24 Curlew, 12 Dunlin and just 2 Greenshank - not even one Little Egret. Only yesterday I included in the Other Wildlife page a warning from Richard Hallett concerning Lyme disease and today the HOS Newsletter arrived with a similar warning from Julian Moseley. Julian

admits he is not a doctor (Richard I think is) but he does give some valuable advice on removing ticks from your skin and says that if such a bite results in an inflamed ring around the bite you should get to your GP as soon as possible - it is possible to prevent Lyme disease from developing if treated early but if not there are possibilities of trouble with your heart or nervous system which do not sound pleasant.

.....also in the new HOS Newsletter is an update to the info I put out last Friday about reporting colour marked gulls - it seems that Peter Rock, 59 Concorde Drive, Westbury on Trym, Bristol BS10 6PX is co-ordinator for all gull marking schemes in Europe so if in doubt try him first (and note that the previous address I gave for him missed the Westbury on Trym bit but did have the right post code).

The walk around Farlington Marshes led by Kevin Stouse yesterday morning started well with three BLACK NECKED GREBE in the scopes before they left Broadmarsh with 14 Brent close to the shore there for those who only had binoculars. Closer still were many Ringed Plover along the Chalk Dock shore with Dunlin, Turnstone, 1 Greenshank and many Black Tailed Godwit.

Reaching the reserve building Bearded Tit could be heard in the reeds and some saw both Water Rail and Snipe in the stream as the party made its way through the bushes area where there were both Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker. Coming out on the western seawall the small island near the carpark was crowded with Grey Plover plus two Knot, a few Dunlin and Turnstone, and the reserve lake was crammed with Redshank and Black Tailed Godwit but little else - just a few Dunlin, two Snipe and some distant Bearded Tits. A pause at the new viewing platform gave views of three Bearded Tit flying overhead and excellent close views of a Water Rail just below the platform. When they reached the Point the tide was right up but 5 Pale Bellied Geese were very considerate and had come out of the water to stand on the small island of bricks and stones and show off their pale bellies. Up to around 1950 a house stood on this 'island' and Muriel Hudson who still lives in Langstone Village can remember rowing out to visit her uncle who lived here (and had a well going down to the chalk beneath the harbour for his fresh water). On the main marsh fields more than 100 Wigeon could be seen with 11 Egrets and 15 Heron but the deeps were empty of birds (just one Tufted Duck left after the local Peregrine is thought to have frightened off everything else). Finally there were 43 Great Crested Grebe and one female Pintail in Chalk Dock on the way back.

PLANTS:

SAT 16 OCT

A week ago (Oct 9) I was told of a possible find of TRAILING TORMENTIL in Havant Thicket near the northern of the two ponds just north of the carpark and today I found this species (or the look-alike hybrid) in a different part of the Thicket in square SU 7110 at offset 66 where the 'yellow brick road' going north up the side of the 'Nightjar valley' begins to turn left before dropping down to the water lily pond (the location is on the right of the path going north, right at the edge of the gravel in the curved section between two tracks going off to the right). What caught my eye were tiny yellow Tormentil flowers apparently growing on the ground but when I went to look I find a mass of interwoven trailing stems, rooting at the nodes and holding up small leaves on stems about 1 cm long. No part of the plants were raised off the ground other than these leaves. One small plant of Common Centaury was flowering at the same spot, and further down the valley alongside the streamlet I found the white Heath Milkwort in flower.

THU 14 OCT

This morning I parked by St Hubert's Chapel at Idsworth, just up the valley from Rowlands Castle and Finchdean, and walked in the valley along which the Portsmouth to London rail line runs before climbing Idsworth Down to complete my circuit. On the roadside where I started was my first botanic surprise - CROSSWORT in full flower (I see the leaves of this everywhere but it never seems to flower in the autumn until today when I found it flowering in two places). A few yards south of where I parked I took the field path east to go close to the house with the huge walled garden and the avenue of Lime trees that have the best Mistletoe in our area - if you have wondered at the disproportion of house and grounds you should know that there was a large house here in the early 1800s, but when the railway was built within half a mile of it the owner was so annoyed at the interruption to his peace that he took the house down brick by brick and rebuilt it as what is now Idsworth House on the Rowlands Castle to Blendworth/Horndean road. Beyond the house I turned north to pass behind the chapel and here found the first flowering of autumn COW PARSLEY (flowering in three or four places today). Past the chapel and over the road leading to

Littlegreen and Compton I went north on the broad field edge path west of Great Idsworth Farm. I have heard that the farmer here is well disposed to wildlife and knew he has planted a number of new copses of trees (there is a FWAG notice on this footpath advertising their involvement in a coppicing scheme) but I was unprepared for the delight of finding the field edge of this path had been sown as a wildflower bed of CORNCOCKLE, CORNFLOWER, CORN MARIGOLD and other plants including WEASELS SNOUT, SMALL TOADFLAX and WALL SPEEDWELL. I hope others will be able to enjoy this unusual display of wildflowers until nature puts an end to the display but only a few hundred yards away ploughing, planting and rolling were taking place changing the flower rich stubble to a brown surface as level as tarmac – luckily I found some of the Corn Marigold plants flourishing in the hedgerow below the pretty pink of Spindle Berries and the rich red of Rose Hips, though I guess the seeds of these field weed plants need the soil to be ploughed for them to grow next year. Further on I found the first of two sites for DWARF SPURGE, and then I was climbing the down accompanied by Small Scabious, Burnet Saxifrage, Rough, Smooth and Lesser Hawkbit. Marjoram and Mignonette were flowering at the top of the down where I also found Field Forget-me-not and Hedgerow Cranesbill. At the end of my walk, dropping down to Heberdens Farm, SHARP LEAVED FLUELLEN was in flower (just) with more Small Toadflax, Dwarf Spurge and masses of Field Madder. Two final things to mention about plants are the strong sickly smell of IVY blossom everywhere today – this is the first day that I have smelt it this year – and to correct an omission from my last note for Tuesday and record that at the end of the day I passed a second Hawthorn tree with blossom on it.

TUE 12 OCT

Along the Eastoke promenade on Hayling two plants of YELLOW HORNED POPPY had flowers as did SEA PINK and STICKY GROUNDSEL. At Sandy Point SEA ROCKET was flourishing and at Black Point the last few flowers could be seen on a TREE LUPIN. Where the sand has been piled up by bulldozers at Black Point several large clumps of SALTWORT (now over) have grown and on my way home, taking an unusual route via the Mengham shore, I found TASSELLWEED in the Fishery Lane lake (both Beaked and Spiral Tasselweed were found here by Pete Selby this summer) with LESSER SEA SPURREY flowering on the shore. Nearing Megham Rythe Sailing Club I came on a large tuft of grass which I believe to be HUNGARIAN BROME, found the remains of much Spiny Restharrow and also Atriplex humilis in full flower.

MON 11 OCT

I usually keep a record of all the plant species I find in flower during each winter month to act as measure of declining and then reviving life so while driving past the New Lane allotments in Havant this morning I felt I should stop to check if one of my summer friends was still alive - this is the LESSER SNAPDRAGON (or 'Weasel's Snout') and sure enough there were quite a few plants still bearing delicate pastel pink flowers. I was en route to Havant Thicket and there found LESSER SKULLCAP with half a dozen similar but paler small flowers on show. Near this plant I collected a couple of prickly samples from what I suspected to be DWARF GORSE and have now checked that it is that species (to my great relief as I had previously been told that the way to identify Dwarf Gorse was that the spines were soft and that you could grasp it without discomfort). I have found Gorse of which this is true but that test is nothing to do with identifying Dwarf Gorse - it's chief characteristics are in the smaller size of its flowers and seed pods (which persist through the winter and burst in the spring, unlike common Gorse whose larger pods burst in the heat of the summer). One of my main reasons for coming to the Thicket was to search for the possible Trailing Tormentil but I am sorry to say that I failed to find it and will have to make another trip now I have better directions. One plant which I am unlikely to see here but which I am told is flowering at Soberton is COWSLIP.

INSECTS:

SAT 16 OCT

Mark Litjens was at Hook (Warsash) today and recorded the following list of insects there ... 85

Common Darter, 15 Migrant Hawker and 2 Southern Hawker plus 6 Red Admiral, 2 Large White and one each of Small White, Small Copper, Speckled Wood and even a COMMON BLUE.

Further up the Meon Valley near Wickham John Shillitoe saw a PAINTED LADY as well as the obligatory Red Admirals.

In Havant Thicket this morning a SOUTHERN HAWKER dragonfly gave me close views as it rested on braken in the sun. Less surprisingly several Common Darter were seen and I hear that a couple of Red Admiral were seen in a Hayling garden today while Barry Collins tells me that he had both SPECKLED WOOD and one WALL BROWN on Thursday Oct 14 with other Red Admirals around Thorney Island.

THU 14 OCT

On Brian Fellows walk up the River Ems to Westbourne and back to Emsworth today he saw 8 RED ADMIRAL which reminds me that yesterday Rosemary Webb told me that there had been 2 PEACOCK and single RED ADMIRAL and BRIMSTONE in her Hayling garden last Sunday (Oct 10)

Despite fairly warm sunshine and lots of flowers the chill nights are bringing the butterfly season to an end and today I saw just one RED ADMIRAL in nearly three hours out in the sun.

TUE 12 OCT

Butterflies did not start to fly until after midday today but by the time I reached Sandy Point I had seen a few Small White and while at the reserve saw both Red Admiral and one SMALL COPPER.

Pete Durnell told me he had seen a PAINTED LADY there before I arrived and I went on to see at least one Large White and more than half a dozen Common Darter.

MON 11 OCT

Sunshine at lunchtime gave Mark Litjens a good chance to check on late butterflies in Hursley Park and to his surprise he found a lone SMALL TORTOISESHELL (the only one to be seen there since April 15). Less surprising were 2 Red Admiral, 2 Brimstone and 1 Speckled Wood.

Here in Havant I saw one Large White in my garden today and had a close up of a Southern Hawker dragonfly working the edges of a pond in Havant Thicket.

Chris Fairhead was in the Lady's Walk at Stansted Forest on Sunday 3 Oct when he spotted two hairy caterpillars which he has subsequently identified as those of the PALE TUSSOCK MOTH. As they should normally have pupated at the end of September (and there was a delay in getting the news to me on account of an email problem) it is unlikely that others will see these caterpillars this year but if you do they are quite eye-catching and easy to identify. Full grown they are 4 cm long and have a generally white appearance with a mass of hairs all over but principally in a series of tufts (just like a toothbrush) along their backs. At the rear end of the body a longer, thinner tuft of hair forms a sort of tail. The colour of the caterpillars body and of the hairs is variable but one thing that remains constant is the black which forms bands around the body behind each tuft of hairs - this is not very prominent until you frighten the caterpillar when it curls up, exposing and stretching these bands and seems to change colour and/or vanish from sight. The caterpillars eat birch, oak, elm and other deciduous tree leaves but apparently they love Hop leaves and when these were grown commercially for beer-making these caterpillars could be a menace to the growers and the caterpillars were called 'HOP DOGS' (don't try them in a bun with mustard - you won't like the hairs).

.....While eating my lunch at home I noticed a fairly large moth had settled on the outside of the dining room window and with the aid of a step ladder I was able to go outside and have a good look at it while it slept. At rest it held its wings in a slightly rounded delta shape (like the old Vulcan bomber) with the front edge of the forewing measuring 2cm. From a distance it looked very dark brown but close up there were irregular bands of different colour across the wing, one of a faint lichen green and a smaller one of an orange colour, and the moth looked a bit faded with a slightly ragged rear edge to the wing (I could not see the hind wings). After finding several that looked a bit like it (but which flew in spring or summer) I think I hit on the right id as a MALLOW moth which flies in September and was of the right size and approximate colouration - not uncommon, but it always gives pleasure to solve a problem of identity and thus acquire a new 'friend for life'!

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 16 OCT

In Head Down plantation above Buriton today the Evening Class had a fungus foray of which I hear that EARTH STARS (both Geatrum sessile and G. triplex) can now be seen there along with many other regulars, but logging operations have made it difficult to find some of the others where caterpillar tractors have changed the face of the ground. In Havant Thicket today I was successful in finding the RHODOTUS PALMATUS which the Class had been shown by Rosemary Webb last week - this fungus is supposed to grown only on Elm logs but here it is I think growing on the wood of a young Beech tree which had for some reason been cut down in its youth (probably to make way for the new path which enters the woodland just here).

THU 14 OCT

If you were to stop at the Texaco Garage as you arrive on Hayling Island and cross the main road to a

clump of well spaced conifers you should find PHAEOLUS SCHWEINITZII on the stump of an old conifer (I believe the tree was blown over in one of the Hurricanes of the late 80s and landed on a policeman - who luckily was not hurt). In case you are not familiar with this uncommon species it is a toadstool with a very short stem and large circular cap up to 30cm across, the whole being a rich dark brown colour except for an attractive gold rim to the cap. This fungus has appeared here in recent autumns and I have also seen it in Leigh Park Gardens where it looked just like Roger Phillips photo of it with blade of fresh green grass seemingly growing through the fungus. Rosemary also gave me further clues to finding the rare and beautiful apricot coloured, pink spored, RHODOTUS PALMATUS toadstools which the Evening Class had found in Havant Thicket a week ago and for which I looked in vain last Monday - the trouble with my directions was that there are two ponds just north of the carpark and I was looking near the northern one where I should have crossed the ride from the southern pond and looked for a large deciduous log lying just within the trees opposite (easily visible from the broad ride) under a narrow belt of deciduous trees along the southern border of the conifers. The fungi seen a week ago will be over but others could have grown from the same log.

One ROE doe was a slightly unexpected sight when it burst from a tiny isolated clump of bushes on Idsworth Down as I approached this morning and I was surprised not to see a single Rabbit in a three hour walk. A few molehills and Badger pits were normal and there was the usual miscellaneous collection of toadstools which I could not name though I did come on and gather one cluster of Horse Mushrooms. The mention of toadstools reminds me that earlier this week I have seen SHAGGY INKCAPS pushing up in several places.

WED 13 OCT

Those who were at IBM with me and who knew Gerry Wells will be pleased to know he is still enjoying life on the farm French style even though that sometimes involves packs of dogs chasing wild boar across his farm. Gerry obviously likes these animals and says in their defence .. 'They do not cause a great deal of damage, and to my knowledge have never injured anyone who wasn't 'interfering' with their lives.' He goes on to say .. 'It is amazing to me that animals as big as this can live in groups of 12 or more - and still rarely be seen. Anyone who has worked with or kept pigs will know how intelligent, sociable animals these 'monsters' must really be.' They certainly seem to keep a pretty low profile in this country and I guess their unseen presence gives more credence to stories of big cats (but I won't start on that now).

MON 11 OCT

While in Havant Thicket this morning I kept finding new and colourful fungi every few yards and inevitably many of them went without attempt at identification but I did note several 'first finds' for this autumn of ones that I already know and the first of these was the common but easily overlooked EARTH FAN - a good name as the fruiting bodies do look like the tips of half-spread fans just protruding from the earth. They are mostly dark brown in colour turning lighter brown and then almost whitish at the frayed edges and they only stick up at most an inch above the surface, but as in this case there are usually quite a lot in a small area and once seen they look like small waves rippling over the ground in a totally irregular fashion. This find was made in an open patch of heathy grassland near a conifer plantation which is typical habitat for them. The most impressive find this morning was a troop of 42 FLY AGARIC toadstools with examples of every stage of development from round button to fully open flat cap, but none had yet started to decay or become so rain-washed that their caps were of a pale orange colour with no spots left. In the same area were two PENNY BUNS or CEPs, and the proof of their excellent edibility was to be seen in the way slugs had already half devoured them, some chewing from the cap downwards and others attacking from below.

COMMENTS:

15 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins – [A proposal to make it easier to use MAP REFERENCES](#)

By far the simplest and most precise way to describe the location of any place in the British Isles is by giving its map reference. Today I reported the sighting of a Raven at SU 768111 which you must agree is more concise and very much more accurate than to say that the bird was flying over 'Lumley Seat, a building half a mile east of Stansted Forest which is near Rowlands Castle' (especially as other people would possibly use other place names in their description or might not know where Rowlands Castle is). All OS maps and almost all other maps such as road atlases have at least the major lines of the national grid on them, enabling you to pin point a location using offsets from those lines. On the OS maps these lines define squares whose

sides are 1km long, and the lines are numbered in a way that gives each of these 1km squares a unique number within a 100 km square. These 100 km squares are defined by a two letter combination (most of Hampshire lies in the SU square) and the new OS Explorer series of maps, of which I would expect every naturalist to have the sheet covering his own area, have in their information section a map of the whole of the British Isles showing all the 100 km squares and their reference letters.

So SU 768111 defines a place within the SU major square which is 76,800 metres east of the 00 line up the west border of the SU square and 11,100 metres north of the southern base line of the SU square (leaving an uncertainty about the location of at most 100 metres in each direction).

To find this location I get out my map and look along the bottom of the map for the north/south line numbered 76, then find where it intersects with the east/west line numbered 11, and that intersection gives me the bottom left corner of the 1km square in which Lumley Seat lies. I then have to determine a point within that square which is 8 tenths across the square from left to right, and 1 tenth up from the bottom line (I use a preprinted scale on the clear plastic base of my orienteering compass, and by moving it until the lefthand line on the map is under figure 8 on the horizontal scale, and the bottom line is under the figure 1 on the vertical scale, I automatically find the top right corner of the plastic base is over Lumley Seat on the map).

MY PROPOSAL is that instead of writing a map reference as e.g. SU 123456 we should write it as SU 1245 – 36. This highlights the numbers we need to look for to define the 1 km square, and when we have found square 1234 by reference to the numbered lines on the map we can use the other two digits (36) to find the offset within the square by a different process. The two main advantages to this are (a) that you don't have to try to remember a six digit number throughout the process (my brain finds it much easier to cope with a maximum of four digits at one time) and (b) it separates out the digits needed for the two different processes. You may find other advantages (e.g. in my database programme I have a file with main entries for each four digit 1 km square and under each main entry a chain of pre-recorded map references for that square)

12 Oct 99 - from Ralph Hollins - Havant Borough wins European money for wildlife habitat at the Hayling Oysterbeds

This news came in a newsletter from the Friends of Langstone Harbour urging them (and anyone else who wants to help) to be at the Oysterbeds at 9am on Saturday 30 October for three hours work on projects to improve the site, starting with laying a good path surface along the muddy bit at the foot of the 'earth mountain'. The aim of the grant is to enhance this rare 'saline lagoon' habitat for wildlife and I am pleased to see that before the money can be drawn on the Borough has to appoint a reserve warden to manage the site (though this need not be a full time warden). Talking to Pete Durnell, who had been at a meeting to discuss how to fulfil this requirement, I get the impression that the Borough will probably 'buy in' the necessary expertise from the County but that is by no means settled. I must admit to a personal wish for the Borough to get more involved in wildlife habitat management and to appoint its own ranger - possibly working with the County Countryside Service for training, etc but requiring the Borough to be more involved with the problems of wildlife rather than adopting an arms length approach. We shall see what happens ...

WEEK 40 OCT 4 - 10

BIRDS:

SUN 10 OCT

Paul Winter's pager today carried a report of a ROSEATE TERN in Langstone Harbour and of a Merlin at Farlington Marshes (possibly the same female which Barry Collins had on Thorney earlier in the day?). Reports of 30 Little Egret, 35 Bearded Tits and 2 Peregrines are not unexpected but I was pleased to see that at least one Curlew Sandpiper is still at Farlington Lagoon – they have been known to stay through the winter ... No news yet from Kevin Stouse of what was seen by his walk around the reserve today.

Russell Wynn and Mark Moody were at Pennington last Tuesday (Oct 5) and Russell has provided a fascinating account of what was seen which will interest those who have not seen it on the HOSLIST email distribution. Russell begins with '9 pale-bellied Brents, a 1st winter Red-throated Diver, a fall of 25 Stonechats and adult Med Gull. However, the highlight was an exceptional raptor passage. It started just after dawn when a ringtail Hen Harrier flew southwest out to sea, and

then in the afternoon a total of 26 Buzzards moved overhead. Between 2:30pm and 4pm Mark Moody and I counted 20 birds moving high south out to sea. At 4pm the temperature dropped a little and the wind changed and, of the other six birds in the air, one moved east and the others dropped down to the north. It was a day of massive movement, with hundreds of House Martins and Swallows going south, good numbers of Goldfinches, Siskins and Redpolls, and a few Meadow Pipits, Grey Wags and Yellow Wags.' He goes on to say 'This scale of Buzzard movement is unprecedented in Hampshire. In Birds of Hampshire there is a ringing recovery of a Hants ringed bird some 400 km ESE in France, but there are no references to movements on this scale. Judging by the height and number of birds moving south I think they were moving beyond the Isle of Wight and heading out over the channel. Maybe this is where many of our New Forest population goes in winter?'

.....This fascinating message continues 'On Thursday morning (Oct 7) at Dibden Bay there was a large number of Song Thrushes, Blackbirds, Stonechats and Dartford Warblers (the latter two presumably reflecting high breeding success). Also single juv Black, Arctic and Common Terns there, and yet another migrant Buzzard - this one moving east over Southampton Water. Yesterday (Saturday Oct 9) at Pennington/Keyhaven there was 1 Woodlark NW, 22 Little Egrets, 1 Curlew Sand, 1 1st win Shag offshore, one Peregrine, four Dartford Warblers, and reasonable numbers of Redpoll, Reed Bunting, Goldfinch, Chaffinch, Siskin, Grey Wag, Swallow and House Martin overhead.'

Today Brian Fellows was at the Chichester gravel pit lakes and found two BLACK TERN feeding near the water ski jump and two BLACK NECKED GREBE also over on the east side of the lake (I assume these are the same two which arrived at Ivy Lake on Sept 21 - will they stay the winter here?). The East Trout Lake today had 30 Gadwall, 18 Wigeon (are these unusual here?), 6 Shoveler and 5 male Pochard among the great mass of Coot. A total of 19 Great Crested Grebe were found with just three young.

Trevor Carpenter reports the presence of 84 GOLDEN PLOVER at Fleetlands (Fareham Creek) this afternoon - last Monday Lyndon Hatfield had 70 here but was not expecting them to stay. To put this news on perspective Trevor tells me he is just back from a week in New Jersey at Cape May where the day before he arrived there had been 5028 American Kestrel (the biggest ever single day movement ever recorded there) but Trevor still managed to see 670 pass in two hours. His message goes on ... 'Other amazing sights included a flock of 2000 Tree Swallows on telegraph wires and a flock of migrating Double Crested Cormorants which I estimated to stretch over a mile and the local favourite Sharp Shinned Hawks which past Cape May in greater numbers than anywhere else, I counted 50 in the first 20 minutes of daylight one morning and it goes on like that for most of the day on most normal days. On good days numbers go way beyond that.' He ends by saying ... 'Of course if you live in Cape May you need to travel to see anything that exceeds your normal expectations. Some local birders had just returned from Vera Cruz in Mexico where they had witnessed a raptor movement of 150,000 in one day!'

Richard Hallett walked round Thorney yesterday and saw both OSPREYS perched on Pilsey Island. He says that both gates were then working but the warning notices were 'quite daunting' so if you want to go round be brave and ask.

A female MERLIN was hunting over Thorney airfield today as the first ROCK PIPIT returned to the shore and a party of presumably migrant GOLDCREST arrived on the scene. Other migrants still passing include two WHEATEAR, one WHINCHAT and two late YELLOW WAGTAIL seen around the feet of some horses. Three old hands - the party of EIDER which have spent the summer in Chichester Harbour - are now looking very smart in almost full dress plumage (two of the three are males). This news comes from Barry Collins who also said that the BLACK BRANT is still present and may have settled in for the winter (after feeding on the mudflats today it moved into the 'lagoon' half encircled by Pilsey Island). OSPREY are also still present - I think he said still two but did not note the number. Back on Oct 6 there was a passing AVOCET which I do not think I have recorded.

Autumn brings quite as much exciting change to the ordinary birds around us as does spring and my first surprise on opening the back door this morning was to hear the insistent 'Chick, chick' of a newly arrived Great Spotted Woodpecker from the trees of the Hayling Billy line as three Grey Wagtails flew over the garden in line astern making their quieter, shriller single 'tzit' notes. Nothing to get excited about when taken individually, but taken together with calls of Skylark and Pipits passing over during the week, the regular convoys of Long Tailed and Blue Tits with the Great Tit's resuming song, and even the coarse trilling of the Greenfinch that are starting to re-

appear at the garden feeders, they tell me that had the screaming parties of summer Swifts and the buzzing of the House Martins gone on much longer I would have ceased to find them exciting, whereas now I can look forward to a frosty morning next Tuesday with the hope of seeing Redwing streaming west over my house.

.....Cycling to Bedhampton later in the morning the quiet song of a GOLDCREST came from trees where the Brockhampton Stream first comes to public notice at the end of Solent Road (incidentally if you go down the concrete steps from Brockhampton Road on the official Wayfarers Way route you will find a tree has fallen across the stream making an ideal Kingfisher perch, and the tree already has one fresh white splash on it). I later heard another party of Goldcrest calling in Langstone Mill Lane and guess these are small parties of recently arrived migrants. At the Brockhampton Gravel Quay with the tide up I saw the female GOLDENEYE looking to be in normal winter plumage but with just a hint of white on her flanks, and I now think that my last view of this bird (when I thought it looked more like a young male) was a case of mistaken observation on my part. I now think the white which I then saw on the breast and flanks may have been the result of the bird feeling itchy as new feathers were growing and re-acting by preening its breast and flanks in way that exposed the white down normally hidden by the grey feathers.

.....Continuing on my round I found a Green Sandpiper with the regular birds on the Budds Farm pools over which couples of Chaffinch and Skylark headed west and 'out of place' Coal Tits as well as regular Chiff Chaff called from the trees. The next excitement came at Langstone where, after pausing to watch three Sandwich Tern and scan the numerous perched Cormorant that no doubt had similar thoughts to the many anglers I passed along the South Moors shore, I came in view of the Wade Court trees just as some loud noise put up the whole flock of 48 EGRETS and 5+ Heron. After circling like gulls in a thermal half the Egrets headed back towards Thorney while the others gradually settled back to the higher roost points (most going to the bare top branches of a tall but dying conifer which the 'dress' like sailors displaying on a parade ground mast)

SAT 9 OCT

Before the midday WeBS Count I made a brief visit to the north east of Stansted Forest where some 30 Swallows and House Martins were hawking for insects above the Rosamunds Hill field along the eastern edge of the woodland. While watching them I heard the 'chup chup' calls of CROSSBILL and the complaining calls of SISKIN also flying from the east into the Forest. I don't think these birds were high up but I only saw one bird that looked like a Crossbill and I guess these were a few lone individuals, certainly not flocks (I would think there were not more than 3 Crossbill and perhaps half a dozen Siskin).

On the IBM Lake the only birds present in any number were 290 CANADA GEESE and the usual flock of gulls, with perhaps 200 each of Herring and Black Headed Gulls. I saw one each of Greater and Lesser Blackbacks and around half a dozen Common Gulls. Moorhen were the most widespread feeders around the edges of the lake with 47 seen, and the 41 Coot had abandoned their territorial aggression and were grazing peacefully together like a herd of sheep. A small 'spring' of 12 Teal were wary of my approach to the west end of the lake where I also found a mixed trio of one Great Crested Grebe, one Pochard and one female Tufted Duck. The Mallard count was relatively low at 61 and just two Heron and three Little Grebe completed the water based birds. Perhaps half a dozen Chiff Chaff called from various trees around the site and single Kestrel and Green Woodpecker were seen

On Thorney today Barry Collins found two OSPREY still present in the Pilsey area and he also saw the BLACK BRANT feeding on the mudflats until the tide rose and it flew west towards Hayling. Brian Fellows made his WeBS count today from Hayling's Black Point up to Tournerbury Marsh and comments that the small flock of 128 BRENT which he found are a measure of the late arrival of these geese this autumn - on the equivalent count last year he found 1,252 of them. Of other species most of the usual suspects were loitering in their favoured high tide hangouts but none in large numbers - for example only 6 Bar Tailed Godwit, 32 Grey Plover and 58 Oystercatcher at Black Point - though he later saw 196 Curlew but these came from the major roost at Gutner Point where someone caused great disturbance by landing a boat in the roost area. Wildfowl were represented by a few Teal and Wigeon, and a relatively dull day was somewhat brightened by the sight of a Heron at Tournerbury Pond having difficulty in trying to swallow a large pink fish that clearly came from some more ornamental source than the farm pond. A few Sandwich Tern were seen but it seems that we have seen the last of the Common and Little Tern for this year.

The BTO NEWS which came through my letter box this morning has a two page report on last winter's Garden Bird Feeding Survey and in this some unusual garden birds are listed together with

some even more unlikely ones that 'just missed' being recorded as feeding/drinking in the gardens concerned. These include Little Auk, Golden Eagle and Red Kite, and also a Little Egret at Emsworth. Of course there may be several contributors to this survey living in Emsworth but I know that one of them is Brian Fellows and I remember him remarking on a Little Egret overflying his garden, and briefly perching on his neighbour's garden shed. Checking with Brian after writing this he confirms that he was the un-named contributor of this record and also informs me of one important fact that I did not know, namely that he was contributing to a BTO Garden Bird Feeding Survey (GBFS) which only has some 250 selected observers, and it is not to be confused with the Garden Birdwatch (GBW) scheme which has over 3,000 observers of varying ability in the identification of uncommon birds. In the GBFS scheme the rules for recording are strict - only birds taking food or water in the garden are to be recorded and Brian makes no claim that an Egret did either in his garden though he was so nearly able to do so...

.....Also in the BTO News is an account of an unfortunate colony of Grey Herons in Nottinghamshire which have been finding it very hard to find enough food for their young, many of which have died in the nest. Analysis of the corpses has not only revealed a high proportion of Goldfish in the food but also shows that the birds had a large amount of the rare mineral selenium in their systems but so far no one has discovered where it came from. The suggestion that first comes to mind is that the parent birds, desperate for food, have been raiding some industrial premises or dump where they have taken some prey items (alive or dead) contaminated though an industrial process but in fairness the article says that it is still not known if selenium is normally present in all Herons. My own theory is that these birds have somehow achieved what humans with all their technology can only do with extreme difficulty - namely to fly to the moon (Selene being the Moon Goddess and selenium no doubt being plentiful there). The cause of the deaths and deformities is then much more easily explained as a not unexpected result of exposure to the radiation from which the Earth's atmosphere protects creatures that know their place and stay where they belong.

One consequence of the decision to split what was previously one species (e.g. Herring Gull) into multiple species (e.g. the Western Yellow Legged Gull and the Caspian Gull) is that the new species need new Euring numbers to identify them. As these numbers are used in many recording systems not only to act as the 'name' of the species (key to database records) but also to define the sequence in which reports are to be presented, there is only one answer, namely to go decimal. John Clark tells me that the bird records which I email to him (and in which I include the Euring numbers as they are needed for input to the HOS database) should in future have Herring Gull under its original number of 592 but that what is now called the Yellow-Legged Gull (what was *Larus argentatus micahellis* and which comes from the Mediterranean) is now 0592.02, and the newly named Caspian Gull (*L.a. cachinnans* of the Caspian area east of the Mediterranean) is now numbered 0592.03

FRI 8 OCT

A visit to the Sussex Recent Sightings website today tells me that a LAPLAND BUNTING and two Ring Ouzels were at Church Norton yesterday. Working back through earlier sightings Oct 6 found Redwing appeared in various places, another Osprey had stopped off at Petworth on its way south and a Honey Buzzard was over Pagham Harbour. Oct 5 found a Spotted Crake in the Long Pool by Sidlesham Ferry accompanied by a Water Rail with two Ring Ouzel and two Dartford Warbler nearby. On Sunday Oct 3 Paul James found a GREY PHALAROPE entangled with the radiator of his car and is thought to have collected it from the River Adur, luckier birds seen alive included 2 FIRECREST, 3 YELLOW LEGGED GULLS and 9 Egrets in Pagham Harbour. On Saturday Oct 2 a SABINE'S GULL seen at Pagham was thought to be sick. Late info is of a BARRED WARBLER at Pagham on Sept 20

Mike Collins asked recently (see Sep 22) if anyone could tell him where to report a Wing Tagged Black Headed Gull which he had seen off the South Moors and today Barry Collins (no relation) has given me two addresses for reporting COLOUR MARKED GULLS (maybe not the same as wing tagged but worth a try). For Large Gulls you should notify Peter Rock, 59 Concorde Drive, Bristol BS10 6PX. For Small Gulls the address is more interesting - it is Kjeld Pedersen, Daglykkevej 7, DK-2650 Hvidovre, Denmark

This evening Barry Collins told me that a BLACK BRANT had been off the southern shore of Thorney today with a flock of 44 Brent and he thought it might be the same bird that spent part of last winter near East Head (West Wittering). While watching these Brent they suddenly took flight as an OSPREY flew over them and this turned out to be a new arrival making two Osprey in the

south Thorney area again (perhaps this new arrival is the one that was at Petworth on Wednesday - see below in today's entry). Yesterday Barry saw the BLACK SWAN heading north over the Great Deeps in a flight of several Mute Swan, presumably on a roundabout journey back to Emsworth. Brian Fellows cycled along the shore from Nore Barn (west edge of Emsworth) to Thorney Great Deeps yesterday (Oct 7) and found the BLACK SWAN back on Emsworth Mill Pond after its seven week holiday at Broadmarsh, possibly with its antipodean springtime urge to find a mate diminished (but from what I have been told of its approaches to other Swans at Emsworth during its 'off season' they will not have abated entirely). On his way Brian scanned the water south of Emsworth for early Shelduck but could see none (they were in Chichester Harbour at Nutbourne by Sep 28 last year, and a few have already reached Langstone Harbour this year). The Slipper Mill Pond has an unusual amount of slimy green weed on its surface and this has driven the gulls which normally frequent it upstream into Peter Pond where a new Swan was also seen intruding on the privacy of the regular pair there. On Thorney several Bearded Tits were noisily busy in the Little Deeps reeds and 18 Egrets were around the Great Deeps. While there Brian used the intercom on the gate to check on the access situation and was told that you can still walk round but may have to wait up to half an hour for a soldier to come and open the gate by hand (Barry Collins has seen one or two walkers going round)

THU 7 OCT

Today's news from Fleet Pond is of 690 REDWING, 77 SONG THRUSH, 50 CHAFFINCH and 73 SISKIN passing over with just 4 Swallows and 2 House Martins. At midday a single RING OUZEL was at Bramshot Heath near Fleet Pond.

Locally Barry Collins had a single OSPREY around Thorney Island today with two Osprey seen yesterday (Oct 6). On Tuesday (Oct 5) he counted just 161 Little Egret at the Thorney roost and if Bob Chapman's guess that more than 100 of them have found a new roost somewhere in Portsmouth Harbour is correct it begins to look as if the estimated 300 Egrets in our area have decided on an east/west split to avoid overcrowding and disturbance.

WED 6 OCT

When out in my garden this morning a single Thrush came flying high from the east, then swerved and dived out of my view but I had the distinct impression that it was a REDWING. I would not have mentioned such an inconclusive sighting had it not been that today's HOSLIST news reports 165 REDWING and 49 SONG THRUSH going west over Fleet Pond in just one hour this morning. 8 Siskin and 3 Redpoll were also seen at Fleet. Down at Hook by Warsash it seems the two Phalaropes have flown on to their oceanic winter loneliness, no doubt grateful for all the human company they have had while here - luckily the Dartford Warblers, Stonechats and Yellowhammer have stayed to keep us company.

Paul Winter deserves more than a round of applause for his ground breaking work in making Hampshire Birds more available to the birders of the county through the HOSLIST mail distribution list which he has set up within the past three months. He has been able to do this during a prolonged gap between jobs but fate has caught up with him and it is back to work tomorrow (Oct 7). As a final reward from the birds themselves he was given his very first close up view of a MALE MERLIN plucking prey it had just caught, and in the sunshine the blue of the bird was stunning. This happened close to Beaulieu Road station and the prey seem to be hirundine.

.....Paul started his last but one day of freedom (Oct 5) at Keyhaven where large numbers of House Martins hawked over stubble fields. The single Pale Bellied Brent which had been at Sturt pond was no longer there but 14 of 'our' Brent were on the sea. A Dartford Warbler, one Whinchat and a couple of Wheatear were by the shore and at least four Yellow Wagtail were still with the cattle. Today (Oct 6) he started at Needs Ore where three Dartford Warbler was the best on offer (there had been 75 species here on the previous day with an immature Marsh Harrier among them), but the Merlin seen by the road north of the Pig Bush carpark made up for that

Today Brian Fellows made his round of Portsmouth sites after a flock of 28 Greenfinch breakfasted in his garden on black sunflower seeds (I have been commenting on a strange absence of Greenfinch but thought it could not last). At teh Southsea Canoe Lake another ten Swans had turned up bringing the total to 57. At Milton Lakes there were six shouting CETTI'S WARBLER were only three have been heard until now and another two announced their presence at the nearby Great Salterns Lake. When Brian reached Farlington Marshes a little later Bob Chapman told him that in 1998 there had been three Cetti's territories at the Milton Lakes and 4 at the Great Salterns - there is no reason why there shuld not have been the same number of more this year and with breeding success there are probably a lot more decibels to be experienced if they all call together. Before

Farlington Brian called at Baffins Pond where things are relatively quiet but the bird population is now stable with 13 Barnacle Geese and only 102 Mallard (Brian says this is half the pre-botulism count). Slightly worrying was the continued absence of one of the two Snow Geese.

.....At Farlington Marshes Brian found he had missed the departure of the Grey Phalarope from the deeps (last seen there yesterday - it must have departed within 24 hours of the two Hook Phalaropes making me wonder again what signals such moves). Still there, and according to Bob Chapman now likely to stay the winter, were 31 Pale Bellied Brent. The Dark Bellied birds only number 120 so far whereas in 1998 there were 400 here on Oct 2 and 1120 of them on Oct 5 - it can't be long before the thousand bomber raids return to Langstone. Bob Chapman also expressed the opinion that there must be a large (100+) night roost of Little Egret in Portsmouth Harbour to judge by the number seen flying west from Langstone Harbour at dusk. Ian Calderwood has told us recently that he has no evidence of them at 'DM Gosport' so I wonder if they are using the trees of Horsea Island (the south side of the Paulsgrove tip/Port Solent area south of the M27)? That is conjecture but Bob Chapman reported as fact the arrival of the first 8 SHELDUCK back today from their Heligoland moult, and he also told Brian of seeing 5 AVOCET flying east (also today). Brian saw one Wheatear and two Whinchat, and heard that the harbour Spoonbill has not been seen for a week.

Mark Litjens was looking for late butterflies by the Itchen navigation at Shawford this lunch time when he glanced up and, to quote him, 'noticed 2 large Accipiters flying high above, heading south. Both birds were Buzzard size with distinctly long tails, broad wings. Both intermittently flapped wings with rapid wing beats then glided with flat wings, occasionally circling in wide circles or grappling with each other as they moved off south. When fanned, the tail was well rounded and broad. The head protrusion was quite noticeable, reminding me of the difference between Honey Buzzard and Common Buzzard. I managed to watch them for a couple of minutes before they flew out of view. In my mind they were GOSHAWKS.' Nothing is more likely to create dissension in the ranks of birders than a report of a Goshawk - what do you think?

TUE 5 OCT

Cycling around Hayling today I found Swallows and House Martins everywhere on the move, not so much south as in every direction as they reached the coast and could not make up their minds what to do next. Meadow Pipits were also to be heard moving over wherever I happened to be. I only saw just one Wheatear and two Sandwich Tern of the departing birds but the arriving Brent are getting bolder with one small party flying north past the Oysterbeds, possibly already scanning the shore fields for food. I saw several Linnet flocks with one of over 50 birds at the Oysterbeds but I think I only saw two Greenfinch in the whole five hour outing - normally they are among the first to flock along the coast in the autumn. At Sinah Lake I had a good view of a perched Kingfisher, not unusual there, but the presence of a single Egret was new to me - there were plenty along the shore line and half a dozen on the Wade Court trees this morning but I have not previously seen one fishing this water. In Hayling shopping centre a Chiff Chaff sang near the library and at Langstone pond a juvenile Reed Bunting was a recent arrival.

MON 4 OCT

Lyndon Hatfield found 70 GOLDEN PLOVER on the Fleetlands shore in Fareham Creek at lunch time today. He comments that the first flock usually turns up here around this time each year but does not stay for long - perhaps the banks of the Hamble are more attractive to them?

Paul Winter's pager reported that both the Grey and Red Necked Phalaropes were still at the Hook (Warsash) reserve until teatime today, and that yesterday two DARTFORD WARBLER (a regular but elusive sight here) showed themselves to some of the visiting birders.

Brian Fellows found 43 Swans and 82 Mallard on the Emsworth Mill Pond today and nothing special to report from the Slipper and Peter Ponds other than yet another dead Black Headed Gull on one of the Slipper Mill rafts - I feel sure there is something abnormal about these deaths and still wonder if there is a airgun sniper who has this raft in his sights (perhaps from a bedroom window?). There was a good selection of waders in the harbour and nearby shores with four Greenshank feeding in the harbour channel probably being the stars, while on shore Brian heard the first strong Great Tit song of the winter from a garden.

The alarm note of a male BLACKCAP in my garden today provided a probable answer to the question of what had been eating an apple which had fallen onto the bird table but it also raised a question as to when the summer birds depart south to Africa and when the winter birds arrive from central Europe. Graham Robert's article on the subject of Blackcaps in the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report indicates that this is likely to be a summer bird getting ready to leave and that we should not expect

wintering birds until November but know that Graham is online and receiving these notes on a regular basis I hope we will be kept up to date with the birds in his Cosham garden which were the subject of his article. Some winter birds have clearly reached my garden, not necessarily from a great distance. A few days ago there were three Blackbirds and a single Chaffinch where there have been none for several months, and there are daily waves of tits (Blue, Great and Long Tailed) passing through, usually with a Chiff Chaff among them (but that could be the 'resident' bird coming out to join in the fun). Thinking of garden birds reminds me that last Saturday morning I walked along the Emsworth Road in Havant and discovered where all the local Collared Doves have gone to – usually in the autumn they form flocks to glean grain from harvested wheat fields but I found a flock of 30 that were on to something better, a garden bird table heaped with seed by an over generous bird lover who must be well known to the local birds for his/her long term generosity. In a nearby garden a GREY WAGTAIL was after meatier insect food, also reminding me how these lovely birds seem in recent years not only to have much increased in number but also to have become much more like Pied Wagtails in their independence of water.

PLANTS:

SUN 10 OCT

One garden in Grove Road at Havant has a mass of prostrate LESSER PERIWINKLE as ground cover and today two small blue flowers (without the white throat of Greater Periwinkle flowers) looked up at me as I passed, reminding me to check in some of this plants woodland sites (such as the west end of Park Lane where it passes the Stansted Groves) to see if there too it has the occasional flower. Another unusual flower was still out in the nearby road leading to Juniper Square where you can still find a mass of SMALL FLOWERED CRANESBILL in flower by the gateway to the house which must be 2 Churchfields though it has no visible label. Down at Broadmarsh immediately west of the slipway a bush of LUCERNE is covered in flowers on the bank behind the seawall and by continuing west to the small carpark (full of cars attracted by Kevin Stouse for the Farlington Marshes walk) and then rejoining Harts Farm Way back towards Havant I found a mass of flower heads on the COCKSPUR GRASS lining the north edge of the tarmac (this has now recovered from late summer mowing) but could not find any anthers to indicate current flowers, and 100 yards further east I checked the big stand of CHINESE MUGWORT (which normally tries to flower in October if at all) and found many stems topped with spikes of flower buds, but all as yet unopen. Further west in the cul de sac north of the Brockhampton Stream footpath a mass of Hybrid Water Speedwell was flowering again in the small pond and beside Southmoor Lane I passed just one flowering plant of the 'all year round' Hedgerow Cranesbill. Beside the Langbrook stream where a stile takes you from the seawall into the moors proper three DOG ROSES were flowering on one bush

SAT 9 OCT

The Evening Class group visited Havant Thicket yesterday and found 30 or so plant species in flower with Devils Bit Scabious winning the prize for elegance and depth of colour. Much Goldenrod was still in flower, but not all the plants were as easy to identify precisely. There is for example a great deal of one or more Hieracium micro-species lining the rides and tempting quick identification as one of the five species illustrated in Francis Rose's Wildflower Key or the fifteen illustrated by Keble Martin, but take note of Keble Martin's warning in 1965 that one expert (a Mr Pugsley) had described 260 separate 'species' while by the time Francis Rose was writing in 1981 he was aware of the existence of 400 'microspecies' in the British Isles. By 1991 when Stace's authoritative Flora was first published the number of recognised microspecies had reverted to 261 and Stace claims that he can help you to separate the species into 15 groups (he calls them 'sections') 'that are recognisable after a little practice' but he also states that no attempt should be made to identify any of them after mid-August in each year due to the vagaries of a second stage of growth and flowering.

.....TRAILING TORMENTIL (*Potentilla anglica*) is a species that was not in my mental filing system until Gwynne Johnson told me today that the Evening Class believe they found it in Havant Thicket close to the northern pond in the compartment which runs beside the Horndean Road and includes the carpark (you can also reach this pond by entering at the main Forestry Commission gate opposite Castle Road, going west for 200 yards then turning south along the first broad track, the

pond being then on your left after less than 100 yards). Looking at Stace in preparation for an expedition to find this 'new to me' species I see that I should be looking for a plant with stems up to 80cm long which trail along the ground (rooting at the nodes in autumn) from a persistent basal rosette. The lower stem leaves should have stalks more than 1cm long (on normal Tormentil all stem leaves are sessile) and some leaves should have 4 or 5 leaflets where the standard plant has only three. If there are any flowers some should have 5 petals and sepals where the standard plant has four and most importantly I should be looking for evidence of seeding as both Stace and the Hants Flora say this plant is over-recorded for the commoner infertile hybrid of the two species (*Potentilla x suberecta*). If it is fertile then the standard plant has less than 20 carpels while the Trailing species has more than 20. The Hants Flora classifies Trailing Tormentil as very local and occasional but does encourage me by recording it locally from the Sinah Golf Course and Tournerbury on Hayling, and even more by a record of it at Woolmer Pond in East Hants which must be similar habitat to that in Havant Thicket (though perhaps more sandy).

.....DWARF GORSE was also identified by the group visiting Havant Thicket and the Hants Flora shows it throughout that area and says it is 'common on nearly all heathland'. This encourages me to have another go at identifying it after having my previous attempt (based mainly on whether the spines were 'soft to the touch') scorned by the experts. I see from Stace that the plants can be up to a metre high and that at this time of year they should have seed pods 6 to 8.5mm long waiting to 'go pop' (dehisc in botany speak) in the spring where the common Gorse has seed pods well over 1cm long which go pop in the summer.

At the IBM North Harbour site at Cosham the first flower was out on a MARSH MARIGOLD (Kingcup) plant beside one of the ditches where they often flower in December and more Wild Roses were in flower with the expected autumn show of Small Scabious and Blue Fleabane plus the last Pale Flax flower I expect to see this year. Earlier in the morning I had been in Stansted Forest where the first Holly berries glistened bright red against the dark green leaves and where one Spindle bush was covered with its salmon pink arils at their most showy.

TUE 5 OCT

Among the many plants I found still flowering on Hayling today a couple of WILD ROSE flowers on Sinah Common were the most exciting find to me. I did not see any of the Yellow Horned Poppies which were out last week but in their place I found a plant of SEA HOLLY in full flower at Sandy Point and was able to record Rock Samphire as flowering after a careful check. Another check which I made was of the PINK SORREL that is now flowering profusely in several places on the island and am sure that it is all *Oxalis articulata* rather than *O. debilis*. Coming back past Northney church I looked at the Strawberry tree which has many flowers but, unlike last year when it was covered with 'strawberry-like' fruit at the same time, I could only see one fruit hanging from it as I cycled by. Also in Northney I noticed the bright red/orange berries of Stinking Iris seeds for the first time this autumn.

MON 4 OCT

A few days ago I was following in the footsteps of the Evening Class to see for myself the Buckwheat they had found growing as game cover/food among the pig fields of Adsdean Park near Funtington. Heading north from the Farm Shop along the farm track I soon came to a big Cedar of Lebanon growing close to the track on the left side and nestling under it was what at first looked like a small Holm Oak but on close inspection it had the most extraordinary ridged and fissured bark on its trunk and I felt certain this must be a CORK OAK. Checking in Alan Mitchell's Collins Field Guide to Trees I found the description fitted the tree and today I made doubly certain by visiting a Cork Oak that grows within 300 yards of my house but in a cul de sac that I rarely visit. Sure enough this was the identical twin to the one in Adsdean Park. I had previously thought the local tree was a 'one off' and that I was unlikely to come on a second one locally but I see that Alan Mitchell categorises this tree as 'infrequent but not rare' and I am wondering how many more there may be within the Havant area —do you know of others? (If you want to see the one in Havant go east along East Street, over the hump bridge and turn left into Bellair Road, right into Oaklands Road then right into Pine Close and you will find the tree in a garden but close to the road on your left). In another garden at Westbourne this morning I saw a Judas tree bearing bunches of bean-pod like seed capsules directly on the trunk of the tree — Alan Mitchell says that the flowers can grow directly from the bole but normally grow from shoots or branches but this specimen restricted itself to the unusual form. Another tree in which the leaves grow directly from the branches (if not the trunk) can be seen at Stansted (between the house and the Irongate Cottages). It seems to have three thin trunks arching outwards from the centre and with leaves growing directly from branches

in the crown – this is a Katsura tree.

INSECTS:

SUN 10 OCT

On Thorney Island today a single WALL BROWN and one or more SPECKLED WOOD were seen by Barry Collins. Moth enthusiasts may be interested to know that Barry had his moth trap light on one evening this week and attracted 11 species including LARGE RANUNCULUS (only the second time he has found this very pretty medium sized moth with greyish wings beautifully flecked with a number of colours - strangely its caterpillars do not seem to feed on buttercups but enjoy a varied diet of delphinium, red valerian and ragwort), BLAIR'S SHOULDER-KNOT (just a hint of red in its colour, coming from a caterpillar that feeds on Monterey Cypress - hence the American influence on its political beliefs), THE SATELLITE (two prominent white dots in its orange brown forewings could be said to look like the brilliant pinpoint of a space station crossing the sky), and BLACK RUSTIC (even I might identify this one as its forewings are almost pure black and its hind wings whitish with a variable amount of brown edging).

Yesterday's sunshine brought one Red Admiral to settle on a concrete path in my garden as I sat on a bench to take off my walking boots but the smell of my socks proved too much for it and it was off. Earlier yesterday I saw a late HORNET on the edge of Stansted Forest (Rosamunds Hill) and then watched a pair of Common Darter in tandem by the IBM Lake where there was one small blue banded dragonfly that I am pretty sure was a Migrant Hawker and another larger one also with blue bands all along its body which I assume was a Common Hawker. Today duller weather restricted the butterflies which I saw to two Small White and one Large White but it did give me two sightings of what I assume to be a fairly common day flying moth (I have seen several of them during the past month and they do not seem to have a restricted habitat). All I have been able to see as they make their rapid erratic flight past me, usually about ten feet off the ground, is that they are of a rich dark brown colour and are bigger than a Large Skipper and smaller than a Gatekeeper. I guess these are male VAPOURER moths which should be still on the wing and are likely to turn up anywhere but would welcome any other suggestions.

FRI 8 OCT

A message from Rob Edmunds this evening tells me the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire Branch now have their promised website online at <http://www.stavekirk.co.uk/butterfly/> and that it will have a weekly update on latest news of butterflies and moths. Congratulations to Rob and his colleagues - if you forget the address you can find a link to the site in my What's New page Links section. I have had a quick look at the site and am very impressed by the presentation and content. In addition to the usual info on joining the branch and its activities there are pages on Hampshire's butterflies (with short articles on each species illustrated by photos), on the Hampshire Butterfly Reserves, and on gardening to attract butterflies. I was particularly impressed by the quality of the photos used and by the way in which no more than one photo is incorporated into each page so that in no case do you sit waiting for a whole lot of pictures to download.

.....And if you want to press the flesh of real butterfly people you have only to wait until Monday evening (Oct 11) when Andy Barker (Head of Conservation in Hampshire for Butterfly Conservation) will be giving a talk on 'Butterflies and Flowers of the Mediterranean' at Holy Trinity Church Hall, West St, Fareham (this is a meeting of the Fareham Branch of Hampshire Wildlife Trust being run jointly with Butterfly Conservation). The meeting starts at 7.30pm and admission is £1-50.

.....Another chance to have a good day out and meet more Butterfly enthusiasts comes on Sunday Oct 17 when Lynn Fomison will be opening her garden at Mount Pleasant, Parkestone Rd, off Stapley Lane, Ropley from 10.30am to 5pm for Apple Day celebrations and teas. Lynn is, among other things, Reserves Officer for Butterfly Conservation.

Mike Collins saw the latest Humming Bird Hawkmoth around a Buddleia bush at Goodwood House last Tuesday Oct 4

WED 6 OCT

One or more Large Whites were in my garden today and at one point two large dark butterflies flew over at roof top height in the fast pursuit flight that often indicates a male in pursuit of a female. I suspect these were Red Admirals but they could have been Peacock and it made me wonder if hibernating species do mate in the autumn, and if so if the females lay their eggs before hibernating (so we have multiple forms of over-wintering in the same species) or if butterflies can practise the

delayed pregnancy that quite a few animal species are able to achieve. Any one know the answer?

TUE 5 OCT

One PAINTED LADY, two Red Admiral and three Small White were the only butterflies seen on Hayling today despite lots of sunshine. A small dragonfly fly by at one point and I think by its size it must have been a female Common Darter though in the glimpse I had its body seemed to be blue rather than brown.

MON 4 OCT

Andrew Brookes was out on Portsdown yesterday with fellow committee members of the Porstmouth Butterfly Conservation branch and they were rewarded not only with Red Admirals, Speckled Woods and Large White that others have seen but also with a male COMMON BLUE and an 'immaculate MEADOW BROWN'. By my reckoning that brings the count of butterfly species seen on the wing this weekend in our local area up to twelve. In his Portchester garden on Saturday (Oct 2) Andrew saw a Humming Bird Hawkmoth.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 10 OCT

Richard Hallett today found quite a lot of FLY AGARIC and single examples of the edible PENNY BUN BOLETUS (also known as a CEP and I believe the principal element putting the taste into your tinned mushroom soup) and BAY BOLETUS which is also edible and more colourful than the Cep. He found these in the west section of Creech Woods where Roe Deer are very common and where it is tempting to follow their narrow paths through thick vegetation in pursuit of wildlife interest. But BE WARNED, says Richard, several local people in the Denmead area have contracted the dreaded LYME DISEASE here by exposing bare skin which brushes against the vegetation and allows the deer tick IXODES RICINUS to attach itself to them - then just one bite and BORRELIA BURGDORFERI is at work in your blood (and the tick may be hardly noticeable, just a baby nymph can transmit the disease). So always wear long trousers and tuck them into your socks and beware of brushing branches aside with bare arms. To find out more visit the website <http://www.dis.strath.ac.uk/vie/LymeEU> (I have not checked out this address and wonder if the final EU is part of the address). Don't be too worried in the winter - the ticks are I think only on the move in warm weather.

SAT 9 OCT

The Evening Class group found the first FLY AGARIC toadstools with their white spotted scarlet caps under birch trees in Havant Thicket today and also, so I hear, came on a very pretty apricot coloured toadstool (which adds to its colourfulness by having pink spores) called RHODOTUS PALMATUS. This latter is a species which I have not seen and I hope to find it still there next week but I am puzzled by its being found in a conifer plantation as my books say that it only occurs on elm logs, especially on trees killed by Dutch Elm disease. The group also found COMMON EARTH BALLS which remind me of the delightful small yellow bolete (*Boletus parasiticus*) which survives in this world thanks to the Earth Balls (its only habitat is as a parasite on them). Several commoner fungi were found in Havant Thicket and in Stansted Forest I came on a good example of a very pretty pure white bracket fungus that grows on conifer logs and is called *Tyromyces stipticus* plus a less spiny version of the *Lycoperdon echinatum* 'Hedgehog puffball' which the Evening Class group found last week in Stansted Sling - mine was another spiny brown puffball which I think to be *Lycoperdon foetidum*.

While I was at Stansted this morning I came on a bunch of seven FALLOW DEER in the newly fenced part of Rosamunds Hill. At first I thought they were all does and this year's young but I then spotted one larger animal with a single, very thin and short, spike coming from one side of its head - presumably a young buck. Normally a buck would only be alone with a harem of females by right of conquest and I am wondering if this bunch have somehow become trapped in the fenced field and if this will turn out to be a lucky chance for this young male.

SUN 3 OCT

Rosemay Webb led a fungus foray for our Evening Class in The Sling (the nose of Stansted Forest which sticks out into Rowlands Castle village) this morning in bright sunshine after heavy rain (good conditions for fungi). The Giant Polypores which flourish like large brown cabbages on several tree stumps lining the main grass avenue were in business and there were several large Parasol fungi (both the tall edible one and the shorter stemmed Shaggy Parasol) with a few tall Magpie fungi in poor condition. Under the trees were many *Mycena* species including both form of *Mycena pura* (one more mauve, one more rosy) and the lovely *Mycena crocata* (illustrated with

Rosemary's own photo on page 40 of the current issue of Natural World magazine). The commoner Amethyst Deceiver (also illustrated on the same page) was found under the trees with several less common species starting with *Lycoperdon echinatum* - a puffball species which is covered with brown spines like a Hedgehog - and including White Coral Fungus and the even whiter Porcelain Fungus which grows on beech trees. Best find, though not identified for certain, was what Rosemary felt sure was a Giant Club which can stand 30cm high and be 6cm in diameter around the club - this one was smaller and not standing erect. After the morning in Stansted Rosemary went on to Head Down at Buriton and found the first of the Earth Stars (*G. sessile*), some *Mycena haematopus* which exudes blood red liquid if the stem is broken, and some young examples of a large toadstool called *Rhodotus palmatus* which grows on elm logs and has very pretty apricot coloured caps. (PS On Sunday Oct 3 she visited Selborne and found the first Death Cap of the season.)

COMMENTS:

10 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins – A rumour that Southsea's Cumberland House Museum is to become a fast food outlet

A rumour has reached my ears that the wonderful small Natural History Museum in Southsea's Cumberland House may be under threat of closure and even worse that it may become a fast food outlet. So far I have no facts but I would urge anyone living in Portsmouth or Southsea to make enquiries (at the museum itself if no other source of info is available) and to consider what value they put upon the presence of this marvellous place to introduce youngsters to Natural History (everything from dead Dinosaurs to living butterflies can be seen here) and its value as a tourist attraction – to say nothing of its service to the public in having professional staff able to answer most questions concerning wildlife or to identify specimens. If I lived in the city and knew there was a real threat of closure I would certainly be making my opinion known to the planners and my local councillor, and possibly writing to The News and trying to get Radion Solent to do a piece about the museum in order to promote awareness of its unique service to the people of the city and their tourist guests.

5 Oct 99 – from Ralph Hollins – Hampshire BTCV and its volunteers together are doing a great job for our countryside and wildlife

Those who are already involved in the practical conservation tasks that are vital to the management of our Hampshire nature reserves and other areas will probably have received a copy of the brand new format PRACTICAL CONSERVATION DIARY for October published for Hampshire by the BTCV. I came across it today when in Havant library, and I was greatly impressed by what I found when I read through it and realised the tremendous amount of work that is going on nowadays to preserve and enhance the county's wildlife habitat.

My first thought was of the great increase in voluntary effort that has occurred in the past ten years, particularly in the community environment groups that have sprung up in the past ten (at most twenty) years. No doubt the enthusiasm to get things done has always been there and the main reason for this surge of organised activity is due to the funding of 'community environment project officers' of one sort or the other by both the County Council (and various Parish and District councils) and by the voluntary conservation bodies with the BTCV and Hampshire Wildlife Trust in the forefront. In the case of this new format diary I am pretty sure that the person we have to thank for it is Alison Angell, and if you can't get hold of a copy of the diary from any other local source you can phone her on 01962-774714 or email her at A.Angell@dia1.pipex.com If you do speak to her do ask what the tiny drawing beside her signature to the editorial is meant to represent – there are lots of other tiny animals appearing throughout the booklet but I can't make anything of this one other than in her enthusiasm she has torn off her bra and this is one half of it with the straps still twanging.

Another vital aspect of maintaining our Hampshire wildlife is to ensure protection of habitat through the law and planning process. The diary not only has articles by Lynn Fomison on Apple Day, John Vigay on the Catherington Lith Project, and anonymous contributions on Fungi and Bumble-bees, but it also has one on the many SINC's (Sites of Importance for Nature Conservation) that have recently been designated to give protection to areas which do not qualify for SSSI or higher status, and while I was in Havant Library I also picked up an annual report (they call it their ANNUAL MONITOR) from the County Council Planning Department. Have a look at the section in it on Rural Hampshire (and overlook the strange first sentence which reads ' There is no strict dividing line separating rural from urban, with both becoming increasingly

independent on one another' – yes, it does say 'independent') and take note of the fact that 13 percent of the county's land area is covered by SSSIs, twice the national average of 6.8 percent. Our county is wonderfully rich in wildlife and our County Council does do a great job in protecting it for our enjoyment – that official effort is backed by a tremendous amount of good work by the conservation bodies and their volunteers, and if you are unable to add your physical effort to the work please support it by passing on the message to all around you that we live in the best county in the kingdom, we have a better range of wildlife and habitat than any other county, and it is vital to the quality of life that we and our descendants experience to keep it that way.

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BIRDS:

SUN 3 OCT

Barry Collins reports that the mechanism for remotely opening both the gates on the Thorney Island coast path from the guard room on the main road has failed and there is no date yet for them to be repaired so there is no public access for walkers around the shore path at the moment. Luckily Barry's work for the Chichester Harbour Conservancy means that he has a permit to enter the army base via the main road and he will hopefully keep us informed of what we are missing. Today he noted 4 Wheatear and 1 Whinchat but only 1 Osprey - the five which were to be seen all together at Pilsey on Sep 27 and 28 have now moved on.

John Shillitoe was at Old Winchester Hill this morning where he several times saw a RED KITE - as far as he knows this is the first sighting since last spring but he hopes it will stay around there this winter as last.

Despite a scare that the Grey Phalarope had left Hook with Warsash reserve during the night it turned up during the day and both it and the Red Necked were seen. Further up the River Hamble a total of 16 Little Egret were seen. The Grey Phalarope which has been at Farlington Marshes Deeps since Sept 24 is still there

One Green Sandpiper was in the lower Ems water meadows this morning when Brian Fellows went by, and there were no Snipe to follow up the one there on Sept 10 but there was a female Swan on the river bank (Brian has never seen one here before)

Rosemary Webb was driving over Langstone bridge this afternoon with the tide well up and had a clear but very brief view of a bird on the water which had just passed under the bridge - from its size, shape and colour (especially white flecking on the back and white on the throat) she immediately took to be a Great Northern Diver in the remains of summer plumage. Unfortunately the traffic did not allow her to stop and she had no scope with which to look from the Northney shore so she is hoping to hear from others that one was in the area - Birds of Hampshire confirms that first arrivals have been seen at the start of October though they do not normally come until November.

With the large numbers of Little Egret using the Wade Court trees at Langstone as a high tide roost recently I thought I ought to see if any were still there at dusk this evening but all I could see at 7pm this evening was one Grey Heron.

SAT 2 OCT

Brian Fellows arrived at Ivy Lake, Chichester this morning to be greeted by 4 BLACK TERN and later spotted a winter plumage BLACK NECKED GREBE among Tufted Duck, Coot and Great Crested Grebe close to the west shore on which he was standing. Exploring further he found more than 20 Gadwall, a male Pochard, and 30 Canada Geese on the East Trout lake with a total of around 800 Coot (I'm not sure if these included birds on Vinnetrow and Runcton lakes - Brian says they were mainly on the Trout Lakes). An interesting sight was of one of 16 Great Crested Grebe having two newly fledged young with it - very late in the year. Several Chiff Chaff were calling from the trees (there had been one in Brian's garden at Emsworth before setting out)

The Red Necked and Grey Phalaropes both remained at Hook nature reserve throughout the day giving many birders excellent close views. At Titchfield Haven two Green Sandpiper and a Buzzard were the best alternative attractions on offer.

FRI 1 OCT

Brian Fellows saw the Goldeneye at the Brockhampton Gravel Quay site this morning and agrees that it is now looking like a male, even to the extent of throwing its head back in a practice of courtship display. The Black Necked Grebe were not to be seen on Budds Farm pools but he did see two of

the SHOVELER which have been there on and off since mid September. A Green Sandpiper was on the back wall and some 30 House Martin were in the air.

Brian went on to Hook and had wonderful views of both the Phalarope. He says "Both birds were feeding about 50 yards apart in the flooded ditch between the seawall and the marsh at SU489048. Both were juveniles going into their first winter plumage. The Red-necked Phalarope was a particularly attractive bird with rich ochre Vs on both mantle and scapulars, a solid dark cap, dark eye patches and a very thin, needle-sharp, bill. The Grey Phalarope, in contrast, was a much paler bird with a uniform grey mantle, a lighter cap, smaller eye patches and a thicker bill. Both birds were feeding busily in the water where they swam and delicately picked food from the surface of the water. The Grey Phalarope also occasionally climbed onto the bank where the earth had been scraped away. I was very surprised at how tame they were; I was able to approach to within 5 yards of the birds and focus my scope on them, without them appearing to 'bat an eyelid'. This was my first ever sighting of a Red-necked Phalarope and what a lovely bird it was."

If you want a trip to Bilbao (from Portsmouth?) then HOSLIST today carries news that there is one going out next Tuesday (Oct 5) on which there will be a jolly party of birders and whale watchers and it may be the last of the season. The fare is said to be £65 and you should ring P&O on 0870-2424999 to enquire and/or book. You can also learn more by visiting <http://www.biscay-dolphin.org.uk>

Paul Winter's pager today brought more news from Fleet Pond of birds possibly moving our way. 1425 House Martin, 65 Sand Martin and 14 Swallows went over this morning together with 105 SISKIN (first movement of these I think), 3 Song Thrush and 2 Woodlark. Both Siskin and Woodlark could be heading for Stansted where the former are normally common in the Larches and the latter have been found wintering in the Rosamunds Hill fields.

Dave Mead saw both the GREY and RED NECKED PHALAROPE at Hook this morning and tells me it was possible to get very close views of both in a ditch running close to the path along the south side of Hook Lake. They were about 50 yards apart and had established their individual feeding territories on either side of a yellow digger currently working on clearance of the ditch. Further HOSLIST reports show that both birds were still present at 5:58pm.

.....Dave also increased my confidence in my sighting of the two juvenile BLACK NECKED GREBE on Budds Farm pools last night - he says the two that were recently on Ivy Lake at Chichester were in the very pale plumage that I described, and possibly these are the same birds. Brian Fellows was at Budds Mound yesterday morning and did not see them so they may have only just arrived when I saw them at teatime.

THU 30 SEP

Today Nick Mills was at Farlington watching the Grey Phalarope when news came through of the Grey + Red Necked at Hook. As Nick lives within a mile of the Hook reserve he called in on his way home, seeing both down to a distance of just 5 yards, and says "Both the Hook birds are juveniles, the Grey at Hook is quite different to the Grey at Farlington, with less brown on neck/head area and smaller grey wing patches."

When I made the walk around Langstone Harbour on Sept 25 I heard three CETT'S WARBLER at the Milton Lakes and today Ian Thirlwell confirms that there are still three there. He also tells me that he saw one BEARDED TIT there on Sep 26 (he thinks there were at least three - probably just passing through) and that on Sep 25 I missed a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER and a pair of STONECHAT (these have stayed on). Wheatear, Swallows and at least one House Martin have passed through while he was looking recently, and Little Egret have been seen in new places (in Ports Creek west of the Eastern Road and in Velder Lake which I guess is in or around the Eastney/Milton shore). Not seen by Ian, but coming from a usually reliable source, is news of a BITTERN at the Milton Lakes within the past three weeks.

Brian Fellows was at Budds Farm this morning and found the number of TEAL was up to 68 and of LITTLE GREBE up to 16 though there were only 16 Tufted Duck to be seen. He also reports that the first WIGEON have arrived back on the sea here. Both Teal and Wigeon are looking pretty smart - some of the Teal have acquired both their colourful head pattern and their bright yellow sterns but while the Wigeon had smart body plumage Brian could not see any males with creamy crowns. Two Common Tern were fishing near the sewage outfall but the Black Tern which I saw later in the day had not yet arrived.

Nick Mills tells me that he always looks forward to the last week of September when a juvenile HOBBY almost invariably turns up at Hook park (south of Warsash overlooking the bottom of Southampton Water) and he has watched one feeding on various insects during the past week in

preparation for its first trip overseas. Today two less common birds have been bringing birders to the Hook nature reserve - both GREY and RED NECKED PHALAROPE together in the same ditch just south of the footpath which runs from Hook Park Road along the south side of Hook Lake to the shore. According to Paul Winter's pager they were showing well between 11am and 3pm and there is nothing to say they have left the area - they could well stay for several days like the Grey Phalarope at Farlington Deeps which is still present today for the seventh day in a row. I was on Budds Mound at around 4pm this afternoon with the tide high and a strong west wind but managed to see a single BLACK TERN flying low over the choppy water around the sewage outfall and am pretty sure there were two juvenile BLACK NECKED GREBE on the landward of the two pools below the mound. They were noticeably larger than the Dabchick which are common on the pools (a Moorhen swam by one and the Grebe had a slightly longer waterline) and had domed heads with a dark crown but the rest of the plumage on the one I was watching was a light brown like a winter Dabchick. For much of the time the bird seemed to be sleeping with its neck retracted, but it did wake up and dive once while I was watching. Although these grebes are usually seen out on the harbour I remember one spending a week or so on these pools right at the start of the winter several years back. Over on the Hermitage Stream the Black Swan was still present and the GOLDENEYE was back by the gravel quay. It is now showing white on its flanks near the breast and is presumably a young male.

WED 29 SEP

Paul Winter was at the Lower Test reserve today but saw little other than several Yellow Legged gulls flying over. Had he been there on Saturday or Monday it seems that he might have seen a RAVEN flying over (a new species for this reserve) and single OSPREYS have been there twice in the last few days.

The LITTLE EGRET high tide roost at the Portsmouth Harbour heronry site is now regularly of 30 to 35 birds according to Ian Calderwood, who tells me I will have to get used to calling this MoD site by the name of "DM Gosport" which is snappy and short and stands for Defence Munitions at Gosport. The old name of RNAD (Royal Naval Armaments Depot) has been scrapped and the confusion caused by the site being half in one district of Gosport and half in another (Frater to the south of Frater Lake and Bedenham to the north of it) can now be forgotten. At this site today Ian saw a continuous movement of SWALLOWS going east (with a HOBBY in pursuit at one point) and yesterday both WHEATEAR and WHINCHAT were seen.

Paul Winter's pager tells him that the Grey Phalarope was still at Farlington Deeps today with 5 Curlew Sandpiper (at the Deeps? or the lake?). 3 Black Necked Grebe were seen in what I take to be Russell's Lake alongside the Deeps (four have been seen in the harbour).

When Rosemary Webb was driving home on South Hayling at about 4pm this afternoon she was pleased to see a SHORT EARED OWL flying west over the fields from Mill Rythe towards Langstone Harbour. Within the past few days Barry Collins told me he had seen one on Thorney which I do not seem to have recorded. Going back to Rosemary's news - early in the morning a small party of Brent had flown over her house in the Mengham area, a pleasant change from the honking flocks of Canada Geese that normally go over.

Today's high tide brought 63 LITTLE EGRET and 15 GREY HERON to the Wade Court trees during the early afternoon spring tide according to Gary Stevens who rang me with the news

Brian Fellows found 131 Blackwits in Emsworth Harbour today (a record number for this time of year) with 62 Redshank and 4 Greenshank, and went on to hear a CETT'S WARBLER calling from the reeds half way along the north side of the open water of the Little Deeps. A Wheatear was on the seawall and a Grey Wagtail flew over.

.....Yesterday Brian was at Baffins Pond where the Mallard count was down to 72 and there were only 10 Canada Geese and just one Snow Goose though the 13 Barnacle Geese were all there. At the Kench there were lots of Grey Plover, just a couple of Common Terns and no Brent at all in the south east corner of the harbour - 5 did fly in from the harbour mouth but disappeared as quickly as they arrived. 40 Curlew were in a flock feeding off the Milton shore and again the only Brent were two over-flying. At Southsea Canoe Lake the Swans still numbered 47 and the only birds at Southsea Castle were the Swallows heading out to sea or patrolling the seaweed for insects.

.....On Monday Brian checked out Emsworth Mill Pond, finding 41 Swans and 82 Mallard. The Swan with the large plastic ring marked UYD was there.

TUE 28 SEP

A pager message relating to yesterday (Sep 27) which came in too late for the Monday night update tells of a Grey Phalarope and a Sooty Shearwater being seen from the Lymington to IoW ferry.

The SOS website tells us that there are still 5 Ospreys around Thorney. The GOLDENEYE off Langstone last Thursday (Sep 23) was seen by John Chapman who says it was a male in full plumage, so it was not the Hermitage Stream bird and presents a new mystery. Also yesterday I said I was puzzled by John Clark's participation in two separate WeBS counts in the same month - John tells me that the second one is part of a special survey of the birds in the Avon valley (right up to Salisbury) organised by himself. It supplements the normal WeBS data but is carried out on separate dates - you can't be in two places at the same time and also the dates are chosen to give the greatest number of birds for each month (last Sunday of the month before Christmas and first Sunday in the months after it). John also says that Ibsley Water is separate from Mockbeggar Lake but is a lake with no public access - he visits by special permission. My apologies to Steve Copsey for changing his name to Simon (my error, but I can't think why). Today Steve was at Titchfield Haven and watched 80 Lapwing and 30-40 Snipe rise in the air before he saw the juvenile HOBBY which disturbed them - it then headed east along the coast. Steve went on to Hook where he had good views of a KINGFISHER

Cycling south past Wade Court early in the morning with the tide well out I was quite surprised to see 6 Little Egret and 4 Heron perched in the Wade Court yew tree - presumably they had already had a good breakfast and were digesting it in peaceful surroundings - and I was pleased to see that the pools in the pony field south of Wade Court were full of water for the first time since the spring, and that a GREEN SANDPIPER was at the edge of the main pool with a dozen Teal. Coming back here several hours later with the high tide fully up I counted 55 Egrets and 8 Heron in the tree roost, and am sure there were more Egrets than I could see as at least one flew in and disappeared from sight behind the branches.

Cycling on down the Hayling Coastal Path I am pretty sure that ROCK PIPITS had returned to the shore - I heard their wheezy calls in the Oysterbeds and further south but could never get a view of one to be sure. Just south of the Oysterbeds a juvenile Stonechat was back on fence posts where the track passes Stoke Bay, and above the West Lane fields a dozen SKYLARK were chirruping and chasing each other around the sky - presumably migrants arriving from the continent as I have not heard any here for a good couple of months. Swallows, House Martins and Wheatear were to be seen in small numbers along the west and south coast of the island with a maximum of 5 Wheatear at Sandy Point where Swallows were going in both directions along the shore (I did see just two head out to sea). I reached Black Point as the tide was just starting to move waders to their roosts - while I was there some 40 Bar Tailed Godwit flew over and plummeted almost vertically onto 'Seagull Island' to be joined by parties of Oystercatcher, Grey and Ringed Plover, among the latter were several Dunlin and perhaps four Sanderling standing a little taller and looking much whiter underneath but still fairly dark above. Just three Common and three Sandwich Terns were in the area. When I got back to the Oysterbeds the tide (supposedly only 4.8 metres but maybe higher under low pressure) had submerged nearly all the outer bund walls and most of the waders had presumably gone to the RSPB islands although there were parties of Redshank and a few Turnstone flying about - one party of waders were I think Knot (slightly larger and less rapid in flight than Dunlin I could see no difference between the grey of their upper parts and their bellies).

MON 27 SEP

The Rare Bird Alert service yesterday produced a message on Paul Winter's pager more reminiscent of second world war massed bomber raids than of a quiet day's birding at Fleet Pond. It would be interesting to know if the news was just one person's impression or the result of a co-ordinated all day watch by careful counters - roll on the time when we have a local website for this and all the other corners of Hampshire to flesh out the bare bones of news which appears anonymously on the pagers. What we were told was that birds seen on Sunday at Fleet Pond included .. 10,000 Swallows, 1,400 House Martins, 145 Sand Martins, 2 Swifts, 61 Meadow Pipits, 17 Yellow Wagtails, 9 Siskin, 1 or more Crossbill, 3 Hobbies, 4 Common Scoter and 15 Water Rails. The Common Scoter are possibly the most interesting of these records - they are not unknown inland and taken with the Sandwich Tern and Arctic Skua recently reported flying south over Hampshire (from the Thames valley?) may indicate a more regular flight path than we would imagine for these seabirds. Other questions raised in my mind by this bulletin include (a) from where did e.g. the Swallows originate, (b) what geographical features focus these birds to come together above Fleet Pond, and (c) what happens to them as they head on south to hide them from watchers on the coast - do they climb above us, fly at night, or just disperse again? Another question is whether the Water Rails were regular residents at the pond or themselves a party of migrants (I assume most of them were migrants but may be wrong).

.....Further news from Fleet Pond this morning is of another single Swift with 500 House Martin, 370 Swallows and 75 Sand Martin. 1 Yellow Wagtail, 1 Woodlark and 81 Meadow Pipit also passed over

All five OSPREYS (or a new set?) were seen around Thorney by Barry Collins today – he describes them as all together and jostling for perching space on posts at Pilsley Island - and in my own garden I heard the ‘silly laugh’ song of Blue Tit as well as Chiff Chaff singing in the rain. Also today I see that John Goodspeed’s poster carries news of a GOLDENEYE seen off Langstone last Thursday (Sep 23). I guess this to be the Hermitage Stream bird which I have not seen at the Bedhampton Gravel Quay since Sep 19 and guess may have been persuaded to move on by the torrents of muddy water and rubbish being swept downstream by recent heavy rain. I have heard no further reports of its progress east into Chichester Harbour but will be amused if it turns up at Emsworth to take on the ‘odd bird’ role from the Black Swan which was still at Broadmarsh on Saturday (Sep 25). Another item of local news is that Nick Montegriffo recorded a single Arctic Tern at Farlington Marshes on Sunday when he found the Pale Bellied Brent still there. Also on Sunday Mark Litjens found 2 Black Tern still in the Budds Farm/Broadmarsh area where he counted 24 Little Egret.

John Clark was at Ibsley Water north of Ringwood in the Avon Valley before dawn yesterday morning (Sep 26) and counted 2,600 Lesser Blackback gulls flying north from their night roost on this water during the hour from 6.15 to 7.15 am, the first ones going while the moon was still the main source of light. He comments "No doubt a few Yellow-legged and maybe even Caspian jobbies in that lot!". This concentration of this species is presumably a new feature as Birds of Hampshire only mentions daytime incursions into north east Hampshire from night roosts on the London or Oxfordshire reservoirs and the highest figure given for a flock is 1200. The 1997 Bird Report gives a maximum of 385 here at Ibsley in that year and in 1996 there was a peak of 460. Ibsley Water is itself a new site which does not occur in the gazetteer at the back of Birds of Hampshire (is it the same as Mockbeggar Lake which is listed?) - presumably this is the current name for what I knew as Ibsley aerodrome when I used to watch Spitfires landing in wartime.

.....another aspect of John Clark's news which puzzles me is that he refers to this as a WeBS count, having already reported as a WeBS count what he found at Stratfield Saye on Sept 12th - I myself get a list of dates on which to turn out for WeBS counts and these are once a month on Saturdays (11th Sep, 9th Oct) and understood that it was agreed that Hampshire would deviate from the national Sunday count dates and do the preceding Saturdays but I was not aware that I was only turning out for half the counts. I also see that my campaign for using agreed abbreviations for bird species is doomed to failure - after a message from the assistant recorder for Hampshire which used SC to denote Spotted Crake (where we all know it means Stonechat) we have the recorder using a more understandable LBBG instead of LB for Lesser Blackback.

The SOS website carries news for Sunday (Sep 26) from Selsey and Chichester. The seawatchers saw another POM and 2 ARCTIC SKUA plus 2 Little Gulls and at Ivy Lake 2 ARCTIC TERN were recorded (matching Nick Montegriffo's sighting in Langstone harbour) along with another Little Gull and 2 BLACK NECKED GREBE - probably the same two which were first seen here on Tuesday Sep 21, so at a guess the four reported in Langstone Harbour on Sat 25 Sep did not include these two.

PLANTS:

THU 30 SEP

Back on Aug 6 John Goodspeed found GOLDENROD flowering in at least two places on Portsdown, bearing out what the Flora of Hants says .. "it usually avoids chalk grassland although it is occasional on leached slopes of downs". I had previously thought of it as just an acid heathland plant but there are exceptions to every rule.

WED 29 SEP

The road which takes you to the Adsdean Farm Shop just north of Funtington leads on to become a farm track heading for the top of Walderton Down and en route passes through fields full of pigs. Among the pigs is a small enclave of plants intended to feed pheasants rather than pigs and it has an assortment of giant sunflowers, a mass of Millet, and various other plants which include BUCKWHEAT which I had never seen before today. I had been told of its presence by members of the Evening Class group who walked here earlier in the month and so knew roughly what I was looking for - the plant is a sort of upright, self supporting bindweed with clusters of pink flowers

and I cannot remember seeing anything like it (though Copse Bindweed is very similar). Among the many other plants I found in flower during a morning's circular walk here were the first tiny flowers on BUTCHER'S BROOM, and two unexpected plants found high on the slopes of the downs were Water Mint and Water Figwort (this last not in flower but retaining its strongly winged stems and tall 'skeleton'. There was lots of Wild Basil still in flower and one plant of Common Hemp-nettle

TUE 28 SEP

Greater Knapweed and White Melilot were among the plants still flowering on north Hayling this morning, and when I reached the south coast of the island a lot of Restharrow was flowering at Beachlands (but none of the expected Evening Primrose - it had I think all been mown in the interests of tidiness). The alleyway which took me from Southwood Road to the promenade was liberally lined with a pink oxalis but I find that I have once more failed my observation test in that I did not check the plants to see if they arose from bulbs or rhizomes in order to separate Pink-Sorrel (*Oxalis articulata*) from Large Flowered Pink-Sorrel (*O. debilis*). Although the flowers were quite big I am pretty sure it was all *O. articulata* as the flowers were all a bright deep pink (not the pinkish-mauve described for *O. debilis*). Along the promenade one patch of Sea Campion and three plants of Yellow Horned Poppy all in full flower matched what the Evening Class had seen at Pagham on Saturday, and at Black Point one plant of Tree Lupin had a full spike of yellow flowers. At both Black and Sandy Points Sea Rocket was flowering and both Large Flowered Evening Primrose and Storks Bill were still out. Along the southern bank of the Black Point sailing club grounds, especially at the western point, a mass of tall stemmed Hare's Tail grass, although now over, was highly decorative.

INSECTS:

SUN 3 OCT

On Sep 30 Barry Collins had another single CLOUDED YELLOW on Thorney Island where it stopped off to nectar on Ragwort and today he made a circuit of the island (see Bird news re the closing of the coast path to the public) during which he counted 44 Red Admiral, 10 Speckled Wood (in the churchyard), 2 Wall Brown, 1 Small Copper, 1 Painted Lady, 1 Comma and 6 Small White. He also saw 1 Ruddy Darter, 1 Migrant Hawker and 14 Common Darter. Six more Red Admirals were seen in Emsworth today by Brian Fellows.

One Red Admiral flew around my garden today and a male Southern Hawker in good condition flew around me and then settled on a shrub to let me fully check its large green ante-humeral stripes and blue banded tail segments.

SAT 2 OCT

Mark Litjens saw up to 9 Red Admiral and 8 Comma around Hursley on three days this week, with 2 Brimstone there on one day. On Saturday (today) he was at Warsash and found 2 Speckled Wood, 3 Comma and 6 Red Admiral there along with 3 Common Darter and 1 Migrant Hawker - best of all was a HUMMING BIRD HAWKMOTH just flying by.

WED 29 SEP

John Vigay tells me that he has been improving his website which covers the 'Greater Horndean' area served by the Hampshire Wildlife Trust 'Southdowns' group. The address has changed to <http://www.vigay.com/wildlife> (this address is now in my What's New page LINKS section) and visitors to it can find out the important insect life of the area called Dell Piece West which has been the subject of planning contention and now may still suffer from inappropriate recreational use of the area. I may have got this wrong so check it out in John's site which is illustrated with pictures of Ruddy Darter and Long-winged Conhead, etc. John's interest in wildlife caused him some mental conflict early in August when a Hobby twice visited his garden pond to eat the dragonflies.

Despite today's wind and rain Red Admiral, Large White and Speckled Wood were all seen when I was out on Walderton Down this morning. Over at Gosport Ian Calderwood tells me that he has seen several COMMA as well as Speckled Wood and Red Admiral

TUE 28 SEP

I saw my first Red Admiral as soon as I arrived on Hayling this morning and had probably been overtaken by at least ten, all heading south, before I reached the south end of the Hayling Coastal Path. I saw another three or four along the south coast of the island, and though I did not see any heading out over the water I am sure these had the same intention of a return migration south as had those which Barry Collins saw going south over Thorney Island last Sunday. On my way north again when the air had warmed up I met three or four Speckled Wood and in my garden one Larger

White was seen in the early afternoon.
Two more MONARCH butterflies were at Beachy Head last Sunday (Sep 26) and the Pagham harbour sighting yesterday was of one at Church Norton

MON 27 SEP

MONARCH butterflies were seen on the Isle of Wight yesterday and again today when they were also seen at Pagham Harbour – these coastal sites and the strong south west winds sound to be good evidence for genuine transatlantic migrants (perhaps a throw off from Hurricane Floyd?). This news came from Mark Litjens who today saw 5 Red Admiral, 2 Comma and a Southern Hawker dragonfly in Hursley village. Yesterday he had Large White and Speckled Wood in his garden, and there was at least one Large White in my garden today.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 3 OCT

Rosemary Webb led a fungus foray for our Evening Class in The Sling (the nose of Stansted Forest which sticks out into Rowlands Castle village) this morning in bright sunshine after heavy rain (good conditions for fungi). The Giant Polypores which flourish like large brown cabbages on several tree stumps lining the main grass avenue were in business and there were several large Parasol fungi (both the tall edible one and the shorter stemmed Shaggy Parasol) with a few tall Magpie fungi in poor condition. Under the trees were many Mycena species including both form of Mycena pura (one more mauve, one more rosy) and the lovely Mycena crocata (illustrated with Rosemary's own photo on page 40 of the current issue of Natural World magazine). The commoner Amethyst Deceiver (also illustrated on the same page) was found under the trees with several less common species starting with Lycoperdon echinatum - a puffball species which is covered with brown spines like a Hedgehog - and including White Coral Fungus and the even whiter Porcelain Fungus which grows on beech trees. Best find, though not identified for certain, was what Rosemary felt sure was a Giant Club which can stand 30cm high and be 6cm in diameter around the club - this one was smaller and not standing erect. After the morning in Stansted Rosemary went on to Head Down at Buriton and found the first of the Earth Stars (*G. sessile*), some Mycena haematopus which exudes blood red liquid if the stem is broken, and some young examples of a large toadstool called Rhodotus palmatus which grows on elm logs and has very pretty apricot coloured caps. (PS On Sunday Oct 3 she visited Selborne and found the first Death Cap of the season.)

WED 29 SEP

On Walderton Down this morning I was passing a securely fenced field full of young cattle when I noticed three small shapes running among them. These were Roe Deer and I have no idea what brought them here but once among the cattle there was a chain reaction whereby the cattle started to run with the Roe and the Roe clearly panicked and started racing to escape them. The fence was too high to be jumped and one of the deer which thought it had spotted a gap in the fence crashed into it at high speed. Naturally the deer outran the cattle and soon disappeared leaving me to contemplate the signs that several Badgers had been on the path I was using very recently - presumably last night - and had left very fresh droppings. Earlier I had found fresh Fallow Deer slots on the path, but strangely I saw only one Rabbit in my walk (they no doubt prefer to be underground in dry burrows rather than out in the wind and rain).

Rosemary Webb today told me a story quite as good as that of Peter and the Wolf, and it was a true story recently played out in her Hayling garden. She hangs a nut-feeder from a tree in the garden where Squirrels take their share as well as the birds, but on the morning in question a Brown Rat had found a way up the tree and was raiding the feeder hanging about ten feet above the ground. Rosemary did not object but one of the resident Grey Squirrels did, and launched a violent attack on the rat which eventually fell to the ground. Clearly the fall stunned it but it would probably have recovered had not the local Fox been lurking under the same tree - quick as a flash he was out and the rat was in his jaws.

Steve Copsy had a similar story of the less pleasant side of animal existence to tell when he was on the road from Titchfield Haven to Thatcher's Copse yesterday and passed "a young up-turned snake on the road. Upon further investigation it was found to be a 10" long Grass Snake. I assumed that it was dead until I lifted it for inspection with a grass stem when it started to hiss at me or tasting the air with its tongue. It was injured about mid-way down its body and so I was in two minds whether to put it out of its misery or to let it go. After a few minutes I decided to place it in the grass verge

by the waters edge. I hoped for the best as it slithered away."

COMMENTS:

2 Oct 99 - from Ralph Hollins - Hampshire TREE WARDENS celebrate their TENTH ANNIVERSARY with a Star Wars project

This morning Jonathan Stokes, Portchester born secretary of the national Tree Council, was on Radio Solent this morning with two pieces of news. The first is that the TREE WARDEN scheme in Hampshire is celebrating its tenth anniversary today with a meeting this evening in Winchester Guildhall, and the second is that one of their new projects is to keep a watch out for a new menace to trees from a large Asian LONGHORN BEETLE (whose common name when translated from Chinese is 'STARRY SKIES' beetle) which may be arriving in this country in the timber of packing cases carrying goods here from China.

The beetle is 3cm long, with the very long antennae that give all Longhorn Beetles their general name, and is black in colour with a number of white/yellow dots on its 'back' (the elytra or wing cases). It picks on youngish trees of various species (not specified, but it is not limited to one tree species) and bores into them a neat round hole 1cm in diameter, leaving a pile of wood chippings below the hole so that it looks like the work of a metal drill. The hole is made for the beetle to lay its eggs deep in the heart wood of the tree and the combined effect of these large holes and of the grubs activities is that branches soon begin to fall from the tree.

The beetle was first discovered as a menace to trees in New York parks not long ago and as a result of the potential danger from falling branches and the unsightliness of dying trees there has been a campaign there to eradicate it by felling every tree in which the tell-tale holes are found, and these numbered thousands when they started searching them out.

In Britain there is a scheme for drying the wood of all packing cases arriving in the country but this does not sound to me to be a fool-proof scheme for preventing a large scale disaster among our trees so everyone - you, me and the Tree Wardens - is asked to keep an eye out for these beetles or the large round holes they leave in trees and to report them immediately to the Forestry Commission (directly or via Tree Wardens or local authorities)

Does anyone know more about this menace? and who are our Tree Wardens here in the Havant area?

1 Oct 99 - from Ralph Hollins - A proposal for BOAR HUNTING in DORSET

The BBC TV South Today programme this evening told me that there was a population of feral WILD BOAR in Dorset and that at least one landowner was hoping to make money by inviting people to pay for the privilege of shooting them. At the moment this is just a proposal ...

I knew that Wild Boar were a problem in parts of Kent but was not aware that they originated as escapes from attempts to farm them. On TV tonight we were shown such a farm, presumably in Dorset, where I was not aware until now that any Wild Boar could be found.

If they are a danger to life and property then I suppose that shooting is the only way to control the problem, but I would be opposed to making their control a money-making business (would it not encourage further 'escapes' to keep up the business?). You, however, may think differently and be of the opinion that it's better to get the rich Italians to spend their money on the support of Dorset landowners - after all it might divert a few of them from culling geese on Islay or shooting Turtle Doves back in Italy.

1 Oct 99 - from Brian Fellows - Date fixed for opening BRIDGEFOOT PATH IMPROVEMENTS at Emsworth

A ceremony will take place at 3pm on Thursday 14 October 1999 to mark the completion of the environmental improvement works undertaken by Havant Borough Council at Bridgefoot Path, Emsworth. The ceremony will take the form of the presentation of a commemorative plaque by County Councillor Dudley Keep and Councillor DM Farrow, the Mayor of Havant.

29 Sept 99 - from Ralph Hollins - The NEW FOREST and the SOUTH DOWNS to be NATIONAL PARKS

The mid-day news today told us that John Prescott had just told the Labour Party conference of his decision to give both these areas National Park status but the news did not include any time table for the changeover from the present 'governing bodies' to the new ones.

Many people will welcome this, seeing it as an extension to the protection of the landscape and wildlife, but others will regret the loss of control by local people and the introduction of national standards and rules which by trying to provide for all circumstances throughout the country may be inappropriate to the needs of each of the individual areas. There must also be fears that this new status will increase visitor pressure, both by advertising the areas to a wider audience and by trying to provide more and more recreational facilities in the parks.

I have not studied the arguments for and against this new status and can only give a gut reaction - a hope that the wildlife and landscape will be better protected than they have been in the past (though it will be difficult to better the past track record of the Verderers or of the more recent South Downs Board), but a strong feeling that the wildlife of the New Forest will suffer from more visitors being encouraged to penetrate further into its hidden places on well intentioned paths for walkers, cyclists and horse-riders. I can also imagine a multiplicity of 'wildlife interpretation' boards appearing to tell the un-informed visitors 'here be Wild Gladiolus' and the like.

WEEK 38 SEP 20 - 26

BIRDS:

SUN 26 SEP

This evening Barry Collins told me of some of the raptors he has seen over Thorney Island recently (I think the following were all seen this week-end). The five OSPREYS seen there last Thursday (Sep 23) were this year's peak count for the island and today only two could be seen (three yesterday but one of these probably went to Langstone harbour). Two PEREGRINES (an adult and a juvenile) have been seen - it would be interesting to know how big their 'hunting territory' is and if these stay in Chichester Harbour or are the same birds that visit Farlington Marshes and Langstone Harbour. Today a HOBBY was seen and recently a MARSH HARRIER flew over with several primaries missing - it may have been a juvenile that had been shot at but hopefully it was a female in the normal process of moult. Turning to the Egrets Barry tells me the roost is still suffering disturbance from joggers and that his latest count was of 220 birds at dusk on Sep 15 - it is probable that some birds have found an alternative roost but it has not yet been discovered by birders.

A GARGANEY was at Titchfield Haven yesterday according to Paul Winter's pager which also reported 25 Black Tern offshore there today with a Little Gull and Hobby. Other messages speak of the Grey Phalarope still at Farlington Marshes where the Spoonbill could not be found though 15 to 20 Pale Bellied Brent were still south of the reserve

A circuit of the Larch plantations in the north west of Stansted Forest this morning found me a nice flock of Tits and Goldcrest but no Siskin or Crossbill as yet. The only thing possibly worth a mention was the rattle of a single MISTLE THRUSH. I know that at this time of year these birds may seem to vanish as they leave their breeding areas and join up in moderate sized flocks but this year I have not come on any of these flocks and have only seen a couple of single birds (this one today and one at Langstone a week or so ago). Are others still seeing them or have they vanished from the scene?

Today Brian Fellows made the Nutbourne/Prinsted circular walk and found some 70 TEAL in the wet meadow where the Ham Brook reaches Nutbourne Bay (recently the field was too dry to attract any waders or wildfowl). Two Little Egret were present but none of the smaller waders were seen. On the seawall 5 Wheatear flitted about and an Osprey was perched on a post out in the Prinsted

channel until a passing wind-surfer drove it off to Thorney.

SAT 25 SEP

Brian Fellows much enjoyed the sight of a HONEY BUZZARD over Pagham Harbour today before visiting the Chichester Lakes and seeing 2 adult BLACK TERN and a first winter LITTLE GULL.

The evening class walk this Saturday was from Church Norton to the Sidlesham reserve centre and back and in addition to the Honey Buzzard (only seen against the sun but confirmed by other birders who had seen it earlier) there were many Wigeon with a few Teal, Pintail and Gadwall in Pagham harbour. A Sparrowhawk flew over the Church Norton carpark and along the shore path just one Wheatear was seen. The reserve sightings board reported 17 Little Stint and 7 Spotshank on the Ferry Pool.

Paul Winter's pager reported a single SWIFT over Farlington Marshes yesterday and today it tells us that the Grey Phalarope is still at the Farlington Deeps with an Osprey in the vicinity (at one point perching on a main marsh fence post). Pintail were on the Deeps and 20 Pale Bellied Brent on the harbour with Whinchat and Wheatear around the reserve. A later message says that the SPOONBILL is still in the harbour and that 4 BLACK NECKED GREBE are now present with 2 Peregrines. Today's messages ended with news of a COMMON ROSEFINCH over on the Isle of Wight at Bembridge.

Mark Litjens was at Needs Ore reserve this morning and watched a juvenile WOOD SANDPIPER until it flew off, also seeing a steady flow of hirundines going south while 3 Common and 2 Sandwich Tern were fishing in the Beaulieu River. Mark went on to Farlington and saw the Phalarope as well as seeing an Osprey catch a fish and take it to the islands to eat.

Trevor Carpenter found 273 WIGEON in Cams Bay this morning and at first I thought this might be an alltime record number for Portsmouth Harbour but I see that Birds of Hampshire records a count of 593 in the harbour in Dec 1978. In more recent years we have not recorded anything like that number and the Cams Bay flock is usually around 50 birds with a peak of 135.

Although I saw no rarities in today's 15 mile walk around Langstone Harbour I recorded an adequate score of 60 species which included Kingfisher (two sightings, at Langstone Mill and in a field ditch alongside the Hayling Coastal path), Common and Sandwich Tern, and many House Martins with fewer Swallows and just one Sand Martin. On South Hayling I heard Yellow Wagtail and on the west shore of the harbour watched five Wheatear moving south. I saw Brent in several places and think I saw the famed flock of Pale Bellied birds off the south of Farlington Marshes (a flock of 30 to 40 birds on the water showing white along the waterline when seen sideways on). Some 15 Wigeon landed close to the shore off Saltmarsh Lane and a much larger flock seen very distantly in the centre of the harbour south of the Farlington Point were presumably the 300 Wigeon others have seen, and my list of ducks included Pochard on Sinah Lake and Teal, Tufted and Shoveler on the Budds Farm pools. At Broadmarsh slipway the Black Swan was still with the Mute Swans, one of which had died and was lying on the slipway. Right at the end of the walk I counted 35 Egrets on the Wade Court trees at Langstone (there were probably more out of sight) and in blackberry bushes at the seaward end of the pony field across which I saw the Egrets I heard a CETTIS WARBLER making plenty of noise to prove its presence - earlier I had heard three separate ones calling by the Milton Lakes.

FRI 24 SEP

This afternoon a GREY PHALAROPE was seen on the Deeps at Farlington Marshes according to Paul Winter's pager. The message contains the phrase 'although mobile' with no apparent grammatical connection to the rest of the words and I assume we are being told that the bird may no longer be at the Deeps because it was flitting around. The message also reports 'that Spoonbill' as being still in Langstone Harbour and a second message reports 31 Pale Bellied Brent as still there today.

A brief line on Paul Winter's pager this morning recorded a sight which must have made at least one Hampshire birder happy - a close inshore fly past of a POM SKUA at Stokes Bay, Gosport. Unlike the birders at Selsey Bill we in Hampshire see less than our share of these birds, especially in autumn, and while one Pom hardly deserves Kingship I hope the lucky person feels proud enough to consider himself a 'Jack of Skuas' (I can see I will be in trouble if the birder concerned was a lady).

There may well be quite a few young people wanting to pursue a working career in some field involving wildlife whose hopes of getting a job would be advanced by a new qualification in Bird Identification being offered by the Natural History Museum with the aid of the BTO so the following remarks are not intended to 'knock' the scheme or put off those to whom it is applicable - they should find out more by visiting <http://www.nhm.ac.uk/zoology/idq.htm> and possibly sending their queries to Dr Anthony Weir (A.Weir@nhm.ac.uk). Having said that, from the position of one well past his working days and who takes a great deal more pleasure in living creatures rather than

dead 'specimens', I think it is a great pity that the examination for this qualification should require the student to show his identification skills on dead corpses rather than out in the field where so many factors other than measurements of e.g. bill length and similar anatomical details rather than a knowledge of habitat and behaviour. I think many people are glad that Victorian practice of 'collecting specimens' by shooting are now over and that butterfly collecting is more or less a thing of the past. I know the botanists still refuse to look at a plant specimen until it has been killed and flattened, and I hope this new 'IDQ' qualification is not the start of a general return of what I see as a deplorable habit.

THU 23 SEP

The Sussex recent sightings website tells me that back on Sep 19 (last Sunday) 2 SOOTY SHEARWATER and a VELVET SCOTER flew past Selsey Bill; ten BRENT were in Pagham Harbour with 2 Sanderling and 10 Little Egret; and that a LONG TAILED SKUA flew west past Bexhill. On Tue 21 Sep there were two BLACK NECKED GREBE on Ivy Lake at Chichester and a RED BACKED SHRIKE close to the Sidlesham nature reserve info centre (frustratingly we are told these are both 'still present' without being told when they were first seen). Four OSPREY were off Thorney Island on that day. Yesterday, Sep 23, the Shrike was still at Sidlesham in the morning but could not be seen in the afternoon, and there were 5 Ospreys off Thorney. In Pagham Harbour a SAKER (the same bird which troubles John Badley in Langstone Harbour?) caught a PINTAIL in flight, while the Ferry Pool had 12 Little Stint and 2 Curlew Sandpiper. At Ivy Lake the two Black Necked Grebes were still to be seen together with a KITTIWAKE.

Of two 'Hoslist' messages today one reports the SPOONBILL as again seen on the north east side of an island in Langstone Harbour (presumably Round Nap) and of it being flushed at 11:30am, while the other bemoans a shortage of passerine migrants this autumn. I'm not able to judge how good or bad a passage we are having but I do know that I often go looking for plants or insects which I think 'should be out' and am disappointed only to find they are abundant shortly afterwards, and maybe the best is yet to come - this week's reports of 600 House Martins over Fleet Pond and of the Budds Farm bushes being alive with Blackcaps suggest that things are beginning to move at last (maybe the warm air and strong southerly winds have delayed the start of passage). In my own garden I had a Spotted Flycatcher last night and Tony Gutteridge today told me he had just heard a Common Whitethroat on the South Moors

WED 22 SEP

Paul Winter was out on Eling Great Marsh at the top of Southampton Water in this afternoon's thunderstorms so he will never know if there were more than the 22 YELLOW LEGGED GULLS which he counted before having to retreat to a hide at the Lower Test reserve. (When he was there on Aug 22 he had heard that up to 22 had been seen at this site but only saw 8 himself that day).

He also spotted a 'half pint' Canada Goose among the flock there (one of the 'small but perfectly formed' minima race of these monster geese) and I share his view that it did not fly the Atlantic to join them but came from some local collection. When I was at the IBM Lake for the WeBS count on Sep 11 this month I half expected to see one among the flock of 395 birds present there as we had one with them last year (can't find the record - it could have been the year before) and it may well be that there is one permanently roaming south Hampshire.

.....3 WHINCHAT were still at the Lower Test today and Paul also saw the Kingfisher, one Common Sandpiper and a few of the 10+ Green Sandpiper that have been there. 5 Snipe are probably not unusual there, close to the New Forest breeding areas, but I have still to see my first on the Langstone South Moors.

Anonymous news from Paul Winter's pager today tells of 5 OSPREY were seen off the south end of Thorney Island this morning. At a guess these are in addition to the two that were still operating around the Thorney Deepes when Barry Collins told me on Monday that he had two more at the south end of the island. Sounds as if there's a mad rush to get away from their British breeding sites before the weather gets any worse. Also on the pager was news that the Langstone harbour SPOONBILL was still present late this morning.

Someone had a good morning's birding at Fleet Pond today to judge by the anonymous news appearing on Paul Winter's pager. To start the day there were two separate sightings of OSPREY (probably the same bird?) and at coffee break time two SANDWICH TERN flew over heading south - these are very unusual but not unknown at Fleet - but the greatest activity came towards midday when 600 HOUSE MARTINS, 65 SWALLOWS and 24 CROSSBILL were seen flying south with one or more WOODLARK and YELLOW WAGTAIL.

Mike Collins was at Budds Farm this morning and found the three BLACK TERN and two LITTLE

GULLS still present over the sewage outfall with a couple of Sandwich Tern. On shore the bushes were alive with BLACKCAPS and a single YELLOWHAMMER (not a regular here) was perched above them

.....Mike asks if anyone knows who might have put a GREEN WING TAG (letter OV on it) on a BLACK HEADED GULL which he saw at Budds Farm last month. And while on the subject of ringing I have just received a note describing the ringing of GREAT BLACKBACK and HERRING GULLS in the Channel Islands - I can pass on to anyone who wants them the details of the seven different ring combinations that are being used but for brevity here if you see one these two gull species with a metal ring on one leg and a large coloured plastic ring on the other please note the colour of the plastic ring, the characters marked on it, and which leg it was on. Send the details (with location, date, time, age of the bird and what it was doing - also of note of what other gulls it was associating with) to Ian Buxton, Le petit Huquet, La Rue du Huquet, St Martin, Jersey, Channel Isles JE3 6HU (the Societe Jersaise running this scheme was founded in 1873 and they havent heard of email yet)

TUE 21 SEP

Brian Fellows was at Farlington this morning with the tide starting to fall and found 29 of the PALE BELLIED BRENT on mud at SU 680035 west of the reserve. This is the first time anyone has mentioned finding them here rather than on the east of the reserve among the islands and Brian was surprised to see that 16 of the 29 were juveniles (he says no one has mentioned this but to be fair to Paul Winter he alone said that 3 of the 7 birds he saw on Sep 14 were juveniles). As we do not usually see any young of the Dark Bellied birds until about a month after the first (non- or failed-breeders) reach us Brian wonders how to interpret this high percentage of young birds so early in the winter. Have they had an exceptionally good breeding season in Canada? Could this be some sort of creche? Does the weather in North America force them all to leave earlier than the Siberian birds (or do the latter spend more time feeding along the route - not much chance of doing that on a flight over the Atlantic as compared to a European overland/coastal route). Brian also says "With regards to plumage the underparts of the adults were distinctly paler than the equivalent of the dark-bellied race, but the underparts of the juveniles were much darker, which I suspect would make the juveniles of the two races difficult to separate." No one so far has commented on a different tone to the upper plumage of these birds - Pale Bellied are supposed to look browner above than Dark Bellied.

.....Looking south from Farlington Brian could see 52 Dark Bellied Brent among a flock of 300+ WIGEON not far off the Point, whereas he only saw 15 off Saltmarsh Lane this morning. Looking east to the islands he watched a motionless PEREGRINE perched on one of the brick structures on Long Island - I believe this to be one of its regular resting places (and the brick structures to have been built during the war when they were regularly set on fire in order to attract German planes to drop their bombs there rather than on Portsmouth)

.....Brian also comments on the behaviour of a Kestrel which he saw on the ground for about ten minutes apparently eating insects and trying to get food from an ants nest. I have never heard of them going for an ants nest before but I do know that young Kestrels are not always successful at catching voles, etc by hovering (like fishing it must take time to learn the tricks and skills involved) and in their hunger will take anything that moves on the ground (I have seen one carry off an earthworm). I think even the adults are not averse to a large beetle.

.....At Budds Farm Brian found the Little Grebe were up to 12 in number with 34 Tufted Duck and 38 Teal and on the sea off the sewage outfall were 4 BLACK TERN and 2 LITTLE GULL (juvenile/first winter), and earlier at Southsea Canoe Lake he found one more Swan had flown in to bring the flock to 47 birds

Alistair Martin brought the discussion on 'one legged waders' round full circle today, and resolved all the problems of how the birds legs come to fall off so cleanly despite some very tough tendons holding them on, by saying that in his opinion they never lose their legs but just tuck them up out of sight (which is one of the alternatives put by Simon Copsy when he provoked the discussion). He suggests that if you see a bird hopping around on one leg and watch it long enough you will suddenly find it has changed legs and is now hopping on the one that was previously invisible. So now what we want are accounts of birds (alive or dead) with visible 'stumps' in place of complete legs.

.....On the other subject of early eclipse in ducks Trevor Carpenter says "when Wigeon first arrive at the very end of August or early September they are always in full plumage. It stands to reason when you think that they have just flown some distance to get here, they presumably want to do it with a nice new set of feathers". OK, so that helps to prove that Wigeon are in good plumage and that that is normal, and clearly all ducks need a good set of wing feathers with which to fly, but anyone seeing a drake Shoveler or looking at the back end of a Teal at the moment will have no doubt that they can fly long before they have completed the moult of the body feathers. So it seems the Wigeon that started the discussion are not doing anything unusual this year, and we will have to wait and see how long it takes for all species to be in complete breeding finery.

MON 20 SEP

Nick Montegriffo offers an interesting new theory (see Sep 18 entry) as to how some waders come to lose their legs, and he says it has some backing in that a higher proportion of transatlantic vagrants seem to suffer from it than do our resident birds. The theory is that these birds fly high and get caught up in the jet stream which both carries them long distances but also subjects them to intense cold for long period (rather like those unfortunate people from third world countries who try to reach the west by stowing away in the undercarriage of an aircraft). All theories so far have major difficulties and with this one I do not see (a) why one leg should suffer more than another, nor (b) how the leg becomes separated from the body. I've seen plenty of gulls flying around with one leg dangling (the Glaucous Gull at Hardway in Portsmouth Harbour could only stand on one leg in the last winter it was with us) but the one legged waders seem to lose theirs cleanly (sometimes at the 'knee' and sometimes at the very top). Further theories and answers still welcome. (I'm sure someone will connect abnormalities in the embryo bird with radiation hazards in the Russian arctic before we've finished)

.....Nick also comments on what Simon Copesey had to say about ducks in eclipse being ahead of schedule this year. (see Sat 18 Sep) He agrees that Mallard are looking very smart already but is not sure that this applies to other species. I don't think anyone is suggesting that any species are completely out of eclipse yet - certainly the Teal have not yet got those lovely yellow 'bottoms' - but both Wigeon and Tufted Duck are suddenly looking 'almost back to normal', and the early arrival of more Wigeon than usual for September implies that more birds were ready to fly back at an early date. We will probably have to wait another five years or more to see if 'global warming' has really advanced the annual life cycles of the birds but it would not surprise me to find that it had (the BTO are telling us that most birds are nesting earlier each year)

Brian Fellows has been enjoying a long weekend away (not birding) before returning to mastermind the Evening Class sessions that start this evening so he has little news from Emsworth other than to record a low Swan count (only 32 where there was an average count of 55 for Sept 98) and a high Mallard count of 108 on the Emsworth Mill Pond.

Unknown birders reporting from Langstone Harbour yesterday caused the following messages to appear on Paul Winter's pager. A SPOONBILL (presumably the one that has been posing on Round Nap, and presumably still on that island) was said to be visible from Farlington Marshes and an OSPREY was seen over the harbour. A second message (which looks as if it was a report from someone on Farlington Marshes) tells of 35 PALE BELLIED BRENT (up 2 on the previous maximum) in the harbour (still presumably in and around the islands), with a PEREGRINE overhead and Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and SANDERLING (the first two are regulars at the reserve lake but Sanderling would be an interesting sighting at the marshes - I know that at this time of year the odd bird can touch down anywhere, and I have heard of Sanderling perching briefly on the seawall near the Point when on passage, but in my opinion to see one on the lakeside mud with the Stint would be 'unexpected' - it's a pity that the pagers cannot give more detail of who saw what and where)

PLANTS:

SAT 25 SEP

YELLOW HORNED POPPIES were still flowering on the shingle at Church Norton for the 'Evening Class' group visiting Pagham Harbour today and both THRIFT and SEA CAMPION were flowering along the harbour shore

AMPHIBIOUS BISTORT is not an uncommon plant but usually it is incredibly dull to look at so I rank today's finding of it in flower as being somewhat of a red letter day. The place where I saw this unusual event was at the side of the concrete road leading from the Tudor Sailing Club (on the north west shore of Langstone Harbour) to the Eastern Road, and just south of this sailing club I had another surprise in

finding a substantial cluster of the GUERNSEY FLEABANE plants which now seem to ring Langstone Harbour (also found near the Kench and at Broadmarsh) and to occur in several other places nearby. A colourful plant which grows in some profusion at the Milton Lakes but not on the Hayling shore is PERRENIAL WALL-ROCKET, today brilliant with a mass of yellow flowers. Late flowering species seen on today's round the harbour walk were Viper' Bugloss, Greater Knapweed and Common Storksbill on Hayling and Tansy over at Milton. One other flower that I think worth a mention though really a garden plant was to be seen as masses of tiny white bells on a STRAWBERRY TREE in a Hayling Sinah Lane garden - I could not see any fruit on it but it served as a reminder to go and look at the tree in the Northney churchyard which last autumn had such a magnificent display of white blossom and red berries mixed in equal proportions.

INSECTS:

SUN 26 SEP

Barry Collins has seen both WALL BROWN and Meadow Brown on Thorney Island this weekend and he tells me that the third brood of Wall Brown emerged there on Sep 12 when he saw eight of them. Today he noticed two or three RED ADMIRAL flying south and heading out to sea - I wonder if Andrew Brookes was out fishing in the channel and saw them pass as he saw them coming in? (See entry for Aug 26)

Mark Litjens still had Red Admiral and Large White on his Buddleia today and I had one Speckled Wood in Stansted Forest and a Large White in the garden.

Brian Fellows tells me that both SMALL COPPER and Red Admiral were seen at Pagham by the evening class group yesterday and today he had both COMMA and another Red Admiral on Ivy in his Emsworth garden.

SAT 25 SEP

Yesterday a golfer called Bill Fergie found a large and colourful caterpillar on a golf course near Basingtoke and asks me what it might have been. His description reads .. "It was at least 10cm long and about 2cm in diameter. It was bright yellow in colour but with blue/grey markings on its back. Other distinguishing features were a small yellow 'tail' and black markings on its face." The only yellow caterpillar of this size that I know of is that of a Death's Head Hawkmoth and my Collins Field Guide to Caterpillars pictures one that exactly fits the description (though the text says the caterpillar can grow to 13cm and that the colours can vary). I don't have access to any source of info on the status of Death's Head Hawkmoth in Hampshire but I am pretty sure it is one of the rarest migrants which reach us from Africa and that the moth people in the county will be pleased to have this record of one visiting us this year - I suspect that none are seen here in most years. I did know that the caterpillars normally feed on the leaves of potato plants but I see that they will eat other leaves so I wonder what this caterpillar had been living on on a golf course (maybe it was wandering off to pupate in which case it may have come some distance in search of suitable soil in which to pupate). I also see that the adult moth differs from the other hawk moths (which have long probosces and nectar from long tubed flowers while hovering in front of them) in having short hard proboscis with which 'it has been known to raid honeycombs'. And finally - neither of my books gives this info but I feel sure I have heard that the caterpillars of this moth will make loud squeaking noises if frightened. Hopefully more knowledgeable people will contribute some more factual info when they see my comments on the species.

A fresh RED ADMIRAL was a normal sight for a blustery autumn day with sun alternating with rain as were both Small White and Speckled Wood but I was quite surprised when on Budds Mound to see what I assumed to be another Small White being blown by the wind until it was effectively pinned against some dead plant stems and I realised it was a GREEN VEINED WHITE. Near Farlington Marshes a single Migrant Hawker flew low over the sea and at Langstone a single Common Darter rose from the seawall path in the sunshine.

FRI 24 SEP

Normally WALL BROWN vanish from the scene in the first week or so of September but occasionally a third brood emerges at the beginning of October. I see from the Hampshire Butterfly reports that this species was seen up to the end of October in both 1998 and 97 (while in 1995 one at least was seen at the end of November), and as the species seems to have been having a relatively good summer I am not very surprised that John Goodspeed saw one flying on Portsdown this afternoon. He also saw a couple of Meadow Brown and, less surprisingly, a Speckled Wood. In my own garden I had Speckled Wood and Large White today, together with an unidentified Hawker dragonfly, and down Southmoor Lane another dragonfly of which I had the briefest of glances of something that looked the shape of a chaser or skimmer rather than a Hawker.

THU 23 SEP

This morning I was chatting to my son in my front drive when a fast flying beetle like insect almost hit me before landing on the white roof of the car where we were both very puzzled as to its identity - the size and the very long back legs, awkwardly spayed sideways, suggested to me that it was some sort of Cricket. Before we had much time to study it it flew again, making two more passes at me, then down to the bottom of a shrub from which I had the impression that it grabbed some smaller green insect (or maybe a tiny leaf) in its jaws before zooming off for good. Whether or not it did seize prey I cannot be sure, but I do know that a lengthy search of Chinery could not identify it - the answer came later from my subconscious mind, and Chinery confirmed what it told me, namely that this was a WATER BOATMAN. As well as being strong flyers Chinery tells me that when swimming on the surface of a pond these creatures swim belly up (possibly to protect their soft underbelly from attack by fish?), but that if you put them in a glass tank and shine a strong light from below they will turn over, keeping their bellies to the light. My son suggests an experiment in which you shine the light from the side and see if the creatures side-slip to the bottom of the water.

TUE 21 SEP

Pete Potts saw his first CLOUDED YELLOW of the year today in the Kites Croft area of Titchfield Common and this is only the second one I have heard of in Hampshire this year (the other was on the New Forest coast on Aug 11). It's a bit late now for any invasion from the south but in October we sometimes find these insects seeming to head south again (though I do not know of any proof that they ever re-cross the channel) so maybe there is hope that we will still see some as they retreat from other parts of England.

On Hayling Island today Small Whites were still plentiful (twenty or more over one cabbage field) and there were Speckled Wood in ones and twos in suitable places (as Andrew Brookes said the other day this autumn brood has a very dark brown colour). I saw two or three Large White and at least one Red Admiral but the most interesting sighting was of a single GATEKEEPER on blackberries in the hedge of the Hayling Billy trail.

While on Hayling I went to see if there were any of the beautiful ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI spiders left in the rough grass where they were abundant on a visit last month. I did not expect to find many as once these large bodied females have emptied themselves of the hundreds of eggs that fill their abdomens they soon die (though they can sometimes be seen guarding their 'Chinese Lantern' egg sacs hanging in the grass). I did find three of them but I also found 30 or more of the ARANEUS QUADRATUS orb web spiders of similar size and colourfulness, and this reminded me of something I had read recently where a spider experts was suggesting that these two species might be interacting and one driving out the other. When I read it I thought it somewhat surprising as, while both species inhabit the same sort of habitat the Argiope builds her web low to the ground and seems to be after small grasshoppers while the Araneus hangs her web high and seems to be after large flying insects. From today's observation I think there may be a further factor of timing as the Araneus webs were not to be seen when the Argiope were at full strength but are now plentiful after the Argiope season is over. Spiders however are not the kindest of creatures and in one Araneus web I found the owner finishing the wrapping up of what must have been a female of the same species, so there is little doubt that should the two species meet there would be conflict (and I am no judge as to which would win). One way of defeating both species was demonstrated to me today by Alistair Martin. When he wishes to remove unwanted spiders from places that should be human habitat he goes armed with a tuning fork and a twig - he first inspects the web and finds which line leads from it to the spiders hideaway then he taps his tuning fork very gently and applies it to the web whereupon the spider rushes out to see what there is for dinner and as she does so Alistair uses the twig to break the line of the web along which the spider has come out. With a twirling motion he continues to wind the web onto the twig until he has the spider also on it when he pulls it away from the remains of the web and carries the spider to some convenient bush into which he releases her.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 26 SEP

Under birch trees in the north west of Stansted Forest this morning I came on a large troop of tall, large yellow fungi which reminded me of the yellow Larch Boletes that should now be found with Larch, but these were very different being gilled toadstools with the cobwebby sheath over the gills when young which indicates a Cortinarius. Naming unfamiliar fungi precisely is an error prone activity but I like to think these were a type with an alternative name of CORTINARIUS TRIUMPHANS, though the

accepted name is now *C. crocolitus*. Near them were the very attractive rose pink/mauve caps of *Mycena pura* and the very dark cap of an Ugly Milkcap. A little further on was a type of fungus that many people would not recognize as such as they looked more like a small forest of pale brown pine needles sticking up from the soil (on closer investigation they came from a plant root under the soil), and these I think were called *Clavariadelphus junceus*. Earlier, growing apparently from a grass path in a larch plantation, were some small yellow fungi looking a little like Sulphur Tuft but they had not got the greenish tinge of that species under the cap and they may have been something called *Pholiota tuberculosa*.

SAT 25 SEP

The toadstool season is now with us and bings with it many unsolved puzzles if you try to name the species you find. One which I first saw many years ago and have never been able to name was growing where I have seen it in previous years beside the footpath across the field between the Royal Oak at Langstone and the Hayling Billy trail (only a few yards from the stile at the Billy Line end). By the shape of its cap (with a central hump or nipple properly called an 'umbo', and by the concentric cracking around the centre of the cap, I think it is a type of *Lepiota* though it does not have an obvious ring on the stem but hopefully other people will find it and give me a name for it. A newcomer on the toadstool scene as far as I am concerned was one of the larger types of 'Japanese Umbrella' – this one was possibly *Coprinus lagopus*. Chris Fairhead has now seen Colin Law's comments and tells me he cannot be certain about the identity of this Slow-worm/Adder at Westbourne. Chris says he recalls the creature was pencil thin and thinks that as he has previously only seen dead Slow-worms (which show no movement of their tongues) he may have exaggerated the extent to which the tongue was 'stabbing the air'. So I think the general conclusion is in favour of the creature being a Slow-worm after all ...

The 'Evening Class' group visiting Pagham harbour today had excellent views of a SEAL basking on the mudflats and occasionally sliding into the water. Brian Fellow's note speaks of this as a Grey Seal but I think this is a 'slip of the pen' as Grey Seals are unknown along the south coast and the ones we see are Common Seals.

THU 23 SEP

In my comment on the creature which Chris Fairhead saw plop into the water at Westbourne (see Tue 21 Sep) I must plead guilty to the common sin of only using that part of the evidence which suited my case and ignoring those facts which don't fit the conclusion to which I had already jumped. I assumed the creature Chris saw must be either a Slow-worm or a Grass Snake and by colour it must have been a Slow-worm, though the 'tonque stabbing the air' was not right for a Slow-worm. Thanks to Colin Law we have a much more likely conclusion that it was probably a young ADDER though I have not heard from Chris his reaction to Colin's message which read "While slow-worms do have forked tongues, the tongue is much shorter and fatter than a snakes and I would not say that they are to be seen "stabbing snakelike", it is more of a licking than a stabbing. I wonder if it was a young adder. The answer lies in whether the creature had a shiny or matt finish, and how fat it was. A six inch slow worm is shiny, gold or copper coloured and probably thinner than a biro, a six inch adder is matt, and will generally look fat for its length." Colin goes on "I do know that slow-worms are poor swimmers, in my youth before I knew any better I remember putting one in my garden pond, it promptly sank and I had to rescue it. Of course it could have been an escape attempt. I am unsure of the competence of adders in the water."

TUE 21 SEP

Chris Fairhead has sent me a very interesting observation made when he was walking the 'towpath' footpath by the canalise section of the River Ems flowing south from Westbourne Church alongside Mill Lane. He saw a creature "about six inches long, and brown, almost rust-coloured" which he and I think was a SLOW-WORM, which "slid purposefully towards the stream, its tongue stabbing snake-like in the air, before it 'plopped' into the water. I didn't know slow worms could swim, but it thrashed about a couple of times and then disappeared behind a weed". I think there are very few creatures that cannot swim and I hope this one had no problem in crossing the water. I have never heard of Slow-worms swimming but this clearly was not a Grass Snake (either by its size and colour or by its in ability to swim as elegantly as the snake would do)

I hesitate to mention one-legged waders again but any that operate in waters which have large 'Snapper' TERRAPINS go in danger of losing not only their legs but their whole bodies (I seem to remember that Brian Fellows produced a case where they were supposed to have attacked a Little Egret). This remark is provoked by news from Geoff Culbertson, the Hampshire County Wildlife police officer, who tells me that "I was contacted the other day about some red-eared terrapins and a nest of 20 eggs found at Hilsea. Apparently the eggs were viable and may well have produced young, although a little late in the year to mature in time for winter. It just goes to show that if you

release a non-indigenous creature into the wild it may well start breeding and then cause untold problems with the natural wildlife, apart from being contrary to Section 14 of the Wildlife & Countryside Act. Unfortunately in this case we were unable to get hold of the eggs and take any photographs to try and get some publicity with the local press about releasing unwanted pets into the wild".

A press cutting which Sonia Bolton gave me today also involves the police and wildlife. It seems that the Sussex police were called to Uppark House recently when the burglar alarms went off, and they found the culprit loitering nonchalantly in one of the main corridors - a large TOAD. Obviously this was 'TOAD OF UPPARK HALL' who had every right, in his opinion, to wander around his own property as he pleased. I hear that the police found it too unpleasant to 'press charges against this animal' so he is still on the loose and I would not be at all surprised if he is not at this moment trying to get round the immobiliser on someone's Rolls Royce out in the garages...

PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR HIGH TIDES

(Date, Time and height in metres)

20/09 :-07:51-3.7 & 20:16-3.8	21/09 :-09:11-3.9 & 21:26-4.0	22/09 :-
10:04-4.2 & 22:15-4.3	23/09 :-10:47-4.4 & 22:57-4.4	24/09 :-11:26-4.6 & 23:36-4.6
25/09 :-12:05-4.7	26/09 :-00:16-4.7 & 12:44-4.8	27/09 :-00:57-4.8 & 13:24-4.9
	28/09 :-01:39-4.8 & 14:06-4.8	29/09 :-02:23-4.8 & 14:48-4.8
30/09 :-03:08-4.7 & 15:32-4.6	01/10 :-03:56-4.5 & 16:21-4.4	02/10 :-
04:53-4.3 & 17:19-4.2	03/10 :-06:04-4.0 & 18:36-4.0	04/10 :-07:35-4.0 & 20:10-4.0
05/10 :-09:01-4.2 & 21:26-4.2	06/10 :-10:03-4.5 & 22:22-4.5	07/10 :-
10:53-4.7 & 23:08-4.6	08/10 :-11:36-4.8 & 23:49-4.7	09/10 :-12:15-4.8

WEEK 37 SEP 13 - 19

BIRDS:

SUN 19 SEP

Late this afternoon (5pm) three BLACK TERNS and a 'W-registration' LITTLE GULL were circling low over the slick showing where the effluent from Budds Farm was entering Langstone harbour. I watched them circling and dipping to the surface for a few minutes before continuing on my way home after a trip down the west of Hayling and round the South Moors during which I saw little beyond a couple of Sandwich Tern and a Common Sandpiper at the Oysterbeds and watched a smart male Kestrel being harried by Crows over the West Lane fields. Wader numbers continue to build, with around 200 each of Redshank and Blackwits at Langstone, and around 400 Oystercatcher and 100 Grey Plover on the Hayling shore. Off the South Moors a dozen Ringed Plover and half a dozen Turnstone flew from the rising tide, leaving six Egrets hoping for supper in the seaweed as it began to float (instead of walking around, stirring the water with their feet, these were adopting a statuesque method of fishing, standing motionless with bodies leaning forward holding the tips of their bills just a fraction above the surface of the water). Over Budds Farm a few Swallows and Sand Martins were flying with a dozen or more House Martins, and five Shoveler flew off leaving others on the water with the Teal, Tufted Duck and Mallard. At Broadmarsh slipway the Black Swan was present with 15 Mute Swan (I could not see up stream where the Goldeneye was probably still present).

Strong southerly winds make for good seawatching along our coast and this morning 5 Black Tern and an Arctic Skua were reported from Stokes Bay at Gosport and this afternoon 2 first year Little Gulls and some Black Tern were seen from Broadmarsh Slipway (a couple of hours later I saw one Little Gull and 3 Black Tern off the Budds Farm outfall - see above). Over at Titchfield Haven Paul Winter's pager reported a STORM PETREL, an Arctic Skua and a repeat of yesterday's news of 1 Little Stint, 3 Curlew Sandpiper and Dartford Warbler.

News on Paul Winter's pager tonight tells us that 18 Black Tern and an Arctic Skua flew past Sandy Point this evening while 2 Med Gulls sat on the beach and watched them. Also in this evening bulletin the 3 Black Tern were seen from Broadmarsh slipway but there was no mention of Little Gull.

SAT 18 SEP

This morning Paul Winter posted news on HOSLIST relating to Titchfield Haven yesterday afternoon - one Little Stint and 3 Curlew Sandpiper were reported but the item which caught my eye said there were 2 DARTFORD WARBLER 'on the beach' - I would have thought the sea was a bit rough for such small birds to take a dip ...

Much more interesting than the anonymous, bare bones, news that comes over the pagers is any personal account of birds seen and comments on them and I was pleased to get such news of birds at Hook and Titchfield Haven from a new contributor, Simon Copsey. Simon was at Hook in the late afternoon and found a Spotted Redshank showing very well along with an early returning Snipe as well as 10 Ringed Plover, 2 Dunlin, 20 or so Curlew and 40 Blackwits. Yesterday (Sep 17) he was at the Haven and saw the Little Stint and 3 Curlew Sandpiper but his news continues with two items which I find much more interesting.

.....First he comments on the fact that the male Wigeon are already in almost full plumage, and I have noticed this with most species of duck - my impression is that normally the ducks are in pretty drab plumage until November or December but this year they seem to be a couple of months ahead of schedule. Am I imagining this? what do you think?

.....Secondly Simon comments on a one legged Redshank that seemed to have no trouble feeding. In my experience quite a few waders seem to lose legs and I don't think we can blame the ringers with their nets and cannons for these losses - my own theories are (a) that occasionally a wader will unwittingly tread on a large clam which refuses to let go and (b) that in hard weather a bird sleeping on one leg may find that leg frozen to the surface when it wakes up. I understand that all waders have a mechanism for minimising the circulation of blood to the legs in such circumstances (a sort of cut-off valve at the top of the leg to prevent excessive heat loss from the body), and I assume that a loss of feeling in the leg goes with this but whether that loss of feeling is sufficient to allow the bird to leave its leg behind in the ice when it is alarmed and has to fly off is a question I cannot answer and would not like to encourage anyone to try to answer by experimenting with a live bird.

Brian Fellows was with the Evening Class group walking over Walderton Down this morning but had little to report in the way of birds there (or at Aldsworth/Brickkiln Ponds on the way home). While telling me this he assures me that when he was at the Oysterbeds the other day looking for Brent he did not get his feet wet by wading out to the outer bund walls but scanned the water from the westernmost accessible part of the shore path - with a good scope I wonder if the top of the 'earth mountain' is as good if not a better vantage point?

FRI 17 SEP

Back on Sep 5 Alistair Martin asked me if I knew about Peregrines on Chichester Cathedral (he had just been told of their presence there by a young birder he met on Thorney) and I now have a status report on them from Graham Reports, who says "I think there is only one around at the present. I haven't seen one during the daytime for some months. I last saw one, probably a male, roosting on the spire on 23rd June 1999, but I haven't looked at dusk recently. Pairs have taken up residence on the spire on and off since about 1984. It is a regular roost site, particularly in winter. I have once recorded three roosting. They were, however, a lot less evident last winter. I erected a Peregrine nestbox in one of the turrets at the base of the spire in March 1985. I have seen a male roosting next to the nestbox, however they have never attempted to breed." So it seems Peregrines are regular worshippers there, unlike the short stay Eagle Owl which bit the Policeman sent to catch it, but that's another story and very out of date.

This afternoon I took a walk around Budds Farm, the South Moors and Langstone where I could see 48 LITTLE EGRET in the Wade Court trees when looking north from the seawall by Langstone Pond. With the Egrets were 10 Heron (plus two out on the saltings). Last year's peak count of Egrets in this high tide roost was 26, and we seem to be hearing of a similar increase in numbers seen at Farlington Marshes (Pager news via HOSLIST of 34 seen there on Sep 12 and 46 on Sep 15 where previously I had not heard of more than 25 seen on one visit). While at Langstone Pond a large number of duck flew out to sea (probably a Fox around) and I reckon there were around 50 Teal and 65 Mallard, so if this week-end brings enough rain to leave water in the pool in the pony field south of Wade Court it should be as full of Teal as it usually is after Christmas. Earlier in my walk I saw both the Goldeneye and Black Swan in the Hermitage Stream, found five Shoveler back on Budds Farm pools with Sand and House Martins overhead among the Swallows, and counted four Wheatear on the South Moors. Right at the start of the walk a Kingfisher sped down the Langbrook from what seems to be a favourite fishing spot for it this autumn, immediately below

the road bridge into the Xyratex site. Early in the morning, back at home, the resident Chiff Chaff was in good voice with its autumn song which I first heard a couple of days ago.

Paul Winter was at Pennington today in the hope of seeing yesterday's Temminck's Stint but could not find it. A juvenile KITTIWAKE appeared briefly and a Sanderling was perhaps unexpected. Otherwise the main items on his list were 2 Little Stint, 3 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Knot and 1 Hobby

THU 16 SEP

The SOS Recent Sightings website today tells us that there was a first class seawatch at Selsey early this morning when four SKUA species and 3 SHEARWATER species were seen. A juvenile LONG TAILED SKUA was the best of that group (presumably the other three were Arctic, Bonxie and Pom) while 3 SOOTY and 5 BALEARIC SHEARWATER were seen with Manx. The Sussex news goes on with a SPOONBILL at Sidlesham Ferry on Sep 15 when an AQUATIC WARBLER was at Church Norton and 3 OSPREY were at Thorney Island. Back on Sep 13 a single OSPREY was seen at Chidham (where Mike Collins saw one over Cot Lane on Sep 14) and 2 WRYNECK were at Church Norton with Pagham sightings of a Buzzard, MARSH HARRIER, and 20 Curlew Sandpiper. More distant sightings that might be of interest were of a RING OUZEL at Fairlight (Hastings) on Sep 13 and FIRECREST at Belle Tout (Beachy Head) on Sep 5

Paul Winter's pager today brought news of a new tick for this autumn's wader passage lists - a juvenile TEMMINCK'S STINT at Pennington. Two Little Stint were noted with it as was an adult Yellow Legged Gull (race unspecified), with a Peregrine and two Hobbies.

So far as I can tell the only people who have seen the flock of Pale Bellied Brent in Langstone Harbour have done so from the seawall of Farlington Marshes, either from the 'Point' or the eastern wall. I think most of the sightings have been of birds close to Baker's Island and I suspect that the reason that different people have seen different numbers of geese is that some of the geese have swum around the southern tip of Baker's Island and become hidden from the view of those on shore (looking south east from the 'Point' you see what looks like a single island but the map shows you that there is a wide channel between Baker's Island and South Binness). Looking from the Hayling shore you have much less chance of seeing the birds, not only is the distance greater but there is much more chance of them being hidden. I found this out on Tuesday and today Brian Fellows went to the Oysterbeds and also so no geese. Incidentally Brian says that he positioned himself at the westernmost point of the oysterbeds, and in case this misleads anyone into thinking that they can still get out onto the outer bund walls I can assure them that to do so at high tide would involve a swim and would be a deplorable act - the bund walls, now cut off from the mainland by deep channels, are intended to be sanctuaries for roosting waders and while we cannot stop disturbance to them from Peregrines I hope all those who care for the birds will leave them in peace (we still sometimes see fishermen out there, which is a great pity, but at least they have to pay the penalty of staying there for about four hours until the tide is low enough for them to wade ashore).

.....While Brian was at the oysterbeds he did see what might have been the Spoonbill on Round Nap, but as that is about 1200 metres from the Hayling shore Brian could not be sure if the solitary white bird he could see on the small shingle island was a Spoonbill or an Egret. Looking even further he could see around 300 duck on the water off Farlington Marshes and assumes they were Wigeon, but otherwise the water was both duck and gooseless.

I am indebted to Adrian Martin for supplying some essential birding information in response to Trevor Carpenter's recent question - what is the collective noun for a group of Magpies. Adrian has not only come up with the answer (a "Tiding of Magpies") but has pointed out that a large number of collective nouns for Birds, Fish and Mammals can be found on a website at

<http://homepages.shu.ac.uk/~acsdry/nouns.htm> One that particularly pleased me was an "unkindness of Ravens", and here are a few more for you. A wake of buzzards; A vein of goldfinches; A deceit of lapwings; An exaltation of larks; A rush of pochard; A scourge of starlings; A ballet of swans; A pitying of turtledoves; and A descent of woodpeckers. Adrian liked the last of these but surely it should be a Descent of Nuthatches as they are the only birds to run down trees. Among the mammals Adrian liked "A Sneak of Weasels" and among the Amphibians (with Fish) I like "Wiggle of Tadpoles" and a "Knot of Toads". I see that there is no noun for a collection of KITES and my personal contribution to this list is (thinking of Benjamin's Franklin's - is that the right name - dangerous experiments flying kites into thunderclouds to see if he could encourage some electricity to run down the line) "a SHOCK of KITES".

Yesterday morning a CHIFF CHAFF was singing in my garden and I hoped that was a prelude towards a regular addition to my autumn breakfast entertainment but wind and rain this morning have made it change its mind.

WED 15 SEP

Thanks to John Goodspeed's good work in circulating around the Portsmouth area many Wildlife Trust posters giving wildlife news each week he receives some unexpected feedback and last week he was told that a PIED FLYCATCHER had been in a garden at the foot of Portsdown (at Drayton). I gather that this was a reliable sighting and that the white flashes in the wings were noted so this makes it the first autumn Pied Flycatcher to come to my notice in the whole of Hampshire (and I have still only heard of two in Sussex).

A SPOONBILL was seen on the north east side of Round Nap island in Langstone Harbour at 5:36pm today according to Paul Winter's pager. Round Nap is the small dome of shingle dues west of the Hayling Oysterbeds, usually populated in the winter by a 'washing line' of Cormorant and a floor covering of Oystercatcher at high tide. An hour earlier the pager had news of 6 CROSSBILL flying west over Fleet Pond on which at least 3 GARGANEY were to be seen (one of them a drake). Another message tell us that at least 20 of the Pale Bellied Brent are still in Langstone harbour.

Paul Winter himself was at the Pennington/Keyhaven marshes today where 3 Little Stint and 10 Curlew Sand were business as usual but a single RUFF and 2 BLACK TERN (one a juvenile) sounded interesting.

Brian Fellows found the Emsworth Mill Pond Swan herd down to just 50 birds today though Mallard had increased to 78. Nothing special on the other two ponds but out in the harbour he counted 117 Redshank (a record autumn count) with more Curlew and Grey Plover (17 and 19 respectively) and 10 Egrets but only 21 Blackwits. At the Little Deeps on Thorney he saw 6 Bearded Tit and counted 72 Coot on the water with 2 Pochard. Nearby he saw a Whinchat and both Swallows and House Martins were in the air. At the Great Deeps a Pheasant flew over the water and a Common Sandpiper was seen along with Red and Greenshank. It seems he met Barry Collins who told him that the two OSPREY currently in the area (one a juvenile with white feathers still on its wing coverts) are different birds from the long stay summering bird of the Thorney Channel.

.....Bad news for Thorney Island walkers - today Brian saw a notice on the west gate saying that walkers wanting to go through could expect delays of up to half an hour. It seems that the gate has still not been repaired and presumably you have to wait for a soldier to come from the main road guard post to operate the gate manually.

The Friends of Stansted Forest (with Brian among them) had a pleasant walk around Lyels Wood this afternoon and not only watched two BUZZARD soaring overhead but learnt from Michael Prior that the OSPREY which we have already reported as fishing the Brickkiln Pond on Sept 2 has in fact been there on at least four occasions up to Sep 9. Even more interesting to me was Michael's news of TREE PIPIT breeding in the young conifers on the east side of Lyels Wood in both of the past two years.

Both the Goldeneye and the Black Swan were back in the Hermitage Stream on this afternoon's high tide. The Mute Swans were down to just 11 in number (though two had flown back onto the Budds Farm Pools) and there were few other birds of interest though I saw one Wheatear along the Broadmarsh shore and three more on the South Moors shore.

TUE 14 SEP

On Monday evening Mike Collins was on Cot Lane (the western of the two roads going south to Chidham from the old coast road) when an OSPREY flew towards him at roof-top height from the east (Bosham area) and perched on dead branches at the top of a tall tree in the fields east of Nutbourne Bay. I have not heard of the Thorney Channel Ospreys heading east towards Nutbourne Bay so maybe this was a newcomer assessing the fishing opportunities in the multiple inlets that make up Chichester Harbour. The Crows which own that particular tree took exception to the Osprey's presence and eventually drove it away to the south-west, i.e. towards the Thorney Deeps.

Paul Winter was at Farlington Marshes this afternoon when the heavy drizzle set in but managed to see 7 Brent (4 were definitely adult Pale Bellied and the other three were juveniles which Paul assumed belonged to the adults). He saw them between South Binness and Baker's Island (square 6903) and I suspect the others of the flock were hidden among the islands as I could not see any from Hayling - at any rate the pager announced that someone had seen all 37 still there this afternoon.

.....While at Farlington Marshes Paul Winter had the luck to see what I think is the first GOLDEN PLOVER of the winter which had turned up at the lake (no doubt moving on elsewhere before the end of the day). Those who contribute the pager messages missed out on this one but did report 35 Egrets, 39 Greenshank, 5 Curlew Sand, 3 Little Stint and 2 Peregrine - quite a normal afternoon down on the marshes.

Cycling down the Hayling Coastal Path this afternoon at high tide I was pleased to see some 700 DUNLIN flying low over the water off the outer walls of the oysterbeds, and even more pleased when I saw the cause of the disturbance - a blue backed male PEREGRINE unsuccessfully zooming up and diving at the criss-crossing wisps of waders. A little further south, on the shingle spits forming the mouth of Stoke Bay, I estimated there were at least 80 Ringed Plover and offshore some 30 Great Crested Grebe could be seen with a similar number of Cormorant back on Round Nap island. No sight of any Brent (I gather the 33 Pale Bellied birds were still present but in Russells Lake along the east shore of Farlington Marshes where the islands hid them from my view). Down at the Kench one lone Bar Tailed Godwit roosted among some 20 Grey Plover, and out on the harbour shore I watched a Kestrel pounce into the grass and fly off with a fat vole which it devoured on top of a tall post near the corner of the Sinah Warren site. On the Sinah Gravel Pit lake two male POCHARD were I think newcomers.

Brian Fellows found 46 Swans back at the Southsea Canoe lake today as the paddle boats are battened down to ride out the coming equinoctial gales. The first dozen Mallard had also returned to this good spot for a winter bread hand-out. Baffins Pond on the other hand had fewer birds than usual - no Canada Geese or Swans, just one Tufted Duck and 'only' 102 Mallard (Brian says this is very low for the time of year).

MON 13 SEP

Pager news late last night was of a PALE BELLIED BRENT on Sturt Pond (between Milford on sea and Keyhaven) and of 19 BUZZARD at Pennington - the news does not tell us if they were all seen in the air together or if this figure is a sum of those estimated to be in the area). Also in the Pennington area 23 Curlew Sandpiper were reported, getting close to the figure of 28 reported at Sidlesham Ferry on Sep 7.

Back on the subject of PALE BELLIED BRENT Simon Woolley was at Farlington early this morning and found the flock of 33 still there with four Dark Bellied birds among them. It seems he separated the two races using 'some very good up-ending id tips given in the new Collins guide' He says the dark bellied birds were 'summering' which is likely but can we be sure (the only news of summering birds I heard of this year was a note of 2 being present back in June), and I wonder what has happened to the six which I saw at Broadmarsh on Friday (Sep 10) - although I saw them against a low sun in hazy conditions they seemed very dark in colour and I assumed they were Dark Bellied.

David Parker tells that a journey to London last Friday gave him a good excuse to go via the Chilterns where he enjoyed the sight of 6 RED KITES over the village of IBSTONE (off the M40 west of High Wycombe)

Late news from Michael Prior (Head Forester at Stansted) tells of an OSPREY trying to catch Carp in Brickkiln Pond for half an hour at lunchtime on Sep 2.

Mark Litjens failed to see the Black Kite at Whitsbury on Saturday (Sep 11) but while there he saw plenty of BUZZARD and watched a PEREGRINE take a bird in mid-air. Less expected birds for that area were 16 Greenshank flyng over. Down at Needs Ore on Sunday he saw another Peregrine (though without the excitement of a kill), a Hobby, an Avocet, two Dartford Warbler and the inevitable Buzzards and Egrets

PLANTS:

SUN 19 SEP

There is no shortage of wild flowers at the moment, though I see that a swathe of GOLDEN SAMPHIRE on the exposed west side of Langstone Bridge seems to have succumbed to an overdose of fresh water from the rain (it presumably enjoys a lashing from the salt sea water and strong wind, but finds rainwater a bit too strong for its taste). Further south on Hayling, right by the path along which ponies from Westcroft stables join the Billy Line, a HAWTHORN tree has at least half a dozen clusters of fresh white flowers as well as its crop of red berries, and one cluster of fresh HONEYSUCKLE flowers was to be seen in the hedge south of the West Lane path. On my way home I went round the South Moors and found the answer to a question that has concerned me for some time - namely, does SEA WORMWOOD ever flower? The plants have been covered with full grown flower buds for two or three months, and some have already died or become damaged without opening, but each time I look at a specimen all the buds are tight closed. Today I noticed the plants on the South Moors seawall seemed to have unusually bright yellow tips to their branches, and at last I found many flowers open with yellow stamens protruding

SAT 18 SEP

This morning the evening class were led by Jim Berry over Walderton Down on a very fruitful (I should say 'flowerful') walk during which 89 plant species were found in flower. Many of these were the natural produce of arable fields on chalky soil - among them were Round and Sharp Leaved Fluellen, Dwarf Spurge, and both Musk and Welshed Thistles - but the pheasant rearers had helped to swell the list by growing many strange plants including BUCKWHEAT. Last autumn in similar game cover/food plots I noticed a huge Goosefoot like plant (2 metres or more tall) which I believe is called QUINOA (*Chenopodium quinoa*) and I guess it's worth looking out for that and also for plantings of HENBANE. One unexpected plant found on Walderton Down was BLUE FLEABANE which can also be seen on Langstone Bridge at the moment - there was a very large plant growing on the grass close to The Ship carpark which was destroyed by mowing recently but several plants have cunningly grown right under the white railings.

FRI 17 SEP

One object of this afternoon's outing was to check for DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS on the Langstone South Moors where I usually find just one or two plants flowering very late in the year. Arriving there today I found the whole or the 'orchid meadow' had been mown (presumably to clear some of the Thistles and Fleabane and encourage more grass for the cattle) and as a result of this clearance I found eight flowering plants of the Scabious - very pleasing. On the way there I walked through Juniper Square in Havant and found more of the SMALL FLOWERED CRANESBILL which I discovered here earlier (it is the only regular site for this plant that I know of). On Southmoor Lane the Hedgerow Cranesbill which seems to flower there in every month of the year had three flourishing plants despite close mowing of the roadside where it grows and back on the South Moors I found a good patch of Lesser Hawkbit and saw the big bush of Duke of Argyll's Teapant covered with purple flowers.

TUE 14 SEP

At this time of year I am continually being surprised by seemingly out of season wild flowers (such as the SEA PINKS - Thrift - flowering at the Kench today) but it seemed more than an accident when I found two whole fields full of flowering peas (the ones with white flowers which I think are normally planted to gather a little free nitrogen into the soil rather than to yield a crop of peas). Less surprising were the fresh flowers on several Dogwood bushes.

INSECTS:

FRI 17 SEP

Speckled Wood and Small White were not unexpected on my walk in the South Moors area this afternoon but I was surprised to see three separate Green Veined White still on the wing and egg-laying in the grass. The first two I saw could not be identified positively other than by their weak flight and by alighting sporadically in the grass. I then saw a Common (?) Hawker working its beat along the Langbrook stream and found the remnants of a white butterfly wing with some black lines in it lying where the dragonfly had presumably dropped it and eventually saw one female open its wings and reveal its wing tips to prove its identity.

TUE 14 SEP

Visiting the Havant Museum this morning I was told of a Sunday lunchtime feast of butterflies seen in a pub garden at Fishbourne - not that they were on the menu but the diners and drinkers could see them enjoying fallen apples in the pub garden. It seems there was a cloud of PAINTED LADIES, several RED ADMIRAL and one COMMA there (on Sep 12). Another source (Sonia Bolton) tells me she has been getting regular (almost daily) visits from HUMMING BIRD HAWKMOTHS with (I think) up to three seen at the same time in her garden at Stansted.

MON 13 SEP

The Portsmouth area group of Butterfly Conservation again visited the wonderful MoD site on the north west shore of Portsmouth Harbour yesterday and Andrew Brookes tells me that "good numbers of SMALL HEATH and COMMON BLUE were seen on the vast grasslands, together with a few Meadow Browns and Small Coppers. The wooded areas held many Speckled Woods, mostly dark third-broods, whilst Red Admirals were everywhere."

On Saturday (Sep 11) Mark Litjens went to Whitsbury (north west of Fordingbridge) in the hope of seeing the Black Kite and while there he found 20 SMALL TORTOISESHELL (there had been 36 of them when he was there on Sep 5). Unlike everywhere else these were the common butterflies and only a few Red Admiral, Small Heath and Small White were seen. On Sunday Mark went to Needs Ore point where the common butterflies were SMALL COPPER (23 of them seen) along with Common Blue, Small Heath, Small White and Red Admiral. Down by the river here there

were also Common and Ruddy Darter to be seen along with 15 Migrant Hawks.

WEEK 36 SEP 6 - 12

BIRDS:

SUN 12 SEP

John Clark came down to Langstone Harbour today and has seen some of the PALE BELLIED BRENT. He says "I have now been to Langstone Hbr and seen 18 of the 33 Pale-bellied Brents this afternoon. This sub-species has only previously been recorded between November and April. There has been an increase in records in recent years, with up to 7 most winters and a flock of 11 seen at Hurst on Apr 1st 1994, which were probably passage birds. This was the highest count since 1955, when 11 were in Langstone Harbour on Mar 9th. However, the largest ever flock in the county was of 20 at Keyhaven on Mar 3rd 1929. At this time, Dark-bellied Brents were also pretty scarce in Hampshire. So the current flock is the largest ever and the earliest autumn record by some weeks. This sub-species has two breeding populations which winter in the British Isles - the Svalbard (Spitzbergen) population which goes to Lindisfarne in the NE, and the Canadian population which winters in Ireland, with smaller nos. crossing to Wales, the Channel Islands and NW France. My guess is that the Hants flock belong to this population."

After reading Ed Griffiths thoughts on some relationship between Red Kites and Buzzards (see Sep 10 where Ed suggests that the presence of the Kites somehow attracts Buzzards into the same area) Trevor Carpenter tells me that following his own sighting - reported here on Aug 11 - of a Kite feeding in a field near Winchfield (Basingstoke area), seen from the window of the train in which he was travelling home from London, he has seen Buzzard feeding at exactly the same place in the same field. I'm not sure what that proves - possibly a new line in bird tables with some farmer putting out his unwanted dead calves in the field?? - but we can be sure that (a) there are a lot more of both Kites and Buzzards around and (b) they may have the same taste for food. Trevor has also seen a pair of Buzzard from the train between Botley and Fareham where the line passes Fairthorne Grange in the Curbridge area.

.....Back at home in Fareham for the weekend Trevor found the Cams Bay Wigeon flock up to 71 birds on Saturday evening (Sep 11) and saw 158 Blackwits in Fareham Creek with seven colour ringed birds among them (all having the "long red ring on the left tarsus - below the 'knee' - which identifies birds rung in the Solent"). As well as a couple of Common Sandpiper and a Whimbrel he also saw here a flock of 27 Magpies heading east - maybe towards a roost in Fort Fareham where in the past Trevor came on a roost of over 50 birds.

.....Trevor asks what the collective noun for Magpies is - my suggestion is a "Murder of Magpies" though maybe that is normally used for Carrion Crows. On the subject of Magpie roosts I see Birds of Hampshire records a roost of 277 Magpies in Alders at Fleet Pond in December 1987 and the book also suggests that Magpie numbers reached a peak in the mid-1980s. About that time I remember being told of a roost of around 100 Magpies in the Southwick Woods and myself saw more than 75 birds around SU 655089.

.....A final note from Trevor concerns a walk round Thorney which he made today. He says his species count was very low but the absence of other birds (other than plenty of Robins along Thornham Lane) was more than made up for by a spectacular view of an airborne OSPREY flanked by 12 Little Egret all within the field of his binoculars.

Today's news from Paul Winter's pager is that the 33 PALE BELLIED BRENT were south east of Farlington Marshes (the normal place for the first arrivals to be seen) on the early afternoon high tide today with four Dark Bellied Brent also in the Harbour. On the marshes 5 Curlew Sandpiper were seen with 3 Spotshank; 21 Little Egret and a Peregrine were also seen. Down at Pennington a WRYNECK was seen mid-morning not far from the Lower Pennington Lane carpark.

This afternoon I cycled to Nutbourne to check out the state of the 'wet meadow' where the Ham Brook reaches Nutbourne Bay, went on via Chidham and Cutmill Creek to West Ashling and Funtington, returning via Racton, Aldsworth and north Emsworth. As expected the 'wet meadow' was bone dry except for the stream itself, explaining the absence of waders in a place where last autumn Wood Sandpiper, Little Stint and Black tailed Godwit were seen. With a high tide fully up Nutbourne Bay was also without birds (just four Ringed Plover roosting on the seawall), and the small bay south of Eastfield Farm on the east side of Chidham was equally barren (later in the year this will be crowded with waders and wildfowl. Continuing up the east shore field path and approaching the

old main road where it cuts across the top of Cutmill Creek I found some 700 Black Headed Gulls on the water with 24 Common Gull and on Lesser Blackback among them, and as I was scanning the gulls a KINGFISHER flew north low over the water to pitch in a favourite fishing place above the point where a tiny stream flows into the creek from a culvert under the road. Close by the local Swan family (two parents and four well grown cygnets) were resting on the shore. North of the new A27 many Rooks were in the air close to the Hambrook House rookery (the largest in Sussex) and another crowd of Rooks and Jackdaws were active near the Aldworth rookery but otherwise there was little bird life until nearly home where a COCKATIEL flew noisily around Southleigh Farm east of Denvilles and the fresh corpse of a Tawny Owl was stuck to the white line in the centre of the road a bit further on.

And finally for this week we have a message from Mike Harris to say that a female Blackbird was feeding a chick in his garden yesterday ... life goes on, and on ...

SAT 11 SEP

Paul Winter's pager tells him (and us via HOSLIST) that 33 PALE-BELLIED BRENT have been in Langstone Harbour for at least four days (i.e. since Wednesday 8 Sep when Ian Thirlwell saw a flock of about 20 Brent flying into the harbour, but too far from him to be sure of their identity). The weather forecast has recently been showing gales and heavy rain over Northern Ireland and much of Scotland so perhaps these geese thought they would do better by pressing on - the question now is will they stay? and will they develop the habit for future years? John Clark wants to know if anyone has actually seen these birds and can tell him more about such an unprecedented event, and while putting out this request for info he tells us that his WeBS count visit to Stratfield Saye today gave him 61 GADWALL, 76 TEAL and a juvenile OSPREY carrying a fish (will it not be wonderful when we get immediate news from all the count locations on the day of the count via HOSLIST).

The IBM Lake was crowded with birds for today's WeBS count but if the quantity was good I have my doubts about the quality as the great majority were CANADA GEESE (I counted 395, including several with abnormal white head and neck markings but no 'half-pint' minima race birds) and immature HERRING GULL (around 500 of these, many very noisily squabbling over disgusting food items from the Paulsgrove tip). Several of the adult Herring gulls were already in winter plumage with dull grey colours and streaky heads, as was one British race LESSER BLACKBACK looking as if it had just been mugged (two lovely black eyes) and had a bucket of mud thrown over its head. Surprisingly there were probably fewer Black Headed than Herring Gulls, and I didn't see a single Common Gull though there were 9 adult Great Blackbacks and more immatures among the Herring Gulls. The two adult GREAT CRESTED GREBE were seen but no young, and I only recorded four Little Grebe. Three Cormorant and three Heron were resting on one of the islands and I put up at least 19 TEAL from the channels between the islands but I found no Tufted or other duck except for 75 Mallard. Over the land both male and female Kestrel were seen (has anyone seen any of their offspring since they left the nest?) - other birds noted were single Mistle Thrush (usually in flocks at this time of year but I haven't seen any at all for some time) and a single Greenfinch (again its some time since I saw any of these very common birds). Other singletons were one Grey and one Pied Wagtail. Chiff Chaff were calling all round the site and I heard takking from one possible Lesser Whitethroat while a single House Martin flew over. Calling at Portchester Castle Shore on my way to take the count figures to Dennis Bill I saw my first autumn flock of 30 Collared Dove perched on dead elms and had just three House Martins overhead so perhaps the apparent dearth of these around my home is not as bad as it is elsewhere - this evening there were 15 in the sky.

Yesterday the Whitsbury BLACK KITE gave a five minute display at 10.45am before drifting north towards Breamore Common but today no one seems to have seen it (at least up to 5:30pm).

Today's rare bird news courtesy of Paul Winter comes from Fleet Pond over which 15+ Greenshank flew south, a single TURTLE DOVE flew south west and an adult 'Western Yellow-legged Gull' (presumably the commoner Mediterranean race rather than the Caspian) went west.

Yesterday evening with the light failing Mike Collins saw a single SWIFT among the Swallows and Martins over Budds Farm and had the impression of 'blunt wings' and pale patches on the undersides of the wings (but not the belly). He is not claiming that he saw a PALLID SWIFT but it just could have been. He was more certain of a CHIFF CHAFF heard today in full song at Chidham.

The Evening Class group walked from Nutbourne to Prinsted this morning seeing both Teal (18) and Wigeon (11) which have now arrived back in force. 48 Canada Geese were present with the lone

EMPEROR Goose and away to the south the 'resident' OSPREY was patrolling the Prinsted Channel and clearly looking for fish but failing to catch any. On the seawall a single Wheatear bobbed along.

Brian Fellows was back on his regular south east Hayling beat for the WeBS count and saw 42 Common and 2 Sandwich Tern flying over the water and 26 Teal on it (no Brent). 31 Bar Tailed Godwit and 2 CURLEW SANDPIPER (unusual here? - they seem to be showing in new places this autumn) were presumably roosting on the shore with Curlew and Lapwing on Tournerbury Middle Marsh (inside the seawall)

FRI 10 SEP

Last Sunday (Sep 5) I commented on what the English Nature magazine had to say about their RED KITE release programme, adding my own comments on what I considered the inevitable expansion of the population from the M40/Thames/Chilterns 'triangle' and suggested that the pair now known to have bred in Cambridgeshire had come from there. Today I have a message from Ed Griffiths who works close to the M40 and can often see Kites from his office window. He says "Strangely enough, though increasing, it seems that they don't spread very far geographically as they move out... sightings are still quite rare along the Chiltern escarpment east of the M40; most of them seem to have set up in the triangle/area between the M40 and the Thames & the Chiltern escarpment to the West. I wonder if this area is more congenial to them - its more wooded, with more Oak than beech ???" He suggests that the Cambridgeshire birds may have come from a different release area (in what English Nature vaguely call the Midlands). Ed goes on to raise another point, saying "An interesting side effect, perhaps, of the local increase in Kites is an increase in Buzzards - formerly completely absent from Bucks/Chilterns and very occasional 10 years ago, they are now regularly sighted in the same areas as the Kites (indeed I had my first Bucks one from this office window !). I wonder if one day we'll see the Ravens which seem to be creeping back along your stretch of the S coast ?" My only comment on this is that we have seen a great increase in Buzzards down here in the south without any released Kites to pull them in - I would think that the presence of plenty of rabbits, the absence of gun-toting gamekeepers, and general good health causing the Buzzard population to expand are also factors. One local factor here may be the excellent practice by the Head Forester at Stansted of shooting Squirrels to protect his trees and laying out the corpses in a place where the Buzzards can find and eat them. The factor bringing Ravens to Hampshire is of course the move of many guns from the Tower of London to Fort Nelson on Portsdown - it is the duty of Ravens to come and guard them.

Paul Winter's pager today reported that a SPOTTED CRAKE is still present at Titchfield Haven with one or more Little Stint. Down at Keyhaven an adult LITTLE GULL was seen today and more than 100 WIGEON are back there (they seem to be back everywhere early and in strength). Paul himself was in the Keyhaven/Pennington area and reports 118 Blackwits, 12 Curlew Sandpiper, 3 Knot (these also seem to be earlier and more widespread than usual?), a Little Stint and a Kingfisher. 10 Greenshank were in the 'Normandy lagoon' and 4 EIDER near the concrete jetty, while a birder whom Paul met 'thought he had seen a Long Billed Dowitcher there within the past two days'. Over at Titchfield Haven the pager today reported 5 Curlew Sand, a Little Stint, 2 Spotshank and 35 Blackwits,

The Dunberry Hill saga goes on with a morning show only by the Black Kite but watchers in the afternoon saw Hobby, Peregrine, 8+ Buzzard, Sparrowhawk and 2 Tawny Owls. Away in north east Hampshire an Osprey was reported going southwest high over Tundry Pond at 10am.

Brian Fellows found 42 Swans on the Southsea Canoe Lake this morning and heard the normal intermittent song of Cetti's Warbler at Milton Lakes where he was hoping to record a repeat of the ten minute aria to which he was treated on Tuesday (see Sep 7) - today a 30 minute wait gave him just two brief bursts of 'normal' song/shout. A message from Ian Thirlwell implies that the bird has been singing 'long and strong' for some time - Ian lives 300 metres from the nearest lake and says he can sometimes hear the bird from his garden. Back in Emsworth his afternoon walk around the Ems valley gave Brian his first winter SNIPE and one of the resident Grey Wagtail but little else

My own 'breath of fresh air' this afternoon was taken by cycling to Bedhampton and Broadmarsh, returning via the South Moors and Langstone. From the Meyrick Road entrance to the water works I saw two Green Sandpiper in the concrete lined section of the Hermitage Stream but found nothing unusual further down the Hermitage Stream (both the Goldeneye and the Black Swan were not to be seen). From the Broadmarsh slipway I could see the usual 20 Swans and hundreds of gulls with Redhank, Oystercatcher and Blackwits on the newly uncovered mud and I distantly saw two small flocks of waders fly in - each of about 30 birds. One of them later turned out to be mainly

composed of Ringed Plover and I think there were some Dunlin but the other flock looked very like Knot to me though I could not prove it (just saw a glimpse of plumpish small waders with little contrast between upper and lower plumage). This spurred me to cycle round via the Brockhampton stream to get a closer view of the waders but as I came back to the point opposite the slipway I saw something much more interesting - a group of six BRENT GEESE in the main stream. They must have flown in while I was cycling round and were now heading out again and while I watched they took off and flew to the edge of the mud south of the sewage outfall. My feeling was that these were strangers to the harbour (summering birds probably wouldn't come so near the busy shore) though they may have come no further than from Chichester Harbour. Continuing along the South Moors shore I found the cattle close to the 'point' and lit by the sun behind me, and I was delighted to find 23 YELLOW WAGTAIL around them, some brighter yellow than canaries. Up the nearby Langbrook I glimpsed a Kingfisher go under the bridge leading to Mill Lane and over at Langstone pond I found the whole Swan family (2 adults plus seven cygnets) together.

THU 9 SEP

Catching up on recent rarities in Sussex I visited the SOS website and found plenty of recent interest, though some of it goes back to August. Here are some of the items that I found interesting arranged in date order starting with 3 Black Tern at West Wittering on Aug 28 (the last Hampshire ones I know of were at Titchfield on Aug 22)

.....Aug 31 - SEMI-PALMATED SANDPIPER at Pagham north wall and some CROSSBILLS at Fairlight (Hastings)

.....Sep 2 - a FRANKLIN'S GULL in the Arundel area, seen there again on Sep 3 when there was a MEDITERRANEAN SHEARWATER (aka Balearic or was this a true Yelkouan?) off Selsey Bill

.....Sep 4 - only the second PIED FLYCATCHER I have heard of this autumn seen at Birling Gap (Beachy Head) and on Sep 6 a WHITE STORK was seen near Worthing (our bird was sitting tight at Andover on this day)

.....Sep 7 brought reports of BALEARIC SHEARWATER from Selsey and Brighton and on Sep 8 we hear of an OSPREY briefly in Pagham Harbour, 28 CURLEW SANDPIPER and 5 Spotsnank at Sidlesham Ferry plus 30 Greenshank at Chichester marina pool. An early birder at Bexhill logged at LONG TAILED SKUA going west at 7:07am.

.....Sep 9 - the Sussex WHITE STORK is heading east - seen for 15 minutes at Pett Level east of Hastings, then flew inland up the Brede valley.

Mike Collins reminded me that armchair twitchers can be almost as up to date as those who sport pagers, and can save a great deal of money on calls to Birdline, by visiting www.birdguides.com I have not checked this out myself but seem to remember being told some time ago that it was good value.

Paul Winter's pager today gave him six reports of the BLACK KITE at Dunberry Hill between 9am and 1:30pm, and it would seem that the bird was showing well in the Whitsbury/Rockbourne area for most of that time. In the afternoon it was seen intermittently until 3:50pm when it flew off towards Breamore Wood. Also in the Dunberry Hill area during the day were a female PEREGRINE, 5 Buzzards, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel.

The Hook Scrape near the mouth of the River Hamble had 5 LITTLE STINT and a DARTFORD WARBLER today according to Paul Winter's pager.

Paul Winter has been to the Lower Test reserve and was told that their Spotted Crake has not been seen since Aug 26 but there were plenty of Whinchat with Spotted Flycatcher, Stonechat and a Wheatear to be seen. 25 Wigeon are back there and there were more than ten Green Sandpiper though Paul has only seen one Common Sandpiper this week. Elsewhere he has heard that 2 SWIFTS were seen at Whitsbury on Sep 6. Many other interesting birds have been reported from the Whitsbury area by the many birders gathered there to see the Kite - John Eyre knows of Woodlarks being seen by Lee Evans and has heard rumours of Honey Buzzard, Montagu's Harrier and Goshawk sightings there but has no proof of their veracity.

The tide was high when Brian Fellows walked from Prinsted to Nutbourne this afternoon. From the seawall he could see one of the OSPREYS patrolling the Prinsted channel for at least 15 minutes in search of fish but apparently no seeing anything worth getting its feet wet for. At this time last year the wet meadow at Nutbourne was alive with birds including a Wood Sandpiper and some Little Stint but today's score was nil. Mike Collins reminded me that armchair twitchers can be almost as up to date as those who sport pagers, and can save a great deal of money on calls to Birdline, by visiting www.birdguides.com I have not checked this out myself but seem to remember being told some time ago that it was good value.

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WED 8 SEP

Ian Thirwell tells me that yesterday (Sep 7) he saw, presumably from the Milton shore, a flock of what he is pretty sure were about 20 BRENT GEESE fly into Langstone Harbour from the sea and head for the north east of the harbour. He is not absolutely certain and is asking for confirmation. So far I have not heard of any but last year I believe I saw 8 migrants in the Pilsey area on Sep 18, and 17 were seen in Langstone Harbour on Sep 19 with the first big flock of 150 being off Hayling west shore (Saltmarsh Lane) on Sep 23. This year there seem to have been fewer than usual summering in Langstone Harbour (I saw my last off the South Moors on May 28 - a single bird - and since then I have heard one report, on the Farlington Notice Board on Jun 22, of two birds in the harbour). In Chichester Harbour there have I think been 17 Brent summering in the Fishbourne Channel and 14 in the Thorney Channel - these could be the same birds. Usually we see the summering birds coming out to look for their friends before migrants arrive so it is possible that what Ian saw was a flock from Chichester Harbour getting restless but they could well be genuine arrivals - keep watching and let us know.

Brian Fellows has passed me a couple of internet messages concerning a subspecies of Common Redstart which suggest that one of these birds was possibly seen on Thorney Island a couple of weeks ago by an unknown birder. From these I learn that if you see a male Common Redstart with "a noticeable white wing panel (formed by pale fringes to the secondaries)", or a female with a pale or buffy panel on the wings, it could be a bird of this race. There have only been some dozen records of this subspecies in this country, so take care with your description and check some authoritative sources before sending in a record. Why won't they make 'White Winged Black Crows' into a subspecies for humbler birders to report and feel proud?

R04 as a number for a tagged OSPREY sounds safe enough but what will happen to R101? (wasn't that the airship which crashed in flames back in the 1930s?). This worrying thought was provoked by a message from Barrie Gilpin who runs the website reporting progress on the Anglian Water Osprey Project based at Rutland Water - he says that R04 should have passed through here on Aug 31 (see my entry for that date for details of the Osprey website and its address). Barrie's message contained a request for all sightings of colour ringed OSPREYS to be reported to him by email to Osprey@fineshade.u-net.com or by phone to 01780-444360 or 444351.

Paul Winter's pager today told him of 4 Curlew Sandpiper and 2 Little Stint seen from the Meonshore Hide at Titchfield Haven at 11am this morning, and of the Black Kite at the bottom of Dunberry Hill at 4:20pm. A later message says that the Kite showed well today and was seen for two hours (4:30 to 6:30pm) at Dunberry Hill before flying south east (off for an evening with Alan Snook in Fordingbridge?)

This afternoon I walked from Havant to the east shore of Hayling at Northney and as I was not cycling I took the field path from the Hayling Billy line to the Langstone Royal Oak over the fields. Stepping over the stile into the field I found I was looking up at 16 Egrets and a couple of Heron perched on the top of the dead conifer in the Wade Court grounds - not as good a view as you get

from the seawall by Langstone pond as it was more restricted by trees but the birds I could see were closer to me. The tide was falling and while I watched a couple of the egrets flew off so I do not know how many were using this high tide roost but if you are by the pond when the tide is high it may be worth looking at what can be an impressive sight. I came back by the pond and was listening to a chorus of chattering and singing Starlings when I heard one very sharp call which I thought was a CETTI's WARBLER but despite waiting for five minutes or so I heard no more and it could well have been a Starling shouting. On the pond a female Tufted Duck was back and on the mud was the usual mass of Black Tailed Godwit and Redshank with one smart Greenshank near the Mill Stream and a Lesser Blackback on the mud nearby. Over the fields at Northney I heard on or two Swallows and saw one Sand Martin as well as hearing a Lesser Whitethroat and seeing a flock of 25 Linnet (a couple of days ago there were 50 on the South Moors seawall but as yet no flocks of Greenfinch)

TUE 7 SEP

I hope that Keith Betton gets refund from the tour operator who sent him down to Andover long before dawn to stake out the WHITE STORK that was sleeping on a pole in an Andover farmyard. Being a gentleman he could, as he says "have gone in with a big torch and seen it, but that would not be cricket!" So he waited patiently for first light. Unfortunately, as he goes on to tell us, "at 0545 a very large lorry started its engine in the farmer's yard right under the bird (asleep on a telegraph pole). Not surprisingly it flew off!"

Another gentle irony relating to the unhappy lot of the twitcher follows Paul Winter's message of doubt about a recent report of the BLACK KITE over Breamore Wood (this doubt was seconded by John Eyre). Perhaps the people who run the pager service took offence at someone doubting the veracity of their reports, but, for whatever reason, a genuine sighting phoned in twice by Paul Winter during the day never appeared on his pager so he had to be content with reporting it on HOSLIST, saying that he had seen the bird for two whole minutes just after 2pm today (he saw it at SU 143183, then flying north east over Gravelhill Copse towards Breamore Wood).

Brian Fellows visited Portsmouth today and had the luck to be at the Milton Lakes when a CETTI'S WARBLER gave a ten minute non-stop song recital - at least the bird was normal in that Brian was within five yards of it throughout this recital and never glimpsed the bird. He says "The song was a mixture of the well-known chut-chewitchoo! cheti-cheti-cheti! together with several other sweet notes and phrases. The delivery was not so explosive as the normal song, being much sweeter and quieter." He goes on to quote from BWP "Courtship-song and Subsong. A quiet, soft, almost continuous variant of Territorial-song, given by male in presence of female, usually September-March." So I take it that there were two invisible birds in the bush. Although they have not been reported recently there is plenty of evidence for Cetti's being present at the Milton Lakes as well as the Great Salterns site last winter and spring, so this may be a revival of activity by resident birds but my possible hearing of one at Langstone pond (Sep 8) could indicate autumn dispersion of young birds from Titchfield Haven, giving one of the resident Milton males a chance to chat up a new female just arrived on the scene.

.....At Southsea Canoe Lake Brian found just 26 Swans and at Baffins Pond the Mallard were down to just 60 (against 178 last week) so the pond seemed relatively empty. 'Straw Sausages' have just been put into the pond to mop up any surplus of algae and the fountain of fresh water is operating so the pond is in good shape for winter visitors.

MON 6 SEP

HOSLIST this evening carries a message from Simon Woolley that was addressed to UK Birdnet and copied to HOSLIST - presumably UK Birdnet or other sources would have more background info but it seems that a bird with some features of a GREAT WHITE EGRET (but also having all dark legs where a Great White should have some yellow towards the top, and having two leg rings which might indicate a captive source) is currently in the Salisbury area and Simon is wondering if it could be a bird from America (what he calls the Nearctic form which he believes should have all dark legs). The only description given by Simon of what he saw is that it "has a bright yellowish bill with a small dark tip, and apparently all dark legs with two leg rings".

Just after 9am the WHITE STORK left Andover Downs Farm and flew south. If it kept going that should have taken it down the Test Valley, over the Lower Test reserve and on towards Lymington but by 6pm this evening no further news of it had been broadcast over Paul Winter's pager so we can but guess that it has found another kind hearted farmer to give it bed and breakfast (or maybe one of those fishermen down the Test is celebrating the biggest catch of his life). Paul is less kind-hearted than the farmer when it comes to believing the news of the BLACK KITE that came up on

his pager saying that it flew east over Breamore Wood at midday. He says that at that time he was one of six birders watching from the 'gallops' on Whitsbury Down, a good two miles from Breamore Wood with hazy air, and that five of the six with him agreed there was no way that you could be sure that one of the three birds seen over the wood was the Kite (just that one of them did not look quite like a Buzzard). Maybe it was reported by an unseen watcher in the woods.

I arrived at Broadmarsh in the late afternoon with the tide starting to rise to find plenty of exposed mud, all of it covered with birds - hundreds of Black Headed Gulls resting on the drier areas and large numbers of Blackwits and Redshank with at least 40 Turnstone and a single CURLEW SANDPIPER feeding at the wet fringes. Suddenly all these birds exploded outwards like the shock wave of a nuclear bomb test, the perfect semi-circle of white gulls expanding outwards incredibly fast to leave bare mud. Eventually the circle broke up as the gulls and waders almost crash landed in the water, and not until then did I see a dark shape rising vertically above the centre of the birdless mud with another brown shape just above it. Now could I see the cause of the explosion - a large female PEREGRINE in hot pursuit of some wader which managed to get away, leaving the falcon to dive back to the mud where she found nothing left to chase and so climbed away at a much gentler angle in a line that took her perhaps 100 feet above my head to give me an excellent view of her moustaches and powerful wings. Perhaps she got her evening meal at Farlington.

On Sep 1 a BLACK SWAN was seen in Fareham Creek, and there is no reason to doubt that it was not the one which had been at Emsworth and Broadmarsh. On Sep 4 I could not see it at Broadmarsh but on Sep 5 it was back there and today I saw it on the slipway looking as if it was intending to stay - we will see about that. I suspect it flew to Fareham and back so it could be off again at any time. Its white companions at Broadmarsh are now down to just 16 plus 1 cygnet, with two more Mutes upstream above Harts Farm Way (the six cygnets of the Bedhampton Mill Pool family are back on that pool with one parent). Coming home via Langstone I had no difficulty in confirming that the Mill Pond Swan family is still intact - I saw both parents and all seven cygnets on the pond.

At Budds Farm I found the seaward of the two pools was several feet below its normal level but have no idea if this is intentional or if it has 'sprung a leak'. When the pools were part of the sewage treatment system they were drained and refilled according to the needs of the system but this year they have not so far been drained, though there has been constant topping up of the water via a pipe feeding the landward pool. Maybe the Southern Water ecologists who are going to manage the pools as a nature reserve after the rebuilding is complete are trying their luck with attracting more passage waders to the bottom mud that is now exposed I do not know but today there was just one Common Sandpiper present and many fewer Tufted Duck. The single juvenile Shelduck was still there and there was a noticeable increase in Teal (25+ seen by me). More evidence of an influx of Teal was to be seen at Langstone where I saw my first Teal of the autumn waddling over the mudflats. There were also three Heron back on the salterns just off the pond and another four of them in the Wade Court trees.

PLANTS:

SUN 12 SEP

Meadow Sweet in full flower was one of today's surprises but the main item on today's flower list was HYBRID MONKEY FLOWER in the upper section of the Bosham stream where it follows the road from Funtington to West Ashling. All five yellow petals of these flowers had large red blotches covering their lobes and the throat of each flower had tiny red dots in it. Earlier, in the Chidham area, I came on yet another female HOP vine covered in flower cones and at Cutmill Creek another vine had no flowers at all that I could see.

SAT 11 SEP

A chance visit to the west shore of Portchester Lake today reminded me that Hampshire County Countryside Service look after wildlife in many unexpected places - here they have a small nature reserve in the lee of the huge Vosper Thornycroft sheds which dominate Portchester Lake. If you go to the main carpark for Portchester Castle and walk north along the shore past the mown grass of the public open space you come to an area of rough grass, scrub, and pony fields with an HCC Reserve sign naming it as Portchester Castle Shore. My reward for coming here was to find a great mass of both CHICORY and LUCERNE flowering alongside the shore path as they do on the shore of Hayling's Mill Rythe. Before coming here I had been at the IBM North Harbour site where more than 50 wild plants are still flowering. Small Scabious, Narrow Leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil and Hawkweed Oxtongue are among the dominant plants but Pale Flax, Common Centaury, Yellowwort and Blue Fleabane can also be found. The plant which most caught my attention was a single fresh plant of HENBIT DEADNETTLE near a large patch of Common Storks-bill, and second place

for interest went to PROCUMBENT YELLOW-SORREL which I have not noticed there before (though as Stace says it is a 'pernicious garden weed' which adds colour to my own garden at this time of year).

The Evening Class group walking from Nutbourne to Prinsted this morning were surprised to see a pile of concrete rubble in one of the shore fields covered with flowering CALIFORNIAN POPPIES and TOBACCO PLANTS. An odd place to scatter wild-flower seed though maybe someone thought the concrete looked unsightly and needed 'improving' - or maybe the rubble arrived complete with earth and seed. More interesting to me was the finding of MARSH WILLOWHERB which I have not yet recorded in this area (I see the Hants Flora has it in one east Hayling tetrad but in no other part of SU 70) together with Marsh Ragwort. The Dwarf Mallow in the orchards was still flowering well.

WED 8 SEP

A long walk from Havant to Northney on Hayling produced a long list of flowering plants starting with the discovery the *Berula erecta* (Lesser Water Parsnip) does grow in the Lymbourne stream beside that Hayling Billy trail in Havant. I am beginning to suspect that the 'erecta' part of its name applies to the leaves which usually grow erect like ladders, and it was these leaves that caused me to check out the plants where the stream turns away from the old railway to run down to Langstone Mill - sure enough there were flowers to prove that this was not Fools Water Cress. In the north end of the North Hayling fields, where there is a potato crop, there is a good selection of weeds and I was able to check out the difference between Pale Persicaria and Redshank (the former has a rash of small glands on the flower stems which Redshank does not) before finding TREACLE MUSTARD, which I did not recognize but took a sample to check at home which Yellow Cress I had found. When I came to look at it the very long thin unlobed leaves were the first clue, the seeds were the next, and a microscope search for 'forked hairs' gave the conclusive evidence (this took me a long time before I realised that the forking was at the base and tended to produce a three pronged 'propeller blade' with each blade looking like a separate unbranched white hair close pressed to the leaf or stem). Going on past Northney Church and down Church Lane towards the seawall I had reached the end of the long track along the side of the first field and had just turned away from it towards the first of the 'squeeze through' stiles when I found a strange knee high plant with a long brownish 'nose' of a flower head sticking up at its tip, and thanks to looking yesterday at a tiny cousin of this plant by the flats on Hayling's Fishery Lane I realised this must be a species of PIGWEED or Amaranth. There was only the one plant in sight so I brought home one small sample branch with a flowerhead and tomorrow I will try to see if I can make it into anything other than Common Amaranth. On the seawall I came on three or four plants of Slender Hare's Ear and on the way home I found my second example of IVY in flower near a second find of female HOP (both by the main road near Northney Farm).

TUE 7 SEP

A cycle ride to Sandy Point on Hayling today brought no new discoveries but if you are at Sandy Point it is worth having a look at the shingle beach off the old hospital site to see how one of Hampshire's botanic rarities (SEA KNOTGRASS) is flourishing. To find it follow the footpath along the north edge of the reserve and go straight ahead onto the beach instead of turning south to follow the reserve fence. On your left you will see that a square of beach close to you is marked by the tops of hefty posts sunk in the shingle. Go to the north east corner of this square and continue north towards the lifeboat station. As soon as you leave the square you will find big prostate plants of a Knotgrass on the shingle and two or three of the first ones you see will have tough wiry wooden bases exposed and without further clues this will tell you that you are looking at a plant which Stace says is extinct in England except for a few sites in Sussex and Cornwall but which the Hants Flora says can be found at Hengistbury, Mundeford and Sandy Point. Here the number of plants is definitely increasing and the plant is doing well. The supposedly much commoner SALTWORT is doing the reverse and declining here but you can find a few plants if you continue northwards. At Black Point the Sea Holly flowers are over but Sea Rocket and Annual Wall-rocket are flowering. The single plant of Cotton Thistle which I spotted earlier this summer seems to have vanished. Coming back along Southwood Road I found a few Autumn Ladies Tresses on the lawn of number 36 and I am told there are plenty on the lawn of 11 Chichester Avenue (which is for sale and has an unmown lawn)

MON 6 SEP

Last Saturday I came on a HOP plant by the Hermitage Stream and noticed that it had female cones only so today I went to other HOP plants which I know of growing near the Brockhampton stream

and found they had male flowers only. Stace's flora does not tell me about the sex life of plants but I have a Collins New Generation guide to Wild Flowers which comes in handy on this matter and confirms my suspicion that a Hop plant is either male or female and here in the Bedhampton area we find the females are 500 metres north west of the males (the Collins guide also tells me pollination is by wind so the only chance of these plants having progeny is in the hands of a strong south east wind).

INSECTS:

SUN 12 SEP

Small Whites continue to dominate the butterfly scene but I did have a single Red Admiral and Large White in the garden today, and while I was out I saw one COMMA resting on a blackberry near Funtington.

SAT 11 SEP

The hot day was ideal for dragonflies around the IBM Lake giving me a pair of COMMON HAWKER mating and what was presumably an aggressive male COMMON DARTER patrolling a corner of the lake in his scarlet uniform, alternately almost hovering with all four wings working independently and shooting across the area to inspect some intruder. The only damselfly I saw was one Common Blue male. A single Migrant Hawker was also there. I saw at least four male Common Blue butterflies and four Red Admirals. Plenty of Small Whites everywhere and a few tatty Meadow Browns plus one Speckled Wood. Surprisingly I only saw one *Ariopneustes* spider – have they already laid their eggs? – and less surprisingly none of the other big *Araneus* quadratus orb web spiders which used to be quite common here in the autumn (each one its own colour from red and green to yellow)

During his stint on the Tournerbury seawall counting the shore birds today Brian Fellows enjoyed the sight of a SMALL COPPER.

WEEK 35 AUG 30 – SEP 5

BIRDS:

MON 6 SEP

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SUN 5 SEP

Today the Black Kite lost the top spot on the pager lists when a WHITE STORK was seen over an area a little east of Andover between 5 and 6pm. Even more intriguing was the appearance of two ARCTIC SKUAS over Dunberry Hill at 4:30pm - they then flew south. Mark Litjens was lucky enough to see the Stork, an immature bird, perched on a telegraph pole near Wood Hall House beside the B3400 Andover to Hurstbourne Priors road at SU 396462. Later, according to Paul Winter, it was at Andover Down Farm further east along the road (SU 403463 with a friendly farmer inviting people into his back garden to see it)

Alistair Martin was on the west Hayling shore (Saltmarsh Lane area) at around 11am this morning and distantly saw four AVOCET flying north east from the Portsmouth area towards Langstone bridge where they appeared to land (possibly in the Oysterbeds). No more known. Alistair also tells me that he bumped into a young birder today who told him about a pair of PEREGRINES based on Chichester Cathedral - I have heard of them there before and believe the only reason why we do not hear much of them is that they have been regulars there for several years - perhaps one of our readers from Chichester can bring us up to date...

Trevor Carpenter today visited Fishbourne where he found 3 YELLOW LEGGED GULLS (he regrets that he can't tell a michahellis from a cachinnans - but he's not alone in that!) and found another of them in Nutbourne Bay later. His list of other sightings at Fishbourne reads ... "11 Whinchat, 1 Spotted Flycatcher, 1 Lesser Whitethroat, 1 Common Sandpiper, 10 Wigeon and hundreds of waders including 1 Greenshank lots of Grey Plover, but surprisingly only 1 Dunlin and no Curlew. At one point I could count 12 Little Egrets." At Nutbourne the Egrets were even more numerous and there were plenty of Curlew, a number of Whimbrel and 5 Wheatear.

This evening Brian Fellows walked along the Langstone shore and found no shortage of Black Tailed Godwit there - he counted 250 of them and around 150 Redshank with a few Lapwing. On Langstone Pond he saw the Swan family (parents and 6 cygnets) which is what I thought I had counted on a couple of recent visits. They succeeded in keeping all seven cygnets up until their recent return to the pond (where they are more easily attacked by Foxes) so I hope both Brian and I have been fooled by a hidden cygnet.

Talking of the loss of young birds I was intrigued by something which Alistair Martin told me this evening and which explains something which puzzled me at the IBM Lake this summer. I have reported that a pair of Great Crested Grebe there raised two broods this summer, but before I saw the second brood youngsters I was puzzled by the fact that one of the first pair of young had grown almost as big as its parents while the other remained half that size (and subsequently the small one 'disappeared'). Alistair Martin tells me that it is a known fact that the parents can recognize their young individually by the pattern of their head stripes and that the two parents each 'adopt' one of the brood and feed that one to the exclusion of the other. All very well if the parents 'adopt' different chicks, but if they both decide to feed the same one the other poor thing gets none. I guess this is what happened to this two youngsters and one just faded away.

RED KITES are now based in three locations outside Wales (the Chilterns, the Midlands and now the Harewood estate in Yorkshire) as a result of the English Nature programme of re-introduction. The success of the scheme can be measured by the fact that the 75 pairs in Southern England (Chilterns plus Midlands) raised 150 young this year - a staggering two juveniles for each pair. Last year (1998) the same adult population raised 140 young and it will not be long before some of the 1998

generation are old enough to breed and that will double the number of breeding pairs in England. No facts are given in the current English Nature magazine about the number of birds released in Yorkshire this year but we are told that they came from the southern English population (not from Spain this time) and that they are based on the Harewood estate near Leeds. The only bit of bad news is that eight of the birds have been found dead over the last two years as a result of 'secondary poisoning' (they had eaten the bodies of rats killed by powerful rodenticides) but this is a relatively small casualty rate and English Nature are doing their best to reduce it by urging farmers to search harder and faster for dead rats after any poison is used. Two other facts emerge from the magazine, one is that there has also been a re-introduction programme in Scotland (but as this is the English Nature magazine they are not allowed to waste taxpayers money by telling us of the work of another organisation over the border), and the second fact is, I think, the most interesting – it is that Kites have now bred in Cambridgeshire without being released there, implying that we are already seeing birds moving from the over-populated (?) Chilterns to establish themselves where there is less competition. Isn't that just what seems to be happening down here in Hampshire and Sussex?

SAT 4 SEP

This evening Kevin Stouse was at a barbeque in West Leigh, Havant and, in his own words, "I watched two birds which at first I thought were large crows flying towards me - then a gull flew past them and I realised they were pretty big and finally as they flew over you could see the diamond shaped tail - yep 2 Ravens!!! They headed off east having come in from the West" Not bad for a week-end when he was too busy to go birding.

Trevor Carpenter was at Cams Bay (where Fareham Creek opens into Portsmouth Harbour) this afternoon and found 25 WIGEON already back. He also saw the redhead Merganser which Lyndon Hatfield tells us has been there since Aug 19, plus 7 Egrets. Over on the south bank a large flock of Godwits had settled to roost and were not in the least disturbed by the noise of a Chinook helicopter landing beside them at Fleetlands.

HOSLIST this morning gave news of an OSPREY over Hayling Oysterbeds and in the afternoon reported a HONEY BUZZARD flying from Hayling to the Isle of Wight at 14:30. Near Fordingbridge the twitchers were busy again and the jury is out on which of them trampled a GRASSHOPPER WARBLER to death (A corpse was found there and seen by Simon Woolley who says it had a severe tick infestation round its eye - the immediate cause of death is unknown but if it could not see out of one eye it could well have flown into a moving car. After death it seems the corpse was left by Simon's car for him to see and he passed the present on to another unoccupied car for the owners to discover on their return). As to the BLACK KITE it performed well, giving four separate sightings between 10:30 and 11:15 - the last of these being over the main Salisbury road at Downton in company with 5 Buzzards - the Kite showed again in the afternoon, flying around from 14:52 to 16:15

Brian Fellows has been sent details of the long staying Swan in the Emsworth area which has a large yellow Darvic ring say UYD and a normal BTO ring with the number 2874. It was ringed at Northney on Hayling on 6 Jan 99 by one D A Stone and was then 2 years old. A little over a month later it was first seen in Emsworth Mill Pond and has been there intermittently ever since - Brian will no doubt let us know if it chooses Emsworth to see the new millennium in. What interests me is why it was ringed at Northney - several years ago there was a regular Swan nest site on the saltings just south of the marina but with increased activity they abandoned it long before 1999 and it is not a regular Swan congregating point - did the Swan get involved in some dispute with a boat? or did the ringer chase it all round the harbour and eventually corner it in the marina area? or was it previously injured and released there?

Paul Winter's pager gave him news today of a second winter MED GULL in Portsmouth Harbour and of two BAR TAILED GODWIT at Titchfield Haven where there were also 36 Blackwits, 4 Green Sandpiper and 2 Whinchat. The BLACK KITE at Rockbourne was seen briefly three times during the day.

A walk from Havant to Farlington Marshes this morning took me down the Hermitage Stream past Bedhampton Mill, and in this relatively quiet section from the Bedhampton water works to the A27 I came on two KINGFISHERS, watched two pairs of GREY WAGTAIL (one pair having two juveniles with it) and enjoyed the sight of Goldfinch bathing in the stream with a young male Blackbird which now has all black plumage bar the head and neck. To judge by the noise they were making there may have been more than two Kingfishers but I definitely saw one fly upstream, making a small detour curve to pass me, and saw another fly up and I think perch in the top of a

tall Horse Chestnut. I have often wondered how it is that Kingfishers manage to avoid being seen for much of the day when they do not have to be fishing but I had not thought of looking for them forty feet up, perched where they would have a good overview of a long stretch of the stream. A single Yellow Wagtail flew east high over the Broadmarsh Playing Fields but there were few birds in the Chalk Dock area or at the Farlington Deepes (I could hear more Yellow Wagtail with the cattle on the main marsh but could not see them though I did pick out a single distant Whinchat perched on a thistle). The only substantial number of birds on the east side of the marshes were 500+ Starlings blackberrying. At the Lake I saw six CURLEW SANDPIPER (eight are currently reported there) and one LITTLE STINT (judging by the short straight bill and small size – a passing Pied Wagtail seemed bigger).

The reserve notice board listed a HONEY BUZZARD for Aug 30 and said there were 70 Great Crested Grebe in the harbour. On my way home I had a close view of a smart male WHINCHAT on Broadmarsh and saw the GOLDENEYE still at the gravel quay but the Swan total was down to 16 with one cygnet. Black Tailed Godwit numbers are very much down on recent counts (the biggest flock I saw was a dozen in the stream near the Farlington building) and I neither heard nor saw a single Skylark today – I'm sure they are lurking in the grass as they moult.

FRI 3 SEP

The elusive BLACK KITE was seen at 9.30 on Whitsbury Common, at 13.30 on Breamore Down and for up to 3 minutes at 14.45 back at Dunberry Hill - it might be easier to see one by taking a tip to Germany.

Brian Fellows spent today at the Frensham Ponds, getting magnificent views of a HOBBY hunting over the Little Pond, a Brimstone that evaded the Hobby, and a beautiful ADDER on a sandy path near the main road. Several Stonechats were seen as was a Green Woodpecker and mixed Tit flock with Goldcrest and Willow Warbler. As usual the best items on the written menu at the information hut were 'off' when requested - there had been a Marsh Harrier as well as that elusive Great White Egret, and the more regular Dartford Warblers also failed to show but I gather that Brian enjoyed the outing

Brian Fellows also passes on news from Nick Green who is currently on Hayling Island - nothing special (Wheatears and Whinchat) but it reminded me that when I bumped into Tim Lawman in Havant yesterday we had discussed the lack of Pied Flycatcher sightings and Tim told me that he had been down to Hayling Park at dawn on several occasions to search for them so the absence of reports is not just down to lack of observer cover. Another item in Nick's news reminded me of yet another minor news item - Nick says that he will be giving a talk about Antarctica to the Hayling Vintners on Sept 10th which reminded me that it was Jan Mitchell (who is probably still secretary of the Vintners) who recently told me of a large bird of prey with jesses which had surprised her when she threw out a chicken carcass for the gulls on the Hayling School playing fields to pick clean (see entry for Aug 25). Today my son told me that he knew of someone on Hayling who had lost a Buzzard about a week ago so I have done my best to re-unite owner and Buzzard - I await news of the outcome.

Brian Fellows also passes on the views of one birder on the Ouse Washes who thinks it is a great year for YELLOW WAGTAILS because he has seen 31 of them. Maybe this person has not been watching them for many years as I would have expected passage flocks in the order of 100 or more birds to be commonplace there (as it used to be here). I can remember being excited to find a winter flock of 39 TREE SPARRROWS here in Hampshire, but today no-one would believe me if I said I had seen just one of them yet Tony Gutteridge, who has just come back from Germany, tells me he saw them there in hundreds - everything is relative to expectation.

Tony Gutteridge has just returned from Germany and told me of a conservation issue that is currently causing enmity between people with conflicting conservation priorities. It seems that one party is engaged in a program to re-instate EAGLE OWLS, but it turns out that one of their favourite prey items is a female PEREGRINE easily taken when she is sitting on her nest. It seems that Peregrines are a rarity out there and there are many birders and others who do not welcome the presence of the Eagle Owls. I wonder if we could please both parties by exporting some of the excellent Eagle Owls which sit on several buildings in Havant - very good looking but guaranteed never to take flight (if they did they would fall and break into fragments)

THU 2 SEP

This morning Brian Fellows found a single RINGED PLOVER back in Emsworth Harbour and with it were the first 12 KNOT of the winter. These were just two of thirteen wader species to be seen in the harbour - five Greenshank and 7 Little Egret were there and a Whimbrel was with the Curlew

while for some reason the Black Tailed Godwit flock was down to 18 birds. Two Wheatear were on the seawall and 2 Common Tern flew over the mud. Walking south along the west seawall Brian saw an OSPREY flying over the east side of the island but never got a closer view of it despite going over to Thornahm Point. Brian was back on Thorney in the evening to see more than 500 SWALLOWS and MARTINS heading for the Little Deeps and to look at the Egret roost in which he could see some 100 birds by the time it got dark. He seems to doubt that three times that number could emerge in the morning and I think most people tend to share that view but it is always open to them to be back there before first light with some reliable counting device to record the birds departure - Barry Collins figures are read off a hand held counter and must I think be an underestimate of the number of birds as there must be some which slip out by the back door without being seen.

Paul Winter visited the Black Kite site at Dunberry Hill near Whitsbury and saw at least one example of the trespassing which gets twitchers a bad name but did not see the Kite - he waited until 11.30 am but the bird only showed from 2.30 to 3pm today so patience and a packed lunch is needed. His pager later told him that an OSPREY flew south over Beaulieu at 4.30pm

Lyndon Hatfield found a BLACK SWAN (presumably the ex-Emsworth bird) in Fareham Creek off Fleetlands yesterday (Sep 1 at 3pm). Even more interesting to me is that a REDHEAD MERGANSER has been present there since at least Aug 19 (and at a guess could have been summering in Portsmouth Harbour) - one reason for its unusual behaviour may be found in Lyndon's description of it as a "reheaded" Merganser - obviously the Fleetlands people are diversifying into bird brain-surgery. Less surprising news is of 5 Little Egret (including 2 JUVENILES) here and this reminds me that one birder recently spoke to me of Egrets breeding at two different MoD sites in the Gosport area but I have no other evidence to back that up and it may well be a misunderstanding over names (different people describing the same site by different names).

Brian Fellows found 30 Swans back at Southsea Canoe Lake today, a considerable increase on the 13 or 14 there in mid-August, but at Baffins Pond he was one short on the Barnacle Goose count as well as being unable to see the last remaining gosling of the year. Only 3 Canada Geese could be found but there was no shortage of MALLARD at Baffins - 178 there today. One thing highlighted by the recent outbreak of botulism here is the size of movement that is probably occurring all the time between different locations. We now know that many of our garden birds in winter are in constant movement around the countryside and that the dozen or so Blue Tits we see at the feeder each day are probably all new birds that have not visited the garden before (not a faithful band of residents that spend the whole winter in the one garden). I suspect that the same is true of many of the wildfowl we see at a particular pond and that the fact that the numbers present are roughly the same on each visit is more a factor of the number which the pond can support rather than the same birds remaining in situ.

Today I used my permit from Michael Prior to walk a circuit of the southern Stansted Forest including Lyels Wood and Pond Copse nature reserve. Birds were quiet over most of the walk but I enjoyed my first view of a TREECREEPER for a month or more and found the Nuthatches once more becoming noisy as were one or two Jays. The interesting birds were at the nature reserve pond where a Heron and three GREEN SANDPIPER flew off and a BUZZARD launched itself more quietly from a tree overhanging the water. There were more Mallard here than usual (perhaps 40) but on the Brick Kiln pond I could only see two Coot and one Moorhen plus a single adult SWAN with the cygnet that has been blocking the local roads (I hope the other parent has not been hit by a car)

WED 1 SEP

Paul Winter has just broken the news that a BLACK KITE has spent the past seven days in a small wood just north of Rockbourne (of Roman Villa fame) near Fordingbridge. As might be expected in a rural area with narrow roads there is a parking problem for those arriving by car, and Alan Snook (based in Fordingbridge and up to now on good terms with the local farmers) tells me that some birders have already caused trouble by roaming over private fields without permission. His message to all who want to see the bird is twofold. First, that the only available parking is in Whitsbury (none in Rockbourne) from which it is only a ten minute walk to the site, and secondly please respect private property (stick to the official footpaths and road). So when you arrive in Fordingbridge over the river bridge turn right and then left and head for Whitsbury, not Rockbourne. In Whitsbury there is a carpark for some 20 cars (and no alternative parking) Continue north on foot along the road and after passing Manor Farm take the first left

turn (the road ahead peters out) and you will soon have Dunberry Hill on your left). Alan saw the Kite on Aug 31 in a stubble field and on Sep 1 it was over the wood on Dunberry Hill.

HOSLIST news from Paul Winter tells us that a LESSER GOLDEN PLOVER flew west over Browdown at 10am this morning (presumably heading straight for Needs Ore Point). An Osprey going southwest over Hythe was probably heading for the same place. Down at Portland is the first (?) RED BACKED SHRIKE of the autumn and at Lodmoor there is a RED NECKED PHALAROPE while the PURPLE HERON remains at Hatch Pond (wherever that may be)

Last week (see Aug 24) Mike Collins described how three Swans held up the morning rush hour traffic in both directions at Aldsworth Pond and today David Parker tells me this same family group are still intent on their self-appointed traffic calming mission. On Sunday evening (Aug 29) the family occupied the road past Brick-kiln Pond so effectively that David's wife could not drive past them and had to wait for a motorist coming in the other direction to help her get them to the side of the road so that they could drive on. Now that the south-bound Newbury by-pass is closed for repairs I wonder if any anti-road protesters will have the idea of dumping this family on the (still open) north-bound carriage way and so cut off the south of England from the north. More seriously it is possible that they were trying to return to the Brick-kiln Pond but could not negotiate the fence with their flightless cygnet .. luckily Michael Prior passes this point on his way to work so I hope that by now he will have opened the gate to Pond Cottage and ushered them through.

TUE 31 AUG

In addition to the birds at Farlington Marshes reported by Brian Fellows yesterday it seems there was an entry on the recent sightings board for a couple of PINTAIL there on Aug 30. Two other items not in Brian's first report were 8 Curlew Sandpiper and 2 Little Stint.

David Parker clearly new what he was doing when he bought his new house backing on to Stansted Forest earlier this year. Not only does he have regular round the year visitors such as Treecreeper but is now getting a good supply of migrant passerines dropping in. Last Saturday (Aug 28) 3 more SPOTTED FLYCATCHER were present and on Sunday afternoon he had what he assumed was a juvenile male REDSTART (just a hint of a white forehead developing) along with a female Blackcap and two Willow Warblers.

Keith Betton's pager yesterday told him that a GREAT WHITE EGRET had left Unstead sewage farm near Godalming heading southwest at 7.30am to be flushed from Frensham Little Pond at 8.15 from where it headed for Frensham Great Pond though it was not subsequently found there or seen elsewhere. It is possible that this is the same bird which was seen in Langstone Harbour on Aug 13, and if so what interests me is how this bird has escaped detection for over two weeks - it clearly has a list of birding hotspots which it knows how to avoid. As I hear that when it was seen on North Binness it emerged from a group of 12 Grey Heron I am wondering if it was forced to appear there under some sort of avian court order and these Heron were the jury in the case ...

With OSPREYS much in the news along the south coast at the moment Adrian Martin has sent me the following message which should be of general interest. He says "this summer saw the launch of a project to trace osprey migration from Rutland Water using satellite tracking. An excellent website at <http://www.rutlandwater.u-net.com/osprey> provides info on the project and up to date maps showing the paths of the ospreys. After a 26th August release two are already as far afield as Madrid and Paris (clearly very cultured birds)."

David Parker softened the blow of his return to work today by taking a quick lunch time visit to Sidlesham Ferry where he saw 3 RUFF (I think this is the only site that currently more or less guarantees a view of these birds) plus 1 Avocet, 9 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Little Stint and 2 Spotted Redshank plus Dunlin and Black Tailed Godwit

John Goodspeed visited Farlington Marshes on Monday Aug 30) and saw four of the Curlew Sandpiper, a Little Stint and a Greenshank with a dozen Turnstone. In the reeds the Bearded Tit could be heard but not seen and overhead were many hirundines, mainly Swallows but he was not lucky enough to spot the single SWIFT which Bob Chapman had seen earlier.

My headline for this item of news from Trevor Carpenter, who tells me that 14 GRASSHOPPER WARBLER have been caught by ringers at Titchfield Haven in the last couple of weeks, is not based on fact. I claimed that they had been passing through the reserve at the rate of one a day, basing that statement on the number caught and the period stated but for all I know they were travelling in convoy and all caught together.

Paul Winter's pager had just one message today giving news of a WOOD SANDPIPER at Pennington Marshes. Paul comments that one has probably been there throughout the past three weeks but has proved to be very elusive.

MON 30 AUG

Mark Litjens spent both Sunday and Monday morning at Needs Ore Point nature reserve with never a dull moment. I recall that two RAVEN spent ten days at this reserve around last New Year and today they were back, calling frequently. Another unexpected visitor this morning was a SPOONBILL flying east along the shore and yesterday's surprise was a party of 4 SWIFTS. Over both days there has been constant movement of many hirundines (Swallows, House and Sand Martins - two HOBBY went over west this morning without diminishing them) and small numbers of passing Wheatear, Whinchat, Common Whitethroat, Yellow Wagtail, and Tree Pipit plus Common, Green and Curlew Sandpiper. A pair of DARTFORD WARBLER with two juveniles were regulars (probably bred here), and Spotted Redshank and Little Egrets could be seen by the water.

Trevor Carpenter saw the first WIGEON back in Cams Bay (where Fareham Creek opens into Portsmouth Harbour) yesterday (Aug 29) and today he found four males and one female there. There were only 137 Black Tailed Godwit in Fareham Creek today against the massive 150 yesterday but 3 of today's birds had colour rings which have been reported to Pete Potts. One Whimbrel and one Greenshank was with them and three Willow Warblers were in shoreline bushes. Over the water at Fleetlands yesterday Trevor could see at least 3 Little Egret sitting out the high tide in trees on the north east boundary of the airfield/golf course.

Brian Fellows was unlucky not to see an OSPREY at Thornham Point yesterday but he was not disappointed today. When he arrived there was no Osprey in sight but soon one came up the Thorney Channel to perform a splendid 15 minute show over the Prinsted Channel close to Brian's view point on the seawall. He says it "soared high on thermals, dived to the water without appearing to catch anything and more spectacularly performed several somersaults. Finally the Osprey moved across to its favoured perch on the Thorney landing lights where it proceeded to preen itself and look around." (This reminds me that when we were watching one of the birds very distantly from the west seawall yesterday several people commented on its 'tumbling' after it had soared to perhaps 1000 feet.)

.....On this same outing along Thornham Lane Brian "was met by huge numbers of Swallows flying overhead and resting on overhead wires. Looking through them on the wires I noticed a number of juveniles and some Sand Martins among the masses. Also smaller flocks of House Martin flew past while I was there. My biggest surprise was to hear a LESSER WHITETHROAT singing from the bushes opposite the houses near the end of the lane." In the Thornham Point area were Yellow Wagtail, Wheatear and Whinchat, and looking west along the Great Deeps he spotted the EMPEROR GOOSE among a flock of Canada Geese. At the start of this outing Brian checked the birds on the Mill Ponds, finding 74 Mute Swan on the Mill Pond and 2 on the Slipper Pond, the Mallard counts being 62 and 12 respectively.

Visiting Farlington Marshes this evening Brian found that a WRYNECK had been seen yesterday but had not been seen today (doesn't mean it's not there). The REDSTART count had gone up to 5 with 2 AVOCET and 4 Spotted Flycatcher and a male WHITE WAGTAIL was reported as well as 2 GARDEN WARBLER.

Although a little out of date (I have not checked the Sussex Recent Sightings for a few days) you may be interested to know that there has been an AQUATIC WARBLER by the Long Pool at Sidlesham (Aug 23), MELODIOUS WARBLERS at Littlehampton and Beachy Head (Aug 20), a LONG TAILED SKUA flying east off Selsey on Aug 24 and a SOOTY SHEARWATER off the Bill on Aug 26. A MONTAGU'S HARRIER was at Sidlesham on Aug 14 and a MARSH HARRIER at Pagham on Aug 26 with another sighting at Pulborough on Aug 24. On Aug 26 there were 5 Little Ringed Plover at Sidlesham Ferry and on Aug 25 the Ferry Pool had 3 Little Stint, 3 Curlew Sandpiper, 4 Spotted Redshank, 3 Common Sandpiper, 1 Green and 1 Greenshank. That same day there were 3 Knot in the Harbour at Church Norton.

Birds bathe daily and there are usually only a limited number of places offering the features they want - ideally a stream of clear water flowing not too fast over a stony shallows with overhanging bushes to provide perches both to check that the coast is clear before going down to the water and to dry out after bathing (so the perches should face south to catch the sun). Often there is no such place in the area so the birds settle for second best (a bird bath or garden pond) or third best (a muddy puddle). A knowledge of where these favoured places are to be found in your patch will add greatly to your enjoyment of local birding and here in Havant I know of two particularly good places at which you can see a variety of birds throughout the year. One is in the Hermitage Stream just downstream from the overflow sluice running out of the Bedhampton Water Works where the

waterworks fence comes down to the stream. Another (which I passed today and watched Gold and Greenfinches at their toilet) is in the section of the Langbrook stream running between the Xyratex building and the Bosmere school field. Both these places also offer regular opportunities to glimpse a Kingfisher - the Hermitage Stream site is regularly visited by these birds and only recently I saw a Kingfisher in a Hawthorn just south of the Langbrook site (immediately upstream of the access road) - to judge by the number of small fish that I found enjoying the protection of the A27 underpass today the Kingfisher should do well here. In woodland away from streams bathing places can be in very short supply and the few persistent puddles are well worth seeking out and visiting early in the day.

This afternoon with the tide up I walked around the South Moors, Budds Farm and the Brockhampton stream seeing little of special interest. On the Budds Farm shore four Common Sandpiper piped and flew out over the water, only to return quickly to dry land at the thought of that long journey over the sea. Over by the slipway that Black Swan was with 25 Mute, and the Goldeneye could be seen stretching its wings after diving up above Harts Farm Way.

PLANTS:

MON 6 SEP

Last Saturday I came on a HOP plant by the Hermitage Stream and noticed that it had female cones only so today I went to other HOP plants which I know of growing near the Brockhampton stream and found they had male flowers only. Stace's flora does not tell me about the sex life of plants but I have a Collins New Generation guide to Wild Flowers which comes in handy on this matter and confirms my suspicion that a Hop plant is either male or female and here in the Bedhampton area we find the females are 500 metres north west of the males (the Collins guide also tells me pollination is by wind so the only chance of these plants having progeny is in the hands of a strong south east wind).

SAT 4 SEP

At Broadmarsh today I walked up the edge of Harts Farm Way to the A27 interchange and found a fresh plant of CORN PARSLEY growing alongside the slip road going west to the A27 and down on the Solent Way path where it leaves Broadmarsh and turns a corner to follow the A27 embankment I looked again at the six Fleabane plants scattered between the corner and the concrete outfall of the stream running into Chalk Dock. These have the hairy, greyish look, and the many hooked hairs around the leaf edges, that is right for GUERNSEY FLEABANE but the flower-heads (Capitula) are only some 3 mm wide where they should be bigger. Today however there was additional evidence that they are Guernsey Fleabane in the distinctly dirty yellow colour of the pappus as they start to seed. Four other plants worth a mention are the COCKSPUR GRASS that still grows abundantly along the edge of Harts Farm Way opposite the turning into the small Broadmarsh carpark and which has been fairly close mown for the second time this year – it may be this mowing that increases the vigour of its growth and it is certainly holding its own over several years now. The second plant is the BUTTONWEED growing and flowering profusely at the bend in the Hermitage Stream just above Bedhampton Mill – not only is this expanding its foothold along the stream but it seems happy to flower throughout the summer (it was well out when I first checked it on June 13 and is still flowering three months later), and the third plant is the HOP growing above the Button weed which is the first one I have seen with flowers this summer (as these were all the female 'cones' I could not tell if they were fresh flowers or had already become seeds but they looked fresh). Last of the plants was a large patch of yellow daisies near the easternmost of the bomb craters south of the bushes at Farlington Marshes. Walking along the streamside path from the lake I noticed this yellow sward and thought it was a patch of buttercups but on inspection found that most of the plants were LESSER HAWKBIT, distinguished by its small flat flowers and the few long white hairs on the lower parts of the stem (the upper part being hairless)

THU 2 SEP

Both Lyels Wood and the Pond Cottage Meadow are restricted areas needing a permit from Michael Prior but today I found my pass well worth having. In Lyels ORPINE usually appears in great quantity early in the summer but very little or none seems to flower in most years - this was no exception as the deer had eaten many of the plants but just four plants had excellent flower heads as good as any garden Sedum. Also in this wood I enjoyed the sight of a large and perfect COMMON DOG VIOLET in flower but I know of nothing locally to compare with the flower richness of the Pond Cottage meadow at this time of year (I must check out the Thicket Lawn southwest of the

Leigh Park Gardens lake which could be a competitor). Here at Stansted you wade through thigh high Fleabane, Ragwort and Knapweed to find it interspersed with patches of DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS, SNEEZEWORT, PEPPER SAXIFRAGE and WILD ANGELICA and around the edges you can feed on first class Blackberries. There were not many butterflies here but I had one fresh Painted Lady nectaring on Fleabane within easy reach of my hand had I moved quickly enough.

WED 1 SEP

At Catherington Down this evening I at last found the yellow anthers of IVY flowers sending out their autumn invitation to nectaring insects. The downland was covered in Eyebright and there was a good selection of flowers (even Round Headed Rampion still flowering with quite a few Harebells and many Small Scabious) but I could hardly see any Autumn Ladies Tresses (I counted just 9) or Autumn Gentians. One interesting find was of one plant of pure white Red Bartsia.

TUE 31 AUG

This morning John Goodspeed walked a relatively short section of Portsdown hilltop from his home (just east of the old A3) to Fort Widley and found 245 AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES to confirm the news that this is a good season for the last of our orchids (despite the poor showing at Catherington Down where only 20 have been found)

MON 30 AUG

Stephen Harwood tells me that so far he has only found some 20 AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES on Catherington Down (along the line from the top gate to the central one on Lovedean Lane).

Autumn Gentian are also in small numbers there. Maybe more will emerge later as other sites are reporting better than usual 'crops' this autumn (and I can remember in the distant past finding over 250 at Catherington Down, albeit with the keen eyes of young Watch Group members to help)

This afternoon I checked out the South Moors 'orchid field' for Devils Bit Scabious which usually puts in a minimal appearance there very late in the season. I did not see it but did find RAGGED ROBIN and LESSER SPEARWORT reflowering, with Marsh Foxtail grass doing the same near the Tamarisk Pool. Also in this tiny streamlet (still just damp) I saw three clumps of BROOKWEED with a total of about 25 plants still having flowers open. Along the seawall path I could find no more than the three plants of Slender Hare's Ear I first found there on Aug 16, and up the Brockhampton stream the TURKISH TUTSAN bush is still flowering where a sailor once planted it to welcome him back to his moored yacht - there has been an inhabited boat here for years but the plant soldiers on with just a Fuchsia for company.

INSECTS:

SUN 5 SEP

Mark Litjens did see the Black Kite in the Whitsbury area this weekend but only distantly. He did have two bonus items, though, one was the HONEY BUZZARD and the other was a count of 36 SMALL TORTOISESHELL butterflies over the horse gallops in the Whitsbury Down area. Dragonfly watching was also good, starting at Titchfield Haven on Friday with Black Tailed Skimmers (which normally fade out at the beginning of August) and a Ruddy Darter and at Eyeworth Pond on Saturday he had five species including Emperor Dragonfly.

SAT 4 SEP

At Farlington Marshes this morning, despite the heat, I only saw one COMMON BLUE and thought there was a similar dearth of SMALL HEATH as I walked around the seawall, but in the grass south of the bushes I found at least ten of them. SMALL WHITE continue to be abundant but the only other butterflies seen were one Green Veined White, one Speckled Wood and two Red Admiral. Just one Common Darter showed itself to me in a walk of over four hours.

Quite a few people suffer from arachnophobia and it seems that one family holidaying on Hayling Island were sufficiently concerned at the sight of a lovely ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI 'Golden Orb' Spider to call on the police for assistance. Luckily we now have a county expert on wildlife matters within the Hampshire force and so the Hayling officer contacted Geoff Culbertson, the county specialist, and took him a specimen of the worrying spider. He hopefully assured all concerned that the spider posed no threat whatsoever to humans but I think he was left with the spider and has probably now created a new colony of this species by putting the gravid female out on grass in the Petersfield area, so it is not only well naturalists carrying spiderlings around on their trousers who extend the range of such species...

THU 2 SEP

Walking around Stansted Forest today both Small White and Speckled Wood were numerous but the

two highspots of the outing were close encounters with a fresh PAINTED LADY and with two different HORNETS. The butterfly and first Hornet were in the Pond Cottage meadow, both on and around Fleabane flowers though the butterfly was there to nectar while the Hornet was slowly flying around in the hope of grabbing a tasty insect. The second Hornet accompanied me as I was picking blackberries from a bush on the edge of the 'Bunny Meadow' (the open meadow which you enter from the road opposite the Saw Mill). In both cases the big insect paid no attention whatsoever to my presence, coming very close but clearly only intent on its search for insect prey around the blackberries.

WED 1 SEP

Today I had a call from someone who had rung Havant Borough Council for help in identifying a monstrous insect devouring her Fuschia plants – someone gave her my number and so I was able to see my first example this autumn of an ELEPHANT HAWKMOOTH caterpillar which I took to Catherington Down and left among a large clump of Rosebay Willowherb plants which should serve to sustain its growth. I have often wondered why this insect is called an “Elephant” but the lady who gave it to me may have supplied the clue when she pointed with amazement to its droppings in the container in which she had put the caterpillar with some Fuchsia leaves – the droppings certainly look like Elephant dung.... An even better bonus came with this call-out in that the lady concerned lived next door to the home of one Richard White whom most local birders will have met in the past at Farlington Marshes and I learnt that he is doing very well working for the JNCC which unites English with Scottish Nature and is currently in the Falklands. I know have an e-mail address to contact him there.

In my own garden today four RED ADMIRALS nectared simultaneously on a Buddleia while a Migrant Hawker patrolled the air.. At Catherington Down late in the day I saw a couple of Meadow Brown and one Common Blue.

TUE 31 AUG

Picnic teas this year have been all the more enjoyable on account of the lack of Wasps but when David Parker was yesterday having a peaceful afternoon tea in his Forestside garden close to Stansted Forest the peace was somewhat disturbed by the arrival of an 'enormous' HORNET. David thinks it must have been a Queen but without having seen it I can only comment that all the Hornets I have seen look very large and they can't all be queens. Needless to say the Hornet was not after their sweet things but was in search of insect meat (if the tea party had attracted ordinary wasps they might have had the interesting sight of seeing one removed in the jaws of the Hornet). I know almost nothing about the lifestyle of Hornets but I guess that there comes a time at the end of the summer when new Queens emerge from the nests to find places to hibernate before setting up new nests next year, and I imagine that on this first flight male Hornets will mate with her, and on the day when this happens there will be a lot of Hornets in the air. Last year on Sept 27 I may have witnessed the aftermath of such an event for on a walk through the Southleigh and Stansted Forests I came on clusters of Hornets in at least twelve different places. It will be interesting to know if anyone can confirm or disprove this idea, and if anyone sees a similar sight this autumn.

The unknown prize which Andrew Brookes is offering for finding a BROWN HAIRSTREAK anywhere in south east Hants (other than Noar Hill) - see Aug 23 entry - has still not been won, even by Andrew himself. Last Sunday (Aug 29) he visited the Ridge Farm area in Botley Woods, where they have supposedly been seen in the past, and got quite close to success but he has to admit that "Although a few small brown lepidoptera were seen flying zany around, none rested to afford a positive identification, despite the vast clumps of Fleabane in the abandoned fields." He goes on to say "The Fleabane nevertheless attracted several Brimstones (all female) some newly-emerged Commas, a Small Heath and several Small Coppers. A solitary Gatekeeper was also seen, although oddly not one Common Blue. The Painted Ladies resident in my garden for two weeks disappeared over the weekend." He would dearly like to have a positive record of Brown Hairstreak in the greater Portsmouth area, but don't expect too much in the way of a prize if you do succeed in finding them.

Mark Litjens found time at midday for a quick walk along the Itchen Navigation north of Shawford where on July 8 he had counted more than 150 BANDED DEMOISELLE in a distance of less than half a mile. Today there was still one male left (despite the presence of 11 Spotted Flycatcher which would I imagine find them easy targets). Mark also saw 4 Red Admiral, 1 Golden-ringed Dragonfly, 1 Brimstone, 1 Small Tortoiseshell and small numbers of Green-veined and Small Whites. One Kingfisher and two Blackcap added to the interest.

While on Hayling Island today I took the path south west from St Mary's Church across the Gable

Head fields and just before it reaches the main road near the Newtown Hotel there is an area of rough ground which has a couple of football goalposts. In the even rougher grassland around it I came on more than 20 ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI 'Golden Orb' Spiders and one ARANEUS QUADRATUS – the first I have seen this autumn. I read recently that the handsome Golden Orb spiders may be out competing (for food) the equally pretty A. quadratus (which comes in a wide range of colours – I have seen bright yellow to deep red with a greeny colour predominating). I certainly have seen few A quadratus in recent years but as they tend to place their orbwebs high to catch flying insects, and Argiope build them low to catch grasshoppers, I do not see they are competing for prey.

MON 30 AUG

Mark Litjens not only saw good birds at Needs Ore during Sunday and Monday mornings but also saw many insects. On Sunday morning he counted 43 MIGRANT HAWKER (only 33 on Monday), but only 2 Blue Tailed Damselflies, and on Monday there were 28 SMALL COPPER against 4 on Sunday when there was a single late WALL BROWN. Inevitably there were many Small White (30 on Monday) and a few Red Admiral with Small Heath, Common Blue and Large White.

Today on the South Moors I found single Small Heath and Common Blue with a couple of Speckled Wood under the streamside trees. In contrast the air was full of SMALL WHITE wherever I walked (well over 40 in my local walk) and in places where I walked through dry grass I put up quite a few SILVER Y moths that will also presumably just flown over to us.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 3 SEP

My knowledge of fish is almost non-existent but I seem to remember that a few years ago Bass fishing was banned in Portsmouth Harbour (if not everywhere) as stocks had fallen to a dangerously low level. It sounds as if things are now looking up as Andy Horton (the British Marine Life specialist from Shoreham) tells me that last Tuesday he found the shallow water at Kingston Beach near the mouth of the River Adur was alive with millions of small BASS (average length of 4cm). He tells me that the Adur is a nursery for these fish but he has never seen so many of them in twenty years of regular observation. Andy was not the only one to spot them - many Black Headed Gulls and Terns were taking their share but the fish were in such numbers that the birds would make little difference. A few days earlier he had noticed the river had an abundance of GREY MULLET which had attracted 7 Heron and 3 Little Egret to take a share of that meal. This is just a taster of news about marine matters that you will never find in this website but can get from a couple of sites run by Andy Horton - links to them are provided at the bottom of my What's New page.

THU 2 SEP

At two points in Stansted Forest today I was surprised by a pig like crashing through the undergrowth close to me and saw a reddish brown backside closer to the ground than I would expect for a ROE DEER but in both cases that is what it turned out to be - both were this years youngsters behaving like rowdy and clumsy teenagers asserting their independence from parents though unable to stand as tall as an adult. As Michael Prior has told me that if there are Muntjac in the Forest he would expect to see them or their signs, and he has not, so I think I must retract my previous claims to have detected them by this rowdy, clumsy behaviour.

Autumn brings toadstools even when the ground seems dry and today I saw three lovely clumps of BRICKCAPS and a small but perfect BLUSHER while one Beech stump had fresh furry growth of some young Ganoderma type bracket fungus.

TUE 31 AUG

Today's information from the Havant Tourist Info office was a first hand account of a week-end sighting of one COMMON SEAL while siling in the water north of Fowley Island just south of Emsworth

WEEK 34 AUG 23 – 29

BIRDS:

SUN 29 AUG

Barry Collins tells me that he was on Thorney Island just before first light last Tuesday (Aug 24) and counted 281 LITTLE EGRET leaving the roost. Coming at this time of day he can get a more

accurate count than is possible in the evening when the birds arriving at the roost jostle for position and some may fail to find a good perch on their first approach and may go round again - in the morning the birds fly out with no hesitation, the only problem then being to spot any which 'leave by the back door'

I am not sure how many people were with me on the Thorney Island walk led by Kevin Stouse this morning (at a guess at least 40) but they should all have gone home well satisfied with the birds seen. OSPREYS were undoubtedly top of most people's lists with two seen together at the 'landing lights' at the east end of the Great Deeps. Even from the west end of the deeps we could clearly see one soaring to around 1,000 feet, then tumbling back to the ground. At close quarters, from the east end of Thornham Lane, we could see the golden mass of juvenile feathers moulting from the scapulars and coverts of the young bird perched atop a landing light and watch the second bird flying around the area in what seemed a half hearted search for food. My first view of this bird in flight was truly impressive - close to me, perhaps 100 feet up, it flew across my front with a tight packed formation of 23 Little Egret in pursuit. Most of these soon gave up the chase but four of them stayed with the Osprey as it circled up into the air, and on at least one pass I saw two of the Egrets fly directly at the Osprey, lunging at it with their bills.

.....As well as Ospreys we saw KINGFISHER, WHINCHAT, WHEATEAR, WHITETHROAT and a couple of SPOTTED FLYCATCHER on west Thorney, with a single male POCHARD on the Little Deeps. GREENSHANK are now very numerous and we saw them in Emsworth Harbour (5+) and at both west (15+) and east (40+) ends of the Great Deeps. There were around 60 Black Tailed Godwit in Emsworth Harbour with several Redshank and one or two each of Curlew and Grey Plover. Swallows were numerous and I saw perhaps half a dozen Sand Martin and heard one or two House Martin but we failed to see a Common Sandpiper and the nearest we got to any Bearded Tits was a distant 'popping' from within the reeds. At the feet of ponies on the Thornham Marshes were five YELLOW WAGTAIL.

Sheila Burton, who lives in the Saltmarsh Lane area of Hayling, was on Kevin Stouse's walk today and told me that she had been surprised sometime in early August to see a lone GOLDENEYE on Langstone Harbour from the south of the Hayling Coastal Path. This gives some credence to the theory that the bird did swim in from the open sea rather than being dumped in the Hemitage Stream by human agency.

News from Barry Collins tonight is of 8 PINTAIL arriving back on Thorney Island last Wednesday (Aug 25) and 5 WIGEON dropping in on Friday (Aug 27)

I'm not sure if Trevor Carpenter has taken up cycling or horse-riding but I have a cryptic message from him saying that he 'rode around Fareham Golf Course last night' and saw large numbers of waders including 150 Black Tailed Godwit and 200 Redshank (presumably in Fareham Creek, not on the grass) with 5 Little Egret - equalling the highest count Trevor is aware of for the creek.

My recent conjectures about the origin of Little Egret that are now being reported all around the shores of the New Forest area from Keyhaven up to the Lower Test Marshes have gained me further knowledge as today a couple of people have told me that there is a minor night roost of Egrets at Sowley Pond near Lymington and the Beaulieu River.

The Sowley Pond Egret roost may also serve the Isle of Wight birds, though they may have their own roost by the Yar estuary according to Ed Griffiths who has just finished a holiday on the island - he tells me that when he was there last August he saw nine in a tree by the Yar though that could have been a daytime high tide roost rather than an overnight one. While on the island from Aug 19 - 26 he says he saw lots of Wheatear along the south coast and found two or three Egrets each day at Yarmouth and Newtown. 60 Grey Plover in summer plumage made a grand sight on the 26th at Newtown where he was impressed by improvements being made to the reserve there (a new improved scrape is being created and the main hide is being extended boding well for next year's visit)

Mike Collins saw the BLACK SWAN off the Broadmarsh Slipway again this morning.

Brian Fellows surveyed Emsworth Harbour from the marina seawall this morning slightly earlier than Kevin Stouse's party reached the end of the Marina Farm footpath. Brian saw 12 Grey Plover (more than we did and his highest count there this autumn) and 12 Greenshank and 74 Blackwits against our rough count of 60. He also picked out a single WHIMBREL which we missed but agreed with us on the absence of Dunlin, Ringed Plover and Turnstone. Brian then cycled on ahead of us to Thornham point and managed to get there before either of the Ospreys (a single Kestrel was keeping their perch warm for them on the landing lights) but he did see 32 Little Egret perched in 'three leafless bushes to the west of the landing lights' (by the time we got there they had probably

moved to the reeds where the Little Deeps join the Great Deeps - this is where the 23+ Egrets rose from to mob the Osprey when we arrived). Brian also found a large number of Redshank along the banks of the Great Deeps near the landing lights.

SAT 28 AUG

The Celtic tribes inhabiting the western fringes of the known world (i.e. people in Dorset) have a PURPLE HERON visiting Hatch Pond according to pager news via Paul Winter. As no maps exist of this terra incognita I cannot say where Hatch Pond may be but no doubt friendly natives will guide you - the bird is said to show well as dusk descends but to be elusive during the day

.....At Titchfield Haven a DARTFORD WARBLER was seen in the morning with the 'usual' Spotted Crake, one Little Stint and 6 Curlew Sandpiper. Only 28 Black Tailed Godwit there at the moment. A female MARSH HARRIER was seen over Thorney Island by Barry Collins today. It did not stay and probably moved on to Pagham where one was reported later in the day

The continuing presence of the BLACK SWAN in the Broadmarsh area was established by a phone call asking me to settle a domestic argument. The caller seemed not to believe his wife who had taken their grandchildren to Broadmarsh this afternoon and come home with the story of having seen a Black Swan which he had difficulty in believing but I was able to persuade him that she was telling the truth.

In mid-afternoon Brian Fellows walked round the Chichester gravel pit lakes where poisonous algae are reported in Ivy, Copse and Triangle lakes. On the East Trout Lake 11 GADWALL were present, presumably early arrivals from the east but I understood that these birds are rapidly extending their breeding range westward (I think they are regular breeders at Arundel now and could well be round the year birds at Chichester before long) though Brian quotes BWP as saying that breeding birds in Britain are sedentary and arise from captive stock. Last time Brian was here he could see no juvenile Great Crested Grebe but there were three juveniles there today (not a good season for them?). Brian also counted 550 Coot and noted a few Common Tern still over Copse Lake where a Sparrowhawk flew north.

.....Moving on to Church Norton Brian heard that a MARSH HARRIER had been reported in Pagham Harbour, presumably the same bird that Barry Collisn had over Thorney and back at Broadmarsh he also saw the Black Swan

FRI 27 AUG

If you were thinking of birding at Keyhaven/Pennington or walking around Thorney Island this weekend be advised that (a) the gates on the Thorney Island path are out of action and will not be repaired until next week and (b) the lock gates at the Salterns between Normandy and Pennington Marshes are open and will cause you to walk 'an extra mile'

Paul Winter has put out on HOSLIST a full list of good birds which he saw on the Pennington/Keyhaven marshes today. These include 20 KNOT, 9 CURLEW SANDPIPER, 4 LITTLE STINT, 5 EIDER and both Whinchat and Wheatear. He mentions 8 Little Egret and I assume these are birds from Poole Harbour rather than Thorney Island. Does anyone know the radius in which they operate around their roosts?

This morning Brian was the first to hear BLACKCAP resume a subdued song in Palmer's copse at Emsworth where Robins, Wrens and a Great Tit also sang. In the afternoon he set out to walk round Thorney Island but found the gates were out of action and was told they would not be repaired until next week. This did not stop him seeing good birds north of the fence - even in mid afternoon (around 3pm) there was a sub-roost of 42 EGRET in the Hawthorns just west of Eames Farm (Barry Collins says they do not spend the night here - just wait till the 'landlady' lets them in - see Aug 20) and on the lines taking power to the island two TURTLE DOVES sat silently side by side. A charm of 15 GOLDFINCH provided colour along Thornham Lane and a KINGFISHER gave more at the Great Deeps while many SWALLOWS and SAND MARTINS flew hither and thither with more purposeful streams of Redshank and Greenshank commuted between Great Deeps roost and harbour mud where there were 68 Blackwits. Just one Wheatear was seen.

Walking round Farlington Marshes today I saw more than my fair share of YELLOW WAGTAILS, finding around 15 of them in groups of two to four in five places around the reserve and hearing more which I never saw. This gives a false impression of their abundance as Bob Chapman told me that only two families had raised young on the reserve this year and that the scarcity of these birds is nationwide. Bob thinks that the males and females may winter in different places and that something has affected the females more than the males, though numbers of both are dramatically low. He says that while the males traditionally arrive earlier in the spring than the females this year

he saw a few males at the beginning of April but had to wait until May before he saw a female, and of the four males that settled at Farlington only three could find a female.

The GOLDENEYE was still present by the Bedhampton Gravel Quay at Broadmarsh this morning, and later Bob Chapman told me that he agreed with John Badley that it was not a summering bird in the sense that it was not in the harbour until it suddenly appeared on the Hermitage Stream at the beginning of August and in such a state of moult that it could not have just flown in. It could have swum into the harbour from the English Channel, or more likely it could have been put in the water by someone. I spoke to Penny Cooper at Brent Lodge today and she told me that it is definitely not one of their patients being returned to the wild, so its origin remains an open question. An interesting twist to the story comes from Jason Crook who (I am told) seriously wonders if it is a BARROWS GOLDENEYE - if it is an escaped/dumped bird from a collection that is possible but we will have to await the re-growth of its full plumage to be sure.

I have only just realised that, as BLACK SWANS are native to the antipodes, their biological clocks may well be currently going into springtime mode. This would account for the sudden surge of whistling and other activity which the Emsworth Mill Pond bird has shown in the past few weeks. I enjoyed a long walk from Havant to Farlington Marshes today and saw a few good birds though there was also a good show of butterflies and plants (described elsewhere). Reaching the Hermitage Stream at Broadmarsh I immediately saw the GOLDENEYE by the gravel quay with 2 Common Sandpiper upstream and 25 Swans with one cygnet down by the slipway. Some 75 Black Tailed Godwit and around 150 Redshank were feeding on the mud and some 60 Turnstone were seen with the usual Oystercatchers and a few Curlew. In Chalk Dock four Egrets were feeding and 25+ Lapwing were resting on the mud where the big winter flock will soon be seen, and on my return with the tide high there were 40 GREAT CRESTED GREBE here but no sign of the Black Necked Grebes. Starting down the eastern wall I saw my only Whinchat just south of the track from the building, but nothing much more until the Deeps. Here 16 SHOVELER were on the water with perhaps 7 Teal and a single Wheatear was on the grass. A single SPOTTED REDSHANK flew in and I had a chance to look at it, and a SNIPE, through another birder's scope but I was not convinced about the duck which he showed me as the single male Wigeon - it didn't seem to be of the distinctive Wigeon shape and did not have the rufous tinge to the breast and body which my book shows for a male in eclipse. The first two YELLOW WAGTAIL were on the seawall at the point and here flights of 10 Ringed Plover with the odd Dunlin and of 60 Grey Plover with other small waders flew over to the islands for the high tide roost. Arriving at the lake the water was crowded with at least 150 Blackwits and 250 Redshank plus Shoveler, Teal and other duck with 4 Common Sandpiper, 20 Lapwing and a few Grey Plover at the edge and a single Shelduck with one juvenile on the shore where at least three Yellow Wagtail were feeding. A very large female Sparrowhawk flew down over the reed beds and made many birds jump to deeper water just before I moved on. In the bushes near the main entrance were four more Yellow Wagtail and a single Spotted Flycatcher but I did not see two Redstart which I was told had been there this morning. Moving east through the bushes I came on a Lesser Whitethroat and a party of three more Spotted Flycatcher, and going east along the track from the building I saw yet more Yellow Wagtail, one of them chasing a Stonechat along the fence by the reeds. A single male Kestrel was probably the only other bird of interest though I did learn from Bob Chapman that the long staying Spotted Crake here left on Aug 14th having arrived on July 15th.

THU 26 AUG

Paul Winter tells us that the Crake seen at the Lower Test marshes on Aug 16 was an adult, though so elusive that only a few saw it well enough to confirm this. The current bird, which is more 'user friendly', is a juvenile.

Paul also passes on pager news from Titchfield Haven at midday today - 'Several' AVOCET there with 7 Curlew Sandpiper, Little Stint and one Spotted Crake.

Mike Collins saw a WHINCHAT on the Langstone South Moors seawall this evening and a GREEN SANDPIPER on the nearby 'Tamarisk Pool'

Returning to his Forestside home yesterday evening (Aug 25) David Parker was pleased to see a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER drinking from his garden birdbath and to watch a Willow Warbler in a Silver Birch - we seem to be doing well for Spotted Flycatcher this autumn but where are the Pied? I can only recall one record (in Church Norton churchyard on Aug 3).

Brian Fellows walked up the Hermitage Stream from Broadmarsh to the A27 this afternoon, seeing the Goldeneye still by the Gravel quay and 28 Mute Swan with no sign of the Black Swan. North of the A27 were two more Swans (almost certainly the Bedhampton Mill parents with their six cygnets

out of sight on the mill pool) and two white geese which will also have come from the pool (perhaps the cygnets are rowdy teenagers driving all the older inhabitants away for peace and quiet). A stranger sight can sometimes be seen in the stream here when ducks are in full plumage - they keep some on the mill pool of a sort which I have not yet identified. These are white ducks slightly smaller than Aylesburys and above their heads is a round ball of feathers balanced on a thin spike of quills like pom-poms on a beret. These balls are large and can be of different colours (e.g. black). Do tell me if you can name them. Brian also saw a Grey Wagtail here but that is not unusual, two pairs nest regularly upstream.

WED 25 AUG

Paul Winter's pager this morning gave him news of one SPOTTED CRAKE, 2 LITTLE STINT and 5 CURLEW SANDPIPER with 2 AVOCET at Titchfield Haven this morning and this evening the news was from the Lower Test reserve where their SPOTTED CRAKE was seen three times this afternoon (and it seems this is also a juvenile like the one at Titchfield). Little Egret and Kingfisher helped to fill in the waiting time at Lower Test.

Brian Fellows arrived at Farlington Marshes today as the rain started so he restricted his birding to a check of 6 Colour Ringed Black Tailed Godwit (one in the stream and 5 in Shutt Lake - the harbour channel into which the reserve lake drains). Despite the rain he noted the following recent sightings from the notice board ... Peregrine 3, Merlin 1, Hobby 1, MARSH HARRIER 1 (21/8), Osprey (12/8, 20/8). Little Egret 20. WHINCHAT 26, Stonechat 4, Yellow Wagtail 10+. Black-tailed Godwit 680, Little Stint 3, Greenshank 53, Spotted Redshank 7, Little Ringed Plover 1, Common Sandpiper 4, Green Sandpiper 1. GADWALL 6, Wigeon 1 male, BEARDED TIT 100+. BLACK NECKED GREBE 2, Roseate Tern 2, Little Tern 10+.

..... The mention of the Black Necked Grebe reminds me that Mike Collins sighting of two last Sunday (Aug 22) was not the first - two, presumably the same two, were on the Farlington Notice Board on Aug 3 and had probably been somewhere in Hampshire through the breeding season, Yesterday I commented on the RSPCA being prepared to rescue Swans but sometimes taking a time to arrive from a distance. Today I hear that they did turn up at Emsworth to deal with the young Swan that had swallowed a fish-hook but despite an intensive search the hooked Swan could not be found - such is life. Brian Fellows also failed to spot the bird there today but did see a large flock of Swallows settling on wires near Peter Pond and out on the mud of Emsworth Harbour there were 6 Greenshank

If you are interested in any aspect of MARINE LIFE have a look at my entry for July 9 in the Other Wildlife page of this site. This gives details of a website run by Andy Horton who this evening sent me this message about Little Egrets seen at the mouth of the River Adur at Shoreham in Sussex - maybe the Egrets are newcomers there, with the number present on Thorney they must spread far and wide by day. The message originally came from a David Roberts and says ... " 3 Little Egrets, their distinctive all white colouring stood out from the greenery (Glasswort) and they were right in the middle of the Adur mudflats (Between the footbridge and the Norfolk Bridge), sometimes in the dips of the channels. The tide was low in the mid-afternoon. In addition 7 Grey Herons were perched as still as statues. All the birds were too far away for photographs even with a 500m mirror lens. The light was poor in the middle of a thunderstorm and a downpour. Shoreham Nature Notes is at: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/BMLSS/adur-5.htm> Flotsam Quiz is at: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/BMLSS/flotsam.htm> "

This evening the doorbell rang and I found two teenage girls clutching a juvenile Collared Dove which their cat had brought in though it had probably been first shot through the body as there were wounds under both wings - the bird was very docile, probably from loss of blood, but seemed to have a good chance of survival so I took the girls to Anne McMahon who said she would do her best for it. A less traumatic phone call last night came from a lady who lives on Hayling with a garden facing onto the big Hayling School playing fields. She told me she went to the end of the garden to throw a chicken carcass over onto the grass for the gulls to enjoy (a new way to dispose of your rubbish - let the gulls have it fresh before it goes to the tip) and as she did so she was surprised by a rush of wings low over her head as a large bird of prey (with jesses) swept down to get the first pickings. This hawk may not be lost, just flown away from its owner to return later, but I told the lady that if it hangs around the best person to inform is the chap who runs the Sussex Falconry Centre in Wophams Lane near Birdham (01243-512472) as I gather that falconers who lose their birds circulate the news of the loss through their fellow falconers and the people at Birdham usually know whose bird it is.

TUE 24 AUG

Mike Collins sends me this account of his journey to work this morning. He says "I was driving to work today and as I approached Aldsworth pond I was met by stationary traffic. the cause of which was three swans walking down the centre of the road, blocking it in both directions. Everyone just sat there so I got out and with another driver tried to shoo the swans along, no luck they just fanned out and still blocked the road. In the end in desperation I caught and picked up the fully grown Cygnet, then I tried to lead the parents to safety. Trouble was we were about a hundred yards from the dry pond and there were no breaks in the hedge to put the swans in the field. So with one lady behind them and me getting them to follow we got the swans to the pond eventually. Yes, swans are heavy how ever do the fly! I hope the swans will be all right in the dry pond I do not think the cygnet will be able to fly for some time its flight feathers were hardly grown." I would guess that this is the family from Brickkiln Pond but I am surprised that they were heading away from the water with a flightless youngster - possibly they had followed the stream down from Brickkiln to Aldsworth Pond and had not known what to do when they got there and found it dry. Hopefully Mike set them pointing in the right direction to walk back to the water they had come from.

Brian Fellows was at Broadmarsh this afternoon at 3pm with the tide low and he saw the GOLDENEYE under the Brockhampton Gravel Quay and also found the BLACK SWAN in the Hermitage Stream with just 27 Mute Swans. Out on the mud with other waders was a handsome summer plumaged Grey Plover and 2 Common Sandpiper came flying down the stream to the sea.

MON 23 AUG

David Parker went to Thursley Common yesterday and was disappointed to see neither Hobby nor Woodlark but says this was made up for by the good number of DARTFORD WARBLERS. Birds of Hampshire tells us that once adults have established a territory they will stick to it regardless of fire, frost or famine but at this time of year the young will disperse and may turn up almost anywhere that there is suitable habitat (not necessarily gorse, bramble bushes seem to be equally acceptable) though they have a distinct preference for coastal sites. The evidence also tells us that while they begin to disperse in August October is the peak month for birds to be seen in new locations, followed by November and September. While at Thursley David saw 4 Spotted Flycatcher and what sounds like the first autumn mixed flock of Tits, Goldcrest and Treecreepers.

Keith Betton's pager assures us that the 'spot a crane' competition is still open to all comers with birds at both Titchfield Haven and Lower Test but gives no news of the Farlington bird. More interesting to me (as I used to live close by) are two reports on Saturday (Aug 21) from Eling Mill where the Bartley Water joins the Test and Southampton Water - it seems that an OSPREY and two Little Egret were seen here (and that presumably would only be news if the Egrets had not yet moved into this stream) so birders in the New Forest should be on the lookout for Egrets eager to conquer new waters - the Bartley Water will lead them through Ashurst Bridge and down to rich pickings in Matley Bog.

Paul Winter was very disappointed with his last visit to the New Forest shore but today he found things looking up. 8 LITTLE STINT and 21 KNOT with 44 Black Tailed Godwit were a good start on the waders and Paul also managed to watch the WOOD SANDPIPER preening on Keyhaven Pool (it has been in the area for about a fortnight but this pool is not its regular haunt). Several Wheatear, a Whinchat and 10+ Yellow Wagtail were present and as the tide fell Grey Plover and Curlew could be seen out on the mud.

Brian Fellows is pleased to have 89 Swans back in the Emsworth area today but the voluntary warden for the Slipper Mill pond had to take emergency action this evening when one of them swallowed a fish hook and short section of line and clearly needed help to remove it. As ever this happened after business hours so he may have had trouble in getting action (though it sounds as if the Swan could survive the night well enough). The RSPCA are quite good at dealing with Swans but getting help from them is very like getting rescued when your car breaks down - you ring a national number and someone who has never heard of Emsworth tries to record where to send help, then you take your place in an unseen queue and wait ... I suggested to Tony three other alternatives - one was to ring Ken Merriman, a full time devoted Swan rescue man who would no doubt offer advice and might even come to the rescue but he is based at West Moors in Dorset, the second suggestion was to contact Brent Lodge, and the third (as there might well be no-one at Brent Lodge in the evening), was to ring Anne McMahon, our local bird rescuer in Bedhampton, as she often sends birds to Brent Lodge and it so happens that Penny Cooper (the head warden at Brent Lodge lives in Purbrook and could be contacted by Anne and could hopefully take the Swan to work with her tomorrow. All these phone numbers are given in the Wildlife Rescue section of my Wildlife Organisations page.

Last Saturday a KINGFISHER flew low across the water of Cams Bay at the entrance to Fareham Creek in Portsmouth Harbour and gave much pleasure to someone who has sailed in the harbour for 30 years and never before seen this beautiful bird. To those already hooked on birds this would be another good tick, but to someone not yet hooked this (like Brian Fellows walk with Chris Tyas - see another entry for Aug 21) it could be one of those pivotal points of life when the natural world suddenly comes to life around you - we hope we have another convert to the point of view that a healthy natural environment is of great importance to our own quality of life. If everyone felt that way we would all be a lot happier (if not so rich) and there would be more Kingfishers for all to enjoy.

PLANTS:

SUN 29 AUG

DWARF MALLOW (*Malva neglecta*) is said in the Hants Flora to be "widespread and frequent, especially on sandy, disturbed, non-acid soil" yet the distribution map shows it as occurring in less than 3% of the 1km squares in south-east Hampshire and I have not seen it anywhere in the Hampshire part of 'my patch' around Havant. There is, however, a mass of it currently flowering in the orchards (SU 774053) at Nutbourne where I first saw it last year and if you wish to make it's acquaintance you can do so by going to Farm Lane at Nutbourne and where the lane ends continue on the footpath through the orchards towards Prinsted. You may see plants on your left as soon as you leave the narrow fenced section of path and come into the orchard proper but you will find it is the dominant plant in the three or four rows of appl trees immediately east of the house which you have to pass. From a distance the plants might look like Common Mallow which has been mown and is just starting to regrow, holding many mallow leaves up 'like umbrellas' but if you look closely at the plants you will find many inconspicuous white/pink smal flowers hiding below this mass of leaves.

Barry and Margaret Collins have just made a careful count of the AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES growing on the Thornham Marshes nature reserve around the Great Deeps and come up with a figure of 144 spikes. I wonder if Portsdown or Catherington Down can better that number?

SAT 28 AUG

Cycling to Northney on a brief evening visit (to check for the presence of Lesser Centaury which I did not find) I was impressed by the amount of PEPPER SAXIFRAGE now flowering in the west end of the small open area immediately north of the houses to the south of the marina (and separated from the shore line path by a thick hedge of Hawthorns with only a couple of gaps allowing you to get through them). A little further east, in the dip near the north west corner of the meadow, the great mass of white flowered Goat's Rue is still flowering.

FRI 27 AUG

Walking to Farlington Marshes from Havant today I brought home two puzzle plants but saw three good ones about which I could be certain - the latter being found at the Marshes. If you enter from the Eastern Road main entrance and set off across the 'bushes' towards the reserve building you will pass what used to be a substantial pond on the south side of a Hawthorn Grove at the eastern end of the bushes area, but if you turn north from the 'streamside' path to look at it you will find no water in it now though it does retain a wet bottom and some pond vegetation. The pond is effectively in two halves and if you go to the eastern part and walk around the cattle trampled dividing line between the dry and the damp ground you should, by looking down at the ground carefully, find something that gave me much pleasure - the tiny bright pink stars of LESSER CENTAURY scattered around in good numbers. Unlike Common Centaury you cannot expect to see them from a distance, you have to go and look carefully at your feet and suddenly you will realise that these beautiful plants are all around you. Also growing here, but effectively over, is a lot of PINK WATER-SPEEDWELL with a few white flowers having pink markings plus other distinguishing characters like bracts longer than flower pedicels and all sessile leaves (though with seed capsules that seemed round to me where they should be wider than long). In the western section of this pond our friend (?) from New Zealand (*Crassula helmsii* or the N Z Pigmy Weed) is abundant and covered with its flowers, and in both sections is one of my puzzle plants in abundance. This is a large, upright Goosefoot with leaves that immediately reminded me in both shape and size of the rare Maple Leaved Goosefoot that I was shown recently but I am pretty sure that it is RED GOOSEFOOT and will be easier to identify in a month's time when it should have begun to turn red and set seed. Continuing east from this pond and along the track past the building you reach the junction with the track going to the ponds north of the road. On the east side of this junction some

very large (railway sleeper) pieces of wood lie on the ground and at the southern end of the largest pieces there has been a good big specimen of CORN PARSLEY though only seeds, leaves and overall shape remain to tell you this (one or two tiny flowers were on a separate minute plant on the south side of a gravel heap just to the south of the big plant). The other puzzle plant was found along the path below the A27 east of the reserve at Chalkdock - in fact I found five specimens between the Broadmarsh end (where I found the first among a big clump of Chinese Mugwort) and the concrete stream outfall half way to the reserve). These are probably just a tall, hairy version of Canadian Fleabane as the flowers are of the right size for that species but the plants 'look different' and the upper leaves which I brought back with specimens of flower stems have edges closely covered with short hooked hairs (just right for Guernsey Fleabane - Canadian Fleabane should have fewer, straighter hairs)

WED 25 AUG

Very few plants have not started to flower this year - IVY is the only common plant that I can think of which is still in bud - but everywhere there are plants that think spring has come round again and are adding fresh colour to the countryside. The most impressive example I saw today was of a small triangular field having sides each roughly 300 yards long which was totally covered with the yellow of Bird's Foot Trefoil but much smaller examples can give equal surprise. Another unexpected yellow flower today was a small colony of Greater Celandine in a ditch at Finchdean but a much less eye-catching plant that is also freshly flowering is Thyme Leaved Speedwell, and its cousin the Common Field Speedwell is undergoing a similar revival. Many of these fresh flowerings come on ground that has been cleared by mowing or the harvesting of crops and I saw a good example of that at Rowlands Castle where a lane edge has been cleared near Wellsworth Farm and a large new crop of BUSH VETCH is growing as the dominant plant - some of it already in flower.

If you go up Bowes Hill by Rowlands Castle Railway Station and continue along the road till you are nearly out of the village you will find Wellsworth Lane on your right, and if you go down this until the houses cease on your left you can look over a field and see the hedge of the last garden on your left. In this hedge is a small tree which I would love to be able to name as it is covered from top to bottom (about 30 feet high) with large pale whitish pink flowers that look to me like those of a Lavatera (not only in size and shape but also in being clustered in twos and threes). However this is a proper tree and has shiny green leaves which slightly suggest a Camellia. I believe it must be a DECIDUOUS CAMELLIA (*Stewartia pseudo-camellia*) but would like confirmation, and would also suggest to anyone walking there that it is worth keeping an eye out for this impressive sight, currently at its best in full flower. I have told Michael Prior about it and hope he may be able to have a look at it and give an opinion though he says he has never seen this tree species before.

MON 23 AUG

On Mar 3 this year I saw the very tatty remains of a plant growing near a telephone box alongside Ferry Road on South Hayling and was pretty certain that it was the plant that had been identified as GUERNSEY FLEABANE just a few days earlier when Pete Selby and Paul Stanley had been searching the roadside for the rare grass *Poa infirma*. I have kept an eye on this plant through the spring and summer and today found it (actually 'them' as there are two plants side by side) looking very healthy and with developing flower buds but unlikely to flower before September. If you are interested in seeing this species (I have never seen it before) go west towards Hayling Ferry and immediately after passing the Kench you will find a private estate of boats, huts and bungalows calling itself the Hayling Health Society. On the north side of Ferry Road outside this estate you will see a public phone box. Go to the box and look for the plants about a yard to the west of it (between it and a post box). The two plants are the only ones that look green and erect there - perhaps 30 to 40cm high and looking 'shorter, fatter and hairier' than the very common Canadian Fleabane, the flower buds look as if the flowers will be substantially bigger than those of the Canadian species

The owner of one garden which always has a showing of AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES at this time of year tells me that there are far more than usual this year and attributes it to the August rain following July heat. I gather there is also a good showing on Portsdown and I hope it holds true at other sites.

INSECTS:

SUN 29 AUG

Barry Collins recorded a third CLOUDED YELLOW for the year on Thorney Island today and also saw a single HUMMING BIRD HAWKMOTH nectaring from Bristly Oxtongue (the moths long tongue keeps it out of danger on a prickly plant which could just possibly impale it)

A walk down the west seawall of Thorney Island from Marina Farm to the Great Deeps gave me regular sightings of SMALL COPPER and SMALL HEATH (about half a dozen of each) along the whole distance, together with a couple of GATEKEEPER and Common Darter plus four or five COMMON BLUE. Small White are still everywhere in small numbers and I also saw a lone Speckled Wood near the Marina Farm and three Red Admirals enjoying fallen apples at Nutbourne. Julian Moseley today told me that he had this summer seen, and been much impressed by, a large 'colony' of at least 120 BEE KILLER wasps (*Phyllanthus triangulum*) in the New Forest. These are solitary wasps but naturally congregate where the sandy soil is suitable for digging their nest tunnels. Julian tells me that they first capture and paralyze the Honey Bee selected to feed their young, then fly (with the bee slung below them) to the nesting area. Only then do they start tunneling, and when they have dug the nest chamber to their liking they complete the operation by laying their eggs and finally depositing the still alive but paralyzed bee in the chamber to be devoured as 'fresh meat' by their young. See entry for Aug 22 describing how Barry Collins has also found these insects on Pilsey Sands. To have a chance of finding the New Forest 'colony' next summer go to the Shatterford carpark near Beaulieu Road station and walk towards Denny Wood. According to Julian's description (which I have probably misunderstood and which my map does nothing to confirm) after a short while a track goes off to the left towards the bridge over the railway and a new conifer plantation is in front of you. The insects were found in this area just after the path to the left.

Mike Harris held a very successful 'Open Garden' in aid of the Wildlife Trust at his home in Drayton (Cosham) yesterday and one of the visitors pointed out to him that the small red beetles that were avidly chomping their way through his Lilies had the charming name of LILLIOCERUS LILII. I suppose these creatures do slightly less damage to the garden than a herd of RHINOCERUS.

FRI 27 AUG

On this sunny morning Mark Litjens went to Old Winchester Hill and deserves an 'outstanding contribution' award from the SMALL TORTOISESHELL preservation society for recording 16 of these rarities (this must be an all comers record count for 1999). He also proved that you do not have to go to Beacon Hill to see SILVER SPOTTED SKIPPER, finding 62 of them on the east side of the Meon. As elsewhere Small Heath were out (21 seen) and Meadow Brown and Chalkhill Blue were still on the wing. He also saw one PAINTED LADY plus seven Red Admiral and heard that Purple Emperor have been seen at this reserve this summer.

.....Yesterday Mark was in the New Forest visiting Hatchet Pond and Crockford Bridge finding 3 Painted Lady, 2 Red Admiral, a few Grayling and Small Heath. There were also 4 Gold Ringed Dragonfly, 2 Southern and 2 Migrant Hawks and numerous Common Darter. Returning home to Whiteley Pastures (Botley Woods) there were 5 fresh COMMA, 3 Brimstone and 1 Red Admiral with 3 Gold Ringed Dragonfly, 10 Migrant and 1 Southern Hawker plus many Common Darter.

Walking to Farlington Marshes from Havant this morning I found SMALL WHITE in the garden before starting (yesterday we had a couple of Large White) and everywhere along the route though in no great numbers (less than 30 seen in total) and all around the seawall at the Marshes SMALL HEATH were fluttering in ones and twos (at least 15 seen) with a similar number of COMMON BLUE. I saw just one late GATEKEEPER and one GREEN VEINED WHITE and got a good view of a COMMON HAWKER sunning itself while hanging from a Hawthorn. One the way home I disturbed several Common Darter and I see from the notice board at the reserve that RUDDY DARTER have been seen at the ponds north of the road

THU 26 AUG

Andrew Brookes enjoyed the sight of a HUMMINGBIRD HAWKMOTH in Portsmouth's Victoria Park today and had both PAINTED LADY and RED ADMIRALS in his Portchester garden.

Yesterday evening (Aug 25) he was fishing from a boat a mile south of Ventnor and saw several RED ADMIRAL flying north across the channel - I guess they should have made it from there with a southerly wind to help.

Pete Selby has a more recent spider book than mine which describes STEATODA NOBILIS (see Aug 17 entry for an account of how these 'terrifying Black Widow type spiders' drove a family from their Gosport house) as being a species in which the females grow to 14mm long, the same size as a male Tegenaria gigantea (that hairy monster of a house spider which comes rushing across your sitting room carpet on an autumn evening when on their search for a female - the female of that

species can grow to 18mm but you will have to seek her out in her web in your garage or outhouse). Tegenaria is harmless to you but Steatoda can inflict a painful bite though I am not aware of any European deaths from spider bite. Pete may be not alone in being uncertain what the measurements in spider books refer to and it may be worth quoting what Dick Jones says about this in my book - he says measurements are of the whole body length excluding any appendages (i.e. legs and prominent palps not included). Pete also tells me that his book gives the habitat for Steatoda nobilis as "in and around houses and also established outdoors near the south coast of England" - I am pretty sure that the last remark is attributable to Dick Jones who some years ago said that there were a lot of these spiders on fences in Portsmouth)

.....While on the subject of spiders, and perhaps also global warming, I see from the latest British Wildlife mag which has just arrived that our Argiope bruennichi 'Wasp Spiders', up to now thought to be limited to a stretch of the south coast from around Eastbourne to Bournemouth, has now been found as far north as Derbyshire.

WED 25 AUG

In a damp meadow on the north side of The Holt woods I came on a large female bush cricket in the grass which was about the size of a full grown Dark Bush Cricket but was almost certainly a different species. The ovipositor was sharply curved upwards and the top of the back was a rich brown colour with no apparent wings, while the sides of the body were what I described at the time as mottled grey/green (giving a light grey look with flecks of green in it). Although it could not fly the creature quickly made a short hop and hid itself so well that I could not re-find it and get more detail. In the pond nearby huge POND SNAILS were writhing in intimacy and over them a Large Red Damselfly hovered while a Southern Hawker made endless repetitions of its low flight over the pond, coming very close to me but never settling. Today's butterflies were 90% Small White with a few Large, at least one Green Veined and some Speckled Wood. I saw just one tatty Meadow Brown and one distant Comma.

MON 23 AUG

Andrew Brookes tells me that the BROWN HAIRSTREAK is currently on the wing in good numbers at Noar Hill where Mark Litjens saw his first on Aug 15th this year. The butterfly will be found where there is Blackthorn and there seems to be a good crop of Sloes this year, so why not go out and collect the materials for your private gin supply and try to spot a Brown Hairstreak at the same time? I'm not sure what prizes are on offer but if you come on these butterflies anywhere in Hampshire (particularly in the wider Portsmouth area) Andrew would love to hear about your find - send your news to andrew.brookes@port.ac.uk It seems that there is an old record of them in the Botley Woods at Ridge Copse and as Mark knows those woods well I'll put my money on either him or Pete Potts to put them back on the map there.

Cycling from Langstone Bridge to the top end of the Hayling Coastal Path today I was delighted to see a fresh SMALL TORTOISESHELL nectaring on Ragwort. Earlier I had seen a Gatekeeper in my garden when I thought they were over and I saw another of these in the rough ground between the Coastal Path and Saltmarsh Lane where there was also a male Common Blue and at least ten of the impressive female Argiope spiders on their webs. During the day I saw three Red Admirals and many Small Whites with at least one Large White, and what I think were Southern Hawkets in my garden and on Hayling.

HORNETS seem to be well established in the Stansted Forest/Southleigh Forest area, nesting both in trees and wooden rooves. This year I have only just heard of one nest which was discovered in a house roof when a painter was looking over the house to give an estimate - no doubt he added in some danger money to that estimate but I have never yet heard of anyone being attacked by these wonderful insects (when I was about ten years old I remember that my mother was concerned to find me standing very close to the entrance of a low tree hole nest, but I came to no harm) One word of warning to those who want to get even closer - Chris Packham says that you can almost put your head into the nest provided that you hold your breath as the insects hate the smell and will re-act strongly, and today I was told that the same holds true of bees.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 29 AUG

I saw my first young COMMON LIZARD of the year scuttling for cover on the Thorney seawall this morning. The small size and thin body (not much bigger than a Common Newt) and the black colour told me that it was one of this year's youngsters.

FRI 27 AUG

The Hebridean islands are far from my home patch but in view of Wednesday's news of a possible SPERM WHALE sighting in the English Channel you may like to know that the new issue of BRITISH WILDLIFE mag comments on very unusual sightings of both SPERM and HUMPBACK WHALES in the Hebrides. If you do not already subscribe to this super bi-monthly mag (£18 a year) email brit.wildlife@clara.net for details (it covers all aspects of wildlife and is of the highest quality and readability)

WED 25 AUG

Radio Solent today carried a story from a dedicated bunch of cetaco-philes (is that what you call whale enthusiasts?) who travel back and forth on cross channel ferries whale-spotting. It seems that recently there was one sighting of a 'blow' that could have been that of a SPERM WHALE, a species never before recorded in the English Channel. This may well be a spot of extra publicity for them, but if you are paddling on Hayling beach and get crushed by a Sperm Whale beaching itself don't say you weren't warned.

Walking along Dell Piece East (the short section of road connecting the Horndean Road to the A3M south of Horndean) a scuttling across the gravel on the north side bank of this road gave me a brief tail end view of what I think was a very big COMMON LIZARD. I assumed it was a female soon to give birth but my book tells me that the young are normally born in mid-summer so I guess it was just an 'oldie'. Prior to this I had a much better view of a creature that I do not think I have seen before but did not take in enough relevant evidence to identify it - this was a long, thin, grey slug in damp woodland and the best I can do at the moment is to look out for a similar creature and note first of all the proportion of the body taken up by the 'mantle' at the front, secondly the presence or absence of a 'keel' down its back, and also try to establish the colour of its mucus (by getting it to move across the paper of my notepad and see the colour of the trail). Simple things like length and body colour are not enough. While in the woods I did notice a massive amount of tiny HORSEHAIR FUNGUS (the stem is the size and colour of a black horse-hair) and other fungi (Charcoal Burner type Russula, Yellow Cracked Bolete, and out in a field some genuine Field Mushrooms)

SUN 22 AUG

Last Monday I commented on the very attractive looking large mushrooms which you may find in grassy meadows which you should steer clear of if they show a tendency to bruise bright yellow and today on Budds Mound I found more mushrooms which are very good to eat though most people would reject them as they tend to grow in dusty dirty places and to come up with dirty brownish caps that may have gravel or road chippings embedded in them. If they have thick but short stems with a hefty double ring around the stem, with very dark brown gills when mature, they are probably AGARCICUS BITORQUIS which make a good and substantial meal - a typical full grown specimen weighs 200 grams and the largest I collected today was 225 grams or a half a pound in old measures

PORTSMOUTH HARBOUR HIGH TIDES

(Date, Time and height in metres)

23/08 :-09:44-4.0 & 21:57-4.1	24/08 :-10:34-4.2 & 22:43-4.3	25/08 :-
11:15-4.4 & 23:24-4.4	26/08 :-11:54-4.5 & 12:32-4.6	
28/08 :-00:41-4.6 & 13:10-4.7	29/08 :-01:20-4.6 & 13:49-4.7	30/08 :-
02:00-4.6 & 14:29-4.7	31/08 :-02:41-4.6 & 15:09-4.7	01/09 :-03:24-4.6 & 15:52-4.6
02/09 :-04:11-4.4 & 16:40-4.4	03/09 :-05:06-4.2 & 17:37-4.2	04/09 :-
06:15-4.0 & 18:51-4.1	05/09 :-07:42-4.0 & 20:18-4.1	06/09 :-09:08-4.1 & 21:35-4.3
07/09 :-10:16-4.4 & 22:34-4.5	08/09 :-11:09-4.6 & 23:24-4.7	09/09 :-
11:56-4.8	10/09 :-00:08-4.7 & 12:38-4.8	11/09 :-00:49-4.7 & 13:17-4.8

WEEK 33 AUG 16 – 22

BIRDS:

SUN 22 AUG

A ride around Bedhampton and Budds Farm this afternoon gave me another good view of the GOLDENEYE which Mike Collins first saw in the Hermitage Stream on Aug 8 and which I saw on Aug 11th. Today's sighting was again around 4pm but this time the tide was fully out and the bird was right at the foot of the gravel quay at the corner where the Hermitage Stream widens into

the pool used by the gravel ships. I had just come down the Brockhampton stream getting a quick glimpse of the KINGFISHER flying downstream from its usual base just below the lower of the two bridges. Earlier I had solved a personal problem by seeing five well grown cygnets on the Bedhampton Mill Pool and finding their parents with one more cygnet on the Hermitage Stream nearby (up till now I had thought that only four cygnets were hatched at this mill pool and had wondered where they had gone to and where a family of six cygnets seen downstream had come from - now I realise they were all the same family and I had missed two of the cygnets when I first saw them). Out on the mud off the Budds Farm outfall there were over 100 Black Tailed Godwit with over 50 Redshank plus a few Curlew, and (flying by) two Ringed Plover and one Turnstone. The Swans here are down to 15 in number but there are plenty of Black Headed gulls and today one Lesser Blackback. Five Sand Martin skimmed the Budds Farm pools where one Common Sandpiper was present and I think three Teal beside the Mallard, Tufted Duck, Coot and Dabchick. Barry Collins dropped in on his way home this evening to tell me that there are still two OSPREY to be seen around Thorney Island and that he has seen the two together high in the air so maybe the display which I watched on Friday evening was not just a 'one off'. He also told me that he saw a total of 6 WHINCHAT on the island today and earlier in the past week he saw a flock of around 40 SWIFTS heading south.

This morning Trevor Carpenter took the boat trip from Itchenor to do some bird watching in Chichester Harbour from a different perspective and had a good view of the OSPREY over the Thorney Channel south of Prinsted. He saw many Little Egrets (and has one back on the River Wallington in Fareham) but did not spot the flock of summering Brent which I would have expected to be in the Thorney channel somewhere (they must hide out in the vast area of saltings when the boat comes in sight). Trevor called at Budds Far on his way home and saw two Common Sandpiper where I only saw one today and he found a mass of Swallows there in addition to the Sand Martins which I saw.

I have today joined Paul Winter's HOSLIST through which information on Hampshire Birds and Birding can be shared by email (anyone with news sends it to a central address from which it is re-sent to all subscribers) as I assume this will very soon become 'the source' of birding news for this area. Peter Morrison is one of the first subscriber's and (not knowing that I was also now on the distribution list) he sent me a copy of the news he sent in today. At Farlington Marshes this morning he noted a 'nice flock of YELLOW WAGTAIL' at the deeps (sounds better news than the reports of just one or two birds earlier this summer but I presume these were migrants originating from further north). He also saw three KNOT flying along the stream, not the place I would expect Knot but I believe one or two were seen 'on land' there last year so it is not a new phenomenon. A LESSER WHITETHROAT was in the bushes but the lake was too full of water for waders - this is normal for neap tides which neither rise much at high tide nor fall much at low water - hence the tidal flap to let water out at low water is not open long enough to drain what the stream had brought down.

.....At Titchfield Haven Peter reports a ROSEATE TERN on the beach east of the sailing club with the Spotted Crake still lurking in the reserve and three Curlew Sandpiper with a Green Sandpiper and some Black Tailed Godwit on the South Scrape

Ian Calderwood tells me that an adult Roseate tern with full black cap and a metal ring on it's right leg was at Titchfield Haven from 12:15 to 13:00 today and that yesterday, looking from the sailing centre, he saw two Black Tern and 2 Little Tern (one a juvenile). Last weekend Ian was on a "Scillonian pelagic" trip and saw 150 great shearwaters, 50 Cory's shearwaters, 8 sables gulls, 3 Wilson's petrels and the debatable albatross!!!!

As soon as five other birders had left Paul Winter alone in the Test Marshes hide this morning the SPOTTED CRAKE which has been so elusive gave him a private uninterrupted short view. Paul also visited Eling Great Marsh at the morning high tide and counted 5 YELLOW LEGGED GULL there, and on a return visit in the evening with the tide rising he counted 8 of them. He has been told that up to 22 of them have been there recently with a CASPIAN GULL among them (see Aug 20 re this species). If you try your luck at separating the Mediterranean *Larus cachinnans michahellis* (the normal Yellow Leg we see) from the Caspian species (*L. c. cachinnans*) make sure you get it to show you its tenth primary to be sure of the identification (to make matters worse Alistair Martin tells me that the authors of a definitive article in British Birds on these Yellow Legs number the primaries in the reverse order to everyone else so that their number ten is at the wing tip where Peter Grant works from number 1 at the tip to 10 adjacent to the secondaries)

Mike Collins saw a group of 18 Great Crested Grebe on the sea off Broadmarsh this evening with two

smaller grebes among them that he is pretty sure were BLACK NECKED. He did not have a scope but says that "Through my bins i could not see much detail but the peaked heads and all black looking heads and necks contrasting with their greyish bodies suggested black necked rather than little grebes." Around the South Moors he not only saw two Wheatear and the Sand Martins and Swallows that others have reported but also a lone SWIFT. At Budds Farm pools he saw two Green and one Common Sandpiper with a second Common on the nearby shore.

SAT 21 AUG

Today I walked around the Cobnor peninsula to see the MARSH MALLOW plants growing near Cobnor point but as I arrived in the small carpark south of Chidham village I heard a WILLOW WARBLER singing persistently in the trees above me, and on the mud where the Thorney Channel divides to Prinsted and Nutbourne bays a glorious 'SILVER PLOVER' (Grey Plover in full summer plumage) was a belated present from the gods - they have been around for a week or more. Continuing south I had a distant view of BRENT GEESE on the Cobnor side of the channel and counted at least a dozen - I assume they were the party of 14 which have been there all summer. As the tide was low when I got nearer to them they were hidden over the shoulder of the mud bank so I could not confirm the number. Also on the west shore of Cobnor I came on single Common Sandpiper and Greenshank in the ditch inside the seawall and passed two juvenile WHEATEAR on the seaward side, and coming up the Bosham Channel on the east side loud noises drew my attention to a pair of Herring Gull with a large juvenile begging them for food - presumably hatched nearby.

On 21 Aug 1989 Chris Tyas, then RSPB warden for Langstone Harbour, led a birdwatching walk from Prinsted to the Thorney Deepes with Brian Fellows among the party. This was Brian's very first introduction to birding and he has never looked back, so today's 'Evening Class' outing was a tenth anniversary walk along the same route led this time by Brian and with a much more memorable highspot as one of the OSPREYS gave them a low-flying demo over the water (talons lowered ready to plunge on any fish but no catch was attempted). GREENSHANK were numerous and Oystercatcher, Curlew and Redshank were seen in good numbers with just a few Turnstone and Dunlin. Over the land they saw one Green and three Common Sandpiper plus a Kestrel and a very yellow warbler which sounds like a Willow Warbler.

FRI 20 AUG

I remember being introduced to the possibility of seeing a Herring Gull sized Tern along our shores when Trevor Carpenter told me of a CASPIAN TERN he had seen off Titchfield Haven last year (or was it the year before?) and today a message from KEITH BETTON (who got it from his pager) tells me that there was a second summer CASPIAN GULL 'on fields near Lower Posbrook Farm' (just upstream of Titchfield Haven, between the canal and the road south from Titchfield village to the Haven) at 18:15 last night (Aug 19). In case you are as baffled as I am as to what a Caspian Gull might be here is what Keith Betton has to say about it. "Caspian Gull is either a race of Yellow-legged Gull or a separate species - I think most authorities favour the latter. In the new Beaman Handbook it is called Pontic Gull, while the new Collins Bird Guide shows it as a race (*Larus cachinnans cachinnans*) of Yellow-legged Gull. Either way, they are THE gull of the Caspian Sea and N Black Sea. I am not sure about 2nd-summer plumage, but adults look more like Herring Gulls, and have light grey wings, less black on the tips, and large white spots within the black. They are more slender and longer-winged than other yellow-legged gulls".

At Thornham marshes this evening (around 18:40) I scanned the landing lights near the Great Deepes for Osprey and was delighted to see one in flight low over the marshes, then to see that it was one of two which rose on their huge wings above the hanger buildings and circled gently against the clear sky. They flew around for several minutes and I ceased to keep my bins on them so I don't know where one of them went but next time I looked I could only see one of them which had landed on top of one of the actual lights in the centre of the array. I assume one of these birds was the recent regular here and that the second bird was just passing through though I have no other evidence to support that guess. While I was there three YELLOW WAGTAIL called as they flew overhead.

Brian Fellows had a look at the EGRET roost on Thorney last night between 8 and 9 pm and was rather disappointed to see only around 100 birds and when I was there briefly this evening (around 7pm) I saw less than 50 birds but did notice two things. It has always been true that early arriving Egrets in the evening do not fly directly into the roost but hang about in the area until some unseen signal tells them to 'go for it' and they rush to get the best perches. This evening I believe (only joking) that I have found the reason for this delay - you may be aware of the typical 'seaside

landlady' who turns her guests out onto the streets at a fixed hour in the morning, regardless of rain or ill-health, and bars the door to their return until a stipulated time in the evening. Well, this evening I saw the Egret equivalent of that landlady as I cycled down past the Little Deeps - just one white egret in the roost trees and 36 of them in a sub-roost in the Hawthorn hedge a little west of Eames Farm, with other smaller groups scattered around on the ground, so I guess it is this dominant 'Landlady' bird which sets the time for them to re-enter the roost. On the second point which I noted I tried to ring Barry Collins to check whether the sub-roost near the farm was in fact an overflow from the main roost (which must now be very crowded) but he was not at home.

Brian Fellows had a look at the Hayling Oysterbeds this afternoon and found at least 100 each of DUNLIN and RINGED PLOVER, and yesterday Peter Morrison found 45 Dunlin at Titchfield Haven, indicating that the smaller waders are starting to return in force. I was very interested to see that Brian also saw one juvenile SHELDUCK in Stoke Bay - probably just one wandering about in the harbour that could have come from anywhere but it is nice to think that it might have come from the Oysterbeds nest hole which I saw an adult entering last month.

John Taylor tells me that he has today seen a total of at least 9 SPOTTED FLYCATCHER in Havant Thicket. 6 of them were in the triangle of rough grass and dead trees bordering Blendworth Common and close to Bells Copse while three more were in another open area with Yew trees in the north east corner of the Thicket. I assume these are families moving south - they may even have come from Scotland, as may a late single SWIFT which flew over my garden in Havant at midday today.

A little while back Brian Fellows remarked on a flock of 56 HOUSE SPARROW which invaded his garden in Emsworth. I assume that these were an assembly of all the Emsworth Sparrows getting together for their annual autumn outing to the countryside where they feed on left over grain in the harvest fields - when I see these flocks in the fields I feel they deserve a better name than House Sparrows and I personally think of them as CORN SPARROWS. Collared Doves have a similar habit but we are still seeing at least one in our garden so perhaps they have their holiday a little later.

Trevor Carpenter took a stroll along the shore near the mouth of the Hamble river this afternoon and saw a couple of DARTFORD WARBLER in the Hook reserve - he says one seemed to be a juvenile and assumes they have nested there. Another good bird was a YELLOW WAGTAIL but only one. At least two Sparrowhawk were in the area and he also noted three Wheatear, one Common Sandpiper, and one Whimbrel on the shore. The Sandpiper was on the 'new scrape' with lots of other birds.

THU 19 AUG

It seems that John Gowen saw a BLACK SWAN at Broadmarsh yesterday (Aug 18) and today Brian Fellows also saw it there - what's more he sped back to Emsworth and confirmed that the one which has been in the Emsworth Mill Pond since Feb 26 (it was first seen in Langstone Harbour on Feb 25 off Kendall's Wharf) is no longer there. At the same time the large flock (peak count of over 80) of Swans that have been off Broadmarsh for their summer moult has no more or less dispersed with just 24 birds now left there (some, we think, going to Emsworth, others to the Southsea Canoe Lake). The mud off the Budds Farm outfall remains a popular feeding ground for Black Tailed Godwit - John Gowen counted 176 there recently and today Brian reckoned there were 178 including one colour ringed bird.

On Budds Farm pools SAND MARTINS continue to skim the surface and Brian found 48 Tufted Duck with at least two ducklings there today

Keith Betton's pager today told him of an OSPREY flying south down the River Test near Redbridge and that an elusive SPOTTED CRAKE was at the nearby Lower Test nature reserve. The word elusive is quantified by Paul Winter who says he saw the bird for 10 seconds in 90 minutes of watching.

Paul Winter's internet 'notice board' for Hampshire Birds and Birding, which will no doubt soon be known to all as the 'HOSLIST', carries news from Peter Morrison and Paul Winter today with Paul's news being of a visit he made to Needs Ore where wader interest was limited to the back view of a SPOTTED REDSHANK and a couple of Black Tailed Godwit but where he did see 6 BUZZARD (four were over Exbury), a HOBBY and a young SPARROWHAWK while at Titchfield Haven Peter tells us a PEREGRINE has been seen today. Referring to my remarks about the HOSLIST yesterday I find that you do have to put the web addresses in all lower case letters (I quoted them in upper case and using that gives 'website not found').

WED AUG 18

I have never belonged to any internet 'newsgroup' or the like but the concept of having a limitless 'notice board' on which anyone can post news, comment, questions and answers to previous questions and/or can read whatever everyone else has put on the board is one of the great wonders of cyber-space. With effect from Aug 15th Paul Winter, a Southampton based HOS member, has set up such a notice board for the discussion of BIRDS & BIRDING IN HAMPSHIRE, and I wish it every success - whatever stage individuals have reached in birding expertise there is always something more to learn, and of course, everyone wants news as fast and as detailed as possible (phones and pagers may be unbeatable for speed but are bound to lack the detail of a good written account - to say nothing of the cost of the phone/pager services which are reduced effectively to zero for receiving and sending email)

.....Once the system has caught on anyone with internet access can see a daily digest of messages on this notice board by visiting [HTTP://WWW.ONELIST.COM/ARCHIVES.CGI/HOSLIST](http://WWW.ONELIST.COM/ARCHIVES.CGI/HOSLIST) when they want to with no further commitment. If you want to get involved and be able to input messages as well as receive them all you have to do is to register your email address with ONELIST.COM who provide the service, and the only cost to you is that a 'small amount of advertising' will come with the messages sent to you. And if you don't like what you get you can 'Unsubscribe' as easily as you 'Subscribed' in the first place.

.....If anything I have said rouses your interest in the new Mailing List service read all about it by visiting [HTTP://WWW.HOSLIST.FREESERVE.CO.UK](http://WWW.HOSLIST.FREESERVE.CO.UK) (Note that I have put both web URLs in uppercase although I accessed them using all lowercase - I don't think web addresses are case sensitive but if you know better use lower case)

Brian Fellows walked from Prinsted to the east end of the Thorney Deeps today and had a good view of an OSPREY (presumably the long stay bird of the Thorney Channel area) perched on its favourite landing light post on the north side of the deeps tucking into a large fish. As the wind was strong the bird regularly extended its wings to keep its balance, giving Brian an impression of their size.

TUE AUG 17

Brian Fellows made his regular tour of Southsea, Eastney and Baffins Pond today and reports that so few holiday makers are using the Southsea Canoe Lake that the Swans are already returning with 13 there this morning. Near the Langstone Harbour entrance at Eastney he saw 4 Common and 2 Little Tern flying south out to sea - could it be that they are fed up with the weather and leaving us early? - normally big flocks of terns and their young build up inside our three harbour entrances through August and September and of course these birds may have only been going fishing at sea to return with the catch to families near the Kench. Baffins Pond is back to normal now with a count of 152 Mallard but the other survivors of the recent plague.

Brian Fellows tells me that yesterday (Aug 16) Barry Collins saw 14 WHEATEAR and 2 WHINCHAT on Thorney and heard a CETTI'S WARBLER at the east end of the Great Deeps (possibly different from the one heard by the Little Deeps on the same day)

Geoff Culbertson tells me that the CHIFFCHAFF that I heard singing at the Langstone South Moors yesterday was not necessarily the first to resume its song after the summer break as he has heard one in his Horndean garden. Now we will have to keep our ears open for the more elusive autumn song of Willow Warbler - let me know if you hear it.

MON 16 AUG

Brian Fellows found the first Turnstone back in Emsworth Harbour this morning along with 8 Greenshank, a Common Sandpiper, 5 Grey Plover plus a couple of Lapwing, one Whimbrel and 55 Black Tailed Godwit to mention but a few (a Sparrowhawk flew over heading north). Continuing south to the Great Deeps he met up with Barry Collins who told him that he had counted 271 LITTLE EGRET leaving the roost this morning, and together they heard a CETTI'S WARBLER calling from the Little Deeps reedbed (Barry had heard one back in April but this is its first comeback here).

This morning John Gowen walked the Langstone South Moors and found a couple of WHEATEAR back on the grass and an adventurous BLACK TAILED GODWIT in the Tamarisk pool, shunning the company of 176 others seen on the mud at Broadmarsh. Last Friday John had found a Common Sandpiper in the Tamarisk pool and today he had the unusual sight of the local Kestrel pair over the moors together. John also told me that last Saturday the Evening Class group at Stansted had seen two families of Spotted Flycatcher - one in the 'Wood Pasture' and one by Long Copse in the valley east of the forest. By chance I also walked the moors this afternoon and saw the Wheatears (two females and a juvenile) plus a family of four Common Whitethroat on the bramble bushes and

heard the welcome return of CHIFFCHAFF song from the trees. From Budds Mound I watched 20+ SAND MARTIN skimming the pools, on which the number of Tufted Duck seemed much reduced as were the Swans over by Broadmarsh slipway (only 23 in sight though others may have been upstream as the tide was high). On my way home I found the Langstone Swans still back on the Mill Pond with their seven cygnets, three of which were shunning the family group. In the Wade Court trees with the tide still high I counted 14 Little Egret and 6 Heron.

John Goodspeed's poster today carries the news that two female MANDARIN duck have been on the Brick-kiln pond at Stansted recently and I hear this news came from Michael Prior, the Forester. I am not certain of dates but I saw and reported one there on July 23 and have seen both male and female on the pond several times over recent years - perhaps they will soon move in as regulars and nest.

PLANTS:

SAT 21 AUG

Walking from Chidham Village through lanes and across fields to Nutbourne Bay, then around the shoreline to Cobnor Point and back up the Bosham channel shore today I made a good list of plants. My main objective was to see the MARSH MALLOW which grows on the south west shore of the peninsula and I found this in fine fettle - lots of it and in full flower, it seems to have spread quite a lot since I last saw it. Coming down the west shore from Nutbourne Bay I found the first plants (100 or more) in the remains of the ditch behind the seawall immediately before reaching the start of the oakwood at SU 783025 (Round Leaved Fluellen and masses of Field Pansy were in the field edge behind the Mallow). The Mallow continued in abundance for the first 200 yards or so along the shore line of the oak wood, and then become intermittent all the way to the point. If you are coming the other way around the shore you need go no further than the little hut on the shore opposite the east end of Stakes Island (SU 789021) where it grows openly on the beach within reach of anyone sitting on the elder of the two benches there. I know this plant grows on the banks of the Hamble immediately above the M27 in the country park area and I see that the Hants Flora records a site for it at Titchfield Haven (square 5202 from the Meon Shore huts to a little beyond the Cliff Cottages as you head west) but says it has vanished from Hayling and Emsworth sites.

.....SOAPWORT was flowering in a field edge ditch at SU 791042 opposite Middleton Farm on the north of Chidham Village, and on the south west side of the road junction south of this farm a good colony of POLICEMAN'S HELMET Indian Balsam is thriving (the MEDLAR fruits hanging over the road on the north west corner of this junction are also an uncommon sight). North of the farm I turned west over a field path through weed rich fields (there has been a rotting pile of sacks of soot here for years indicating an old fashioned approach to fertilizers) and enjoyed the sight of several acres of golden flowered Sonchus arvensis as well as finding my first plant of FIELD PENNY-CRESS for the year and my first flowering BLACK BINDWEED. Earlier in the walk I came across a good clump of IMPERFORATE ST JOHN'S WORT on the roadside edge of Chidmere Pond, and later (on the southern shore of Nutbourne Bay) I noticed a large colony of LAX SEA-LAVENDER with none of the commoner species in sight.

FRI 20 AUG

GALLANT SOLDIER is the English name of an attractive weed of cultivated ground, and the name is thought to be just a corruption of the Latin name GALINSOGA. Having learnt that attractive name (and found my first example of it peeping from a pavement crack in Cosham years ago) I more recently learnt that this plant has a cousin called SHAGGY SOLDIER (it is much more hairy) and it seems to be the latter with the less attractive name that is the commoner species. Today I found a lot of it flowering in a market garden patch at Prinsted where I have found it in several past years. If you are in that area and want to check it out the map ref is SU 764055 - heading east from Emsworth take the first turning to Prinsted and turn right into a lane at the first bend in the road. At the end of this short lane go through a gate onto a field footpath and look in the market garden plot immediately on your right.

THU 19 AUG

DEVILS BIT SCABIOUS was just beginning to open its first blue flowers in this afternoon's sunshine as I took a stroll around Havant Thicket. Another plant which I had not seen in flower this year was the GOLDENROD that is common in this wood but that had clearly been in flower for a week or more, as had the LING HEATHER. WHITE WATER LILIES had started to flower in the central pond and bright gold was returning to the Gorse, especially the younger bushes. A less prominent but equally widespread plant here is the PURPLE MOOR GRASS and that was to be

found in all stages from thin stems with the panicles tight closed through the delightful stage when the panicles begin to splay long straight fingers and look like the tips of lightning conductors on the tops of church steeple, to the opening of the purple flowers. Towards the end of my walk I followed the course of a small streamlet along which I had found LESSER SKULLCAP flowering last month and I was pleased to find much more of this in flower today. One other plant that was just opening its flowers (maybe in a second flowering) was a Hieracium species that is common here and I brought a specimen home in the vain hope of keying it out - naturally I failed, perhaps as I see that Stace has an 'identify by' date after which he warns us that growth will vary so much from the 'proper' state that it is not worth trying to identify species - for some species that is as early as mid-June, and by mid-August all species have exceeded their 'identify by' date.

John Goodspeed found AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES in two places on Portsdown today so keep your eyes open for the tiny white spikes on any downland turf - either on the downs or in many gardens where the lawns have been turved with grass brought from the hills by the Butser Turf Company.

WED 18 AUG

'AR' of Hampshire County Council (the sender's email address gives his initials only) tells me that AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES are just starting to come out on Noar Hill at Selborne where there is now a mass of AUTUMN GENTIAN. I myself have had a close look at one garden in South Hayling (38 Southwood Road) twice recently as they had a good show last year but nothing so far and I have not had a chance to look at Catherington Down or Portsdown, so those which I reported as flowering in Rosemary Webb's garden on Aug 9th remain the only coastal ones that I know of so far.

TUE 17 AUG

Brian Fellows tells me that when he was with Barry Collins near the Thorney Little Deeps yesterday Barry pointed out to him some plants of SLENDER HARE'S EAR growing on the seawall. In past years I have seen it here at the north end of the wall (opposite the Red Hot Poker plants which you will have noticed if you have visited the area) but this is an elusive plant and may turn up almost anywhere that it can get a good whiff of salt air. If you spot the 'fuse wire thin' stems of this plant and trace them to some minute yellow flowers some 15cm in the air you may have difficulty in recognising this plant as a very close relative of the Hogweed sized WILD PARSNIP, or even of thinking of it as an umbellifer at all but it is.

MON 16 AUG

I must have walked the path behind the Langstone South Moors seawall a good dozen times in the past few weeks painstakingly searching for SLENDER HARE'S EAR and today I found it - three whole strands of almost invisible umbellifer overhanging the path from the mass of Sea Couch Grass beside it. One of the plants even had yellow flowers just visible at the end of its extremely slender stem branches. Much easier to see but equally difficult to find (this is my first find this year and only the second time I have ever been positive of its identity) was SMALL FLOWERED CRANESBILL of which a good half dozen plants were growing by the pavement edge of Juniper Square in Havant (if you go to the bottom of South Street and turn left along the road leading into Juniper Square you may find it on the north side just before you reach the first of the modern houses). In past years I had assumed that any Cranesbill that looked smaller and paler flowered than normal Doves Foot was the Small Flowered species, but unlike the great majority of those that I look at because they fall in that category these plants passed both tests - they had no long hairs at all among the mass of tiny glandular hairs on the flower stems and had only five anthers (not ten) visible in the flowers.

INSECTS:

SUN 22 AUG

Today Barry Collins saw a single CLOUDED YELLOW over the north of Thorney Island (a 'proper yellow one' unlike the pale Helice which he saw on Aug 10) and he tells me that he has found BEE KILLER Wasps nesting in the sand at Pilsay - these are solitary digger wasps which tunnel into the sand, lay eggs in the tunnels, and then catch Honey Bees which they carry back to tunnel and leave as food for their young grubs. The wasp is not much bigger than the bee but manages to fly with it carried upside down between her legs. The females both dig the tunnels (they have spines arranged like a comb along their front legs to help with the digging) and collect the prey which they paralyse by stinging and leave the bodies (still alive but paralysed to keep the food fresh) in the tunnels.

Last Tuesday (Aug 17) I reported a Privet Hawkmoth caterpillar which was eating Holly leaves (both

green and brown) as its only diet. My Collins field guide to Caterpillars does not mention this food plant but today Barry Collins tells me that it is listed in Skinner's book of moths so we have not got a 'new to science' item here.

SAT 21 AUG

Walking around the Cobnor peninsula today I found a large number of SMALL WHITE everywhere with several colonies of GREEN VEINED WHITE though only one or two Large White. One fresh RED ADMIRAL was nice but a single SMALL COPPER at Cobnor Point was better and a single WALL BROWN seen in the grounds of the Cobnor Activities centre was even better for me as it is the first I have seen this year which it seems has been very good for them, especially the second brood. Right at the end of my round, coming across fields opposite Bosham, I noticed two large female ARGIOPE spiders on their webs and elsewhere I found the much commoner Garden Cross spiders that will dominate the autumn scene were already well grown

The Evening Class group walking from Prinsted to Thorney Deeps saw a 'small number of SMALL TORTOISESHELL' along their route, so perhaps there is some hope for a few surviving the coming winter.

Today Mark Litjens went to Needs Ore point reserve hoping for a Clouded Yellow but found only single Grayling, Wall Brown, Migrant Hawker and a few Common Darter. Going on to Crockford Bridge area Common Darter were more numerous and one Gold Ringed and two Emperor dragonflies were seen. Also there Migrant, Brown, Common and Southern Hawkers in small numbers. One Emerald Damselfly and a possible BLACK DARTER were seen with Beautiful Demoiselle and Keeled Skimmer. At Hatchet Pond Mark added Common Blue and Blue Tailed damselflies to his list and saw two more each of Emperor, Southern and Common Hawkers.

FRI 20 AUG

Mark Litjens took a lunch time walk along the Itchen navigation at Shawford today and found only 8 BANDED DEMOISELLE where there have recently been hundreds. One Common Darter and one Gold Ringed Dragonfly were present. Butterflies put up a better show with 6 Brimstone, 8 Red Admiral, a single PEACOCK and a Common Blue plus small numbers of all three white species.

Today at the Hayling Oysterbeds Brian Fellows saw a single PAINTED LADY to keep up the trickle of migrants this summer. In my garden today I saw Large and Small White and yesterday I found Speckled Wood, Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper still on the go in Havant Thicket (the last Gatekeeper in my garden was so worn out that it unfortunately went through the lawnmower as I was cutting the grass and I don't think it lasted much longer). Today one insect wanted to get a mention in this website and flew onto the desk beside my keyboard as I was typing this update - this was an OAK BUSH CRICKET, a species often attracted through open windows to lights on summer evenings.

Pete Selby has passed me the email address of the Recorder for the British Arachnology Society in case I or others wish to report unusual spiders or other relevant info. It is Peter Harvey <grays@peterharvey.freeserve.co.uk> I don't think he would welcome real spiders, alive or dead, but they are difficult to send by email. If anyone has a keen interest in spiders I may be able to put them in touch with an expert on the subject who I think still lives in the Portsmouth area at Purbrook - this is Dick Jones whose Country Life Guide to Spiders is my reference book on this subject.

TUE 17 AUG

August is traditionally the 'silly season' but it is also the time when nature tries to support newspaper circulation with some impressive aspects of insect life. I have just received two emails reporting caterpillars about which a full page spread in the tabloid press would not surprise me, especially as a good photographer could make the caterpillars look quite as awesome as any extraterrestrial creature. Number one exhibit in the chamber of horrors is the PRIVET HAWKMOTH caterpillar, ten centimetres long, bright green (to match the little green men that brought him) except for half a dozen coloured slashes on his flanks, and with a vicious hook on its tail end this creature has the name SPHINX to warn you of his power over the human race. Fear not though for he will soon bury himself deep in the earth to emerge again next June as everyone's favourite cuddly moth in a lovely furry pink jump suit decorated with black bands and having impressive wings measuring 10 cm across. This caterpillar was seen at Goodwood by Mike Collins and in Hampshire by Dave Rice who tells me that his specimen is living exclusively on a diet of HOLLY (eating both green and dead leaves) with no Privet or Lilac anywhere near. Mike also saw another caterpillar that can be even more frightening as it chomps through your favourite Fuschia bush or stares at you from a tall plant of Great Willowherb - this is the ELEPHANT HAWKMOTH caterpillar which is not quite so

big (up to 8cm) but has the ability to raise its head and inflate its supposed 'neck' like a Cobra, showing huge 'eyes' on the sides of its neck.

.....Continuing on the theme of scary creatures I heard on Radio Solent this morning that a Gosport family with young children have abandoned their house because the garden has been invaded by 'Black Widow' type spiders - some of which have come into the house, and Gosport Borough are refusing to send in their troops to exterminate the creatures. I did not catch the name given for the spiders but thought it was *Steatoda nobilis*, but I cannot find this species in Dick Jones book (probably because it is a recent immigrant - perhaps brought back from Kosovo by sailors returning to Pompey?). Dick does list *Steatoda paykulliana* whose body can be up to 13mm long and which "could be poisonous to humans" - it is described as restricted to France and Germany, but with the Channel tunnel who knows what is creeping northwards under the sea.

.....In general I support the Gosport Borough view that it is inappropriate to 'exterminate' creatures until they are proven to be harmful (not just scary looking or having eight legs) but I gather that people who earn their income as pest controllers and who would normally be busy at this time of year dealing with wasps nests are nearly bankrupt for lack of business - again on Radio Solent I heard of one such man who expected an average of 17 calls for his services per day at this time of year and who is currently averaging just one a day, and no less an authority than the Daily Mail tells us that wasps are extremely scarce this year (along with many other insects) - possibly due to a cold spring. I myself have hardly seen a wasp this summer - have you?

MON 16 AUG

John Goodspeed's poster today carries news of "TABANUS - the largest British horsefly - found in Stansted Forest" and John tells me that this news came from the Forester, Michael Prior, so I am unable to check at this moment which of the 30 species of *Tabanus* found in Britain was actually seen, but looking in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide to the Insects of Britain I see that there is one enormous species called *TABANUS SUDETICUS* which is over 2cm long (bigger than the largest Bumble bee) that is found at this time of year in pastures and open woodland. Like all Horse Flies it has largest and brightly coloured eyes together with the unpleasant habit of blood sucking - it is of course only the females which do this, males are harmless consumers of nectar. As this fly is nearly as big as a Queen Hornet I think I would have noticed it if it were common and I am glad that it is not - Chinery says it is mostly found in upland Britain.

Several of the impressive female *ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI* spiders were seen today on the Thorney seawall by Brian Fellows who calls them 'Bee Spiders' - they do not have an established English name and I have heard them called Wasp Spiders and Golden Orb Spiders. Now that they are really quite common in southern England I expect that an agreed name will soon emerge

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 22 AUG

Last Monday I commented on the very attractive looking large mushrooms which you may find in grassy meadows which you should steer clear of if they show a tendency to bruise bright yellow and today on Budds Mound I found more mushrooms which are very good to eat though most people would reject them as they tend to grow in dusty dirty places and to come up with dirty brownish caps that may have gravel or road chippings embedded in them. If they have thick but short stems with a hefty double ring around the stem, with very dark brown gills when mature, they are probably *AGARCICUS BITORQUIS* which make a good and substantial meal - a typical full grown specimen weighs 200 grams and the largest I collected today was 225 grams or a half a pound in old measures

WED 18 AUG

Along the east side of Stansted Forest the chalk is nearer the surface than in other places and loose chalky soil is the habitat which the fairly rare *ROUND MOUTHED SNAIL* enjoys. This particular small snail grows to 15mm tall by 10mm across and has a distinctive 'round mouth' to its shell, and one reason for needing loose soil is that it makes itself difficult to find during the daytime by burying itself in the soil. Several years ago I found two or three of its empty shells along the east side of the Ladies Walk at its north end and today I had a further search for the creatures and found three of them. The first was an empty shell washed down the slope by rain but the second and third were both alive. Number two was 'asleep' with the entrance to its shell firmly closed by a 'horny heel' (when it draws itself into the shell this heel - called an operculum - is the last part to be drawn

in and effectively seals the round mouth) but number three was actually awake and moving over grass (the first time I have ever seen one do so). One of several fascinating things about this species is that its 'foot' is divided into two lengthwise so it actually walks like us by moving one side, then the other, but the major distinction between it and all other British land snails bar one other species is that it retains the gills of a sea creature (all other land snails have developed a primitive sort of lung)

MON 16 AUG

Close to the footpath heading west across the Langstone South Moors, south of the 'orchid meadow', a large troop of white capped mushrooms caught my eye today. Some had caps a good 10cm across and underneath showed attractive pinkish gills looking like the best edible field mushrooms, but where the caps had been slightly bruised they showed a faint tinge of yellow. These were almost certainly *Agaricus xanthodermus* which are classed by Roger Phillips as poisonous though he says that many people suffer no symptoms (and they are certainly not fatal). I suspect that many people eat them and get away with it as they are both common and exceedingly good looking.

WEEK 32 AUG 9 – 15

BIRDS

- 15/08 GREY PLOVER now back in a big way in Langstone Harbour and other news from Farlington
- 15/08 SWIFTS seen in the Meon valley today
- 14/08 OSPREY gives a 15 minute early morning display at Titchfield Haven
- 14/08 "A great swirling cloud of Egrets" drop out of the darkling sky on Thorney and six BUZZARDS soar over Stansted
- 14/08 Great Crested Grebe have second brood on the IBM Lake
- 13/08 GREAT WHITE EGRET on North Binness this evening, moving on to Farlington Marshes – well authenticated
- 13/08 GREY PLOVER return to Emsworth Harbour as WHEATEAR continue to move south
- 13/08 A single late SWIFT over Thorney Island
- 12/08 YELLOW LEGGED GULLS back on the scene, 2 at Shoreham, possibly 1 at the Kench
- 12/08 21 SWIFTS over Thorney
- 12/08 Male RUDDY DUCK on Swanbourne Lake at Arundel with 2 male Pochard
- 12/08 A second OSPREY at Thorney Island
- 12/08 Four juvenile BLACK TERN and the SPOTTED CRAKE at Titchfield Haven
- 12/08 Four SWIFTS head south over Havant
- 11/08 236 LITTLE EGRET at the Thorney roost this morning counted by Barry Collins
- 11/08 The Hermitage Stream GOLDENEYE still present today and SAND MARTINS over Budds Farm.
- 11/08 New of a BARN OWL on Hayling from Grant King
- 11/08 At Titchfield Haven the SPOTTED CRAKE re-appears but only one ROSEATE TERN to be seen
- 11/08 The tedium of a train journey from London to Fareham this evening broken by a view of RED KITE near Basingstoke
- 10/08 2 more ROSEATE TERN at Titchfield Haven and a phone number to report colour ringed Roseate Terns
- 10/08 BLACK KITE over the A27 between Havant and Chichester (news from the internet)
- 10/08 BEARDED TITS pose with the SPOTTED CRAKE for birders at Farlington
- 10/08 Brian Fellows' news from Baffins Pond where a 'domestic' Goose has turned up
- 09/08 Titchfield Haven has a juvenile SPOTTED CRAKE, ARCTIC TERN and 2 LITTLE GULLS, and an OSPREY chooses a good route south along the River Test (Pager news from Keith Betton)
- 09/08 Info from Pete Potts on colour ringing combinations for waders and their meaning
- 09/08 As human lemmings go west for the eclipse sensible Swans go east to Emsworth
- 09/08 High speed chase along Langstone High Street - HOBBY after Swallows

PLANTS:

- 14/08 Rare plants around Hayling's Fishery Lane campsite – TASSELWEEDS, AMARANTH and HAIRY FINGER GRASS
- 14/08 WHORLED MINT and COMMON GROMWELL were two good finds by the evening class in Stansted Forest
- 14/08 CORN PARSLEY flowering under duress at the IBM North Harbour site
- 13/08 CHICORY and LUCERNE have been flourishing at Hayling Mill Rythe and are still in flower
- 12/08 Head Down at Buriton shows me flowers I have been missing (Nettle Leaved Bellflower,

- Valerian etc)
- 12/08 Narrow Leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil now abundant along the Chalk Dock shore of Langstone harbour
- 09/08 AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES were flowering on Hayling before last week-end
- 09/08 A great display of GOLDEN SAMPHIRE on the Emsworth Nore Barn shore

INSECTS:

- 15/08 BROWN HAIRSTREAK out at Noar Hill and SILVER SPOTTED SKIPPER in the Meon valley
- 14/08 ARGIOPE spider web decorated with colourful damselfly bodies at IBM North Harbour
- 12/08 More CLOUDED YELLOWS in Hampshire and Cornwall
- 12/08 GATEKEEPERS and SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY on the way out as HOLLY BLUES make a come back
- 12/08 Full grown DARK BUSH CRICKET and flying Grasshoppers
- 10/08 The first CLOUDED YELLOW (a Helice) seen by Barry Collins on Thorney
- 09/08 "The poorest year for Peacocks in my memory" - Andrew Brookes, whose assumption that newly emerged butterflies can go straight into hibernation despite the heat would answer a question in my mind last spring.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

- 14/08 POINTED SNAIL thriving at IBM North Harbour
- 10/08 The first dead MOLE of the summer
- 10/08 Request for out of print books from Chris Fairhead

Ralph Hollins (01705-615528), 15th Aug 1999

BIRDS:

SUN 15 AUG

Kevin Stouse took a long walk round Farlington Marshes this morning leaving no doubt that the GREY PLOVER are now back with us - he saw more than 90 in the Chalk Dock area where there was just one Bar Tailed Godwit. Also on the east side of the Marshes 12 Egrets could be seen together but all of them were Little - no further news of Friday nights Great White. 6 Sand Martins were over the lake with one Spotted Redshank and one Little Stint plus two young Bearded Tits in view but no sight of the Spotted Crake. Along the stream a Common Sandpiper was at the water's edge and the single Wigeon on it. Down at the point Kevin saw one Whinchat and three Yellow Wagtail and a Green Sandpiper as he came up the eastern seawall - just after the pillbox there were two young Reed Warbler in the bushes. Finally Kevin comments on many Linnet and Goldfinch and a big flock of Starlings. I heard from someone who had lunched at Meonstoke today that several SWIFTS were still there with the House Martins.

SAT 14 AUG

Brian Rackett reached Titchfield Haven early this morning and says "Literally the first bird I raised my binoculars to upon arrival just after 8am was an Osprey, which flapped and hovered over the reserve for around 15 minutes before moving up the river accompanied by an entourage of mobbing birds."

The 'evening class' group walking in Stansted Forest east of the road this morning saw six BUZZARDS - I have only heard of this at second hand and do not know if they were soaring together or seen separately but the news reminded me of a walk I took at this time last year in the Watergate area a mile or so north east of the Stansted area during which I saw eight Buzzards soaring in one thermal - I got the impression then that a passing group had intruded on the territory of the local breeding pair and their young, and the group split up within minutes of being seen together.

This evening Brian Fellows walked down the Thorney seawall from Emsworth to see the Egret roost and he tells me "They were superb. With a low tide they were slow to arrive. Most turned up at 20.30 in a great swirling cloud before descending into the tree roost. How lucky we are to have this on our doorstep - in my case almost literally!" And how lucky Brian was not to have to make an accurate count of the number arriving.

The striped head of a young GREAT CRESTED GREBE chick peeping from its mother's wing feathers as if rode on her back was the main surprise of my WeBS count visit to the IBM Lake

today. The adult birds nested here for the first time last year and it was good to see them back this summer and to see a first brood of two chicks out on the water by the May 15 count. On June 12 one of the youngsters was already near adult size but its sibling was only half that size. I did not see any of these grebes in the July count (adults were probably sitting on a second nest) and today both parents were with their new brood (I could only see one head but there may have been other chicks under the wings) while the large juvenile of the first brood was all alone at a safe distance (at a guess the smaller one had not survived). This is good news for the IBM site and maybe for the species as Brian Fellows failed to find any juveniles when he visited the Chichester lakes on June 20th.

.....Another unexpected sighting on the IBM Lake was of 7 Cormorant - in past years we have been lucky to see one at all in the summer months, and their presence probably indicates a thriving fish population. Ten, possibly fourteen, Tufted Duck were present where we had been down to two pairs over the past two months, and some of these may have come from Baffins Pond. Less welcome were the 149 Canada Geese and the only good news as far as they are concerned is that their numbers do not seem to have gone up since these birds became airborne again after their summer moult (there's plenty of time for more to arrive - we have had 450 there in past Septembers). Mallard were still supplying their input to the food chain with another two new hatched ducklings on the main reception lake, and at least two families of Little Grebe were seen, each with two well grown juveniles. On land one pair of Common Whitethroat were still present and a soft 'tushing' from a blackberry bush was probably the note of a Garden Warbler, while in the reeds several Reed Warbler scolded me when I got close to them.

FRI 13 AUG

Around 7.0pm this evening Alistair Martin saw a GREAT WHITE EGRET on the north shore of North Binness among a cluster of 12 Grey Heron and Barry Collins, who saw it from Budds Mound, tells me it flew on towards Farlington Marshes at 7.17pm. Both accounts say it was a very big bird with a yellow bill and quite unmistakable. It had originally been seen by John Badley who passed on the news around 6.30pm

.....While watching the Great White Egret Alistair Martin saw two black bellied birds flying fast over North Binness and assumes these were Grey Plover just returning. Neither these nor the one seen by Brian Fellows in Emsworth Harbour today were the first back as Barry Collins saw his first last weekend. Barry also told me that he had a HOBBY and 4 more SWIFTS over Thorney today and yesterday watched a female PEREGRINE take a Ringed Plover from the Pilsey Sands 'before his very eyes' (the falcon passed so close to Barry that he was startled by the noise of its passing). Barry also confirmed that he has had two separate OSPREY off Thorney today and again last Wednesday (Aug 11)

The Langstone Swan family had somehow managed to get back onto the Mill Pond today - as the cygnets cannot yet fly they either hopped onto the seawall from the sea at the top of the tide or made quite a long detour to get up easy slopes onto the wall and from it onto the pond. The tide was still high when I reached Langstone but surprisingly I could see no Egrets in the Wade Court trees (just one Heron there), though I did see three at the Oysterbeds where the lagoon island was crowded with roosting waders - more than 24 Redshank, 20+ Turnstone, a good dozen Ringed Plover and at least three Dunlin. Further south there were 10 Great Crested Grebe by the 'midway saltings' but at the Kench there was no visible wader roost. Sinah Gravel Pit had at least 13 Canada Geese but little else - a few Coot and Moorhen and at least one Tufted Duck. Later on my trip I saw 20 Canada Geese flying low over Tournurbury, going east and I guess these were the Sinah Lake birds.

Brian Fellows found the first six returning GREY PLOVER in Emsworth Harbour at low tide this morning (same date as last year's first autumn birds) along with 107 Black Tailed Godwit, 20+ Redshank, 2 Greenshank and 1 Whimbrel. On the Mill Pond there were only 30+ Swans (with the Black Swan) but at the Thornham Lane sewage works there was more excitement with a Sparrowhawk pursued by 100+ Starling and a late single SWIFT with 50+ Swallows. Thornham Point had a small flock of 10+ REED BUNTING and a superb male WHEATEAR to give Brian his first for this autumn. On his way home, making a detour to the west end of the Great Deeps, Brian had a second WHEATEAR and a Common Sandpiper but he saw neither of the two Ospreys reported by Barry Collins yesterday.

THU 12 AUG

Today Barry Collins had 21 SWIFTS over Thorney, and the SOS website tells us that there were one or two YELLOW LEGGED GULLS on the River Adur near Shoreham airport plus a Wood

Sandpiper at Sidlesham Ferry and yet another Osprey in Pagham Harbour. Alistair Martin thinks that there is a good chance that a gull which he saw at the Kench was a Yellow Leg but could not be certain.

Keith Betton's pager today tells him that the juvenile SPOTTED CRAKE is still at Titchfield Haven together with four juvenile BLACK TERN. In the late afternoon sunshine today four SWIFTS paused in their flight south to take in food from the air above the Hayling Billy line behind my garden.

Brian Fellows was at Arundel today and was pleasantly surprised to find Swanbourne Lake full of water with a male RUDDY DUCK and 2 male POCHARD on it. Late in the evening Brian walked to the Thorney Egret Roost where he could see at least 150 birds and hear them making a great racket - adding in those out of sight there were probably the full 236 which Barry Collins counted leaving the roost at dawn yesterday. At some point Brian met up with Barry who told him that a second OSPREY was in the area, patrolling the Emsworth Channel while the first stuck to its beat on the west side of the island and its perch on the landing lights by the east end of the Great Deeps.

WED 11 AUG

Barry Collins was at the Thorney Island Egret roost before first light this morning and his counter was soon clicking away as the Egrets flew off to their day's work. When the roost was empty Barry looked at the number on his counter and read 236 - one more than last year's peak count of 235 in late September. He fully expects a much higher number as this year's peak, and told me that in addition to 'his birds' there is currently a roost of 36 birds in Pagham Harbour and possibly a few more still in Elson Wood in Portsmouth Harbour - there is also a possibility of another roost in Oldpark Wood east of Bosham where the birds have roosted at times in the past. Barry also told me that the 3 EIDER are regulars this summer, as are 14 summering BRENT and that he has a good population of GREY PARTRIDGE on Thorney.

At around 4pm, with the tide still up but ebbing rapidly, I saw the GOLDENEYE (which Mike Collins saw on Sunday, Aug 8) swimming down the Hermitage stream past the Bedhampton Gravel Quay. Its plumage was extremely tatty (I'm pretty sure it could not have flown any distance in the past week - if it could fly at all) which makes me pretty sure it was not a juvenile but I could not decide it is was male or female in eclipse - I suspect it was a female as the distinctive head feathers were all brownish and the large amount of white visible in the closed wing was probably the result of loss of scapulars that would otherwise cover the secondary and tertial feathers. As Mike also saw it hereabouts on an ebbing tide that may be a good time to look for it.

.....Before reaching the mouth of the Hermitage Stream I had seen a GREEN SANDPIPER back in one of its regular winter haunts in the concrete based section of the stream between the Water Works entrance bridge and West Street (visible looking over the wall at the waterworks gate), and later I saw at least two SAND MARTIN among many Swallows and a few House Martins over the Budds Farm pools (where yet another family of tiny Tufted Duck were out with their mother). Up in Chalk Dock near the A27 the two regular Great Crested Grebe and 60 Curlew were among the birds disturbed by a hovercraft following the north shoreline of Long Island and North Binness (John Badley tells me this is an ENVIRONMENT AGENCY SURVEY of the plant and marine life on the mud to act as a baseline for future checks on the effect of reducing the sewage input into the harbour when the new regime comes into effect at Budds Farm). Continuing my journey home via the South Moors shore I found a clean-up operation in progress on the ex-IBM playing fields from which the travellers have now moved on (where to? I ask myself) and glimpsed a Lesser Whitethroat in bushes by the mouth of the Langbrook stream.

Keith Betton's pager reported a SPOTTED CRAKE seen from the Meonshore Hide at Titchfield Haven (possibly the juvenile last seen there on Saturday Aug 7) and only records a single Roseate Tern

While out this afternoon I met Grant King who told me that a BARN OWL had been seen on fields close to West Town Station at the southern end of the Hayling Coastal Path on Wednesday Aug 4. As I have not heard of one there before it may have been a young bird dispersing from its nest, and if others are doing the same at the end of the breeding season its worth keeping an eye out for them in any areas of rough grassland. Grant had not seen this bird himself but had more recently seen 4 WHEATEAR and a WHINCHAT on South Hayling, and had noticed a large number of Willow Warbler on the move.

My last message received this evening was from Trevor Carpenter who now works in London and commutes to Fareham. He says "A nice one this evening, when I looked up from my book near Winchfield between Farnborough and Basingstoke and saw a RED KITE feeding in a field."

TUE 10 AUG

Keith Betton's pager today reported 5 ROSEATE TERNS at Titchfield Haven on Monday (Aug 9), two more adults having joined the adult and two juveniles already there. With more than usual of this species being seen along the south coast Keith Betton tells me that he has heard of a phone number for reporting any which are colour ringed - he doesn't know who the number belongs to but it is 01426-983963. Also at Titchfield were 3 Black Tern and at Farlington the Spotted Crake was still present.

.....Today the pager reported 5 Black Tern at Titchfield Haven but only 1 adult and 1 juvenile Roseate. It also carried the same report of a Black Kite over the A27 that David Parker saw on the internet (below)

David Parker sent me a brief announcement of a BLACK KITE seen at 9:10am this morning over the A27 between Havant and Chichester. He had seen this on the internet but has no further details.

This evening David Parker visited Farlington Marshes and saw the SPOTTED CRAKE showing well in the reeds close to the viewing platform and at one point he had 2 BEARDED TITS in his scope along with the Crake. He also saw 1 Whinchat, 1 Little Stint, 3 Dunlin (still black bellied) and 5 Common Sandpiper plus numerous Black Tailed Godwit and a few Teal.

At Southsea Canoe Lake this morning just three Swans were present when Brian Fellows arrived and he could not find a Med Gull among the Black Headed. At Baffins Pond Mallard had increased to 128 birds and a 'DOMESTIC' GOOSE has turned up (presumably a Greylag, but possibly a white Embden type - he does not say). The Canada Geese were down to 12 and there were 14 Barnacle Geese with one small gosling. It seems that things are back to normal now after the botulism outbreak.

Two SWIFTS flew over the Ridgeway in Berkshire while I was walking there with friends today, and both Robins and Woodpigeons were singing strongly in my garden this evening.

MON 9 AUG

On Saturday (Aug 7) Keith Betton's pager announced the arrival of a juvenile SPOTTED CRAKE at Titchfield Haven (the 'resident' bird was still at Farlington) and 1 ARCTIC as well as 1 ROSEATE TERN there. South of Romsey an OSPREY was seen flying down the River Test, no doubt with fishermen and water bailiffs as well as birders watching its progress. On Sunday the Crake was still at the Haven where 2 first winter LITTLE GULLS were newcomers and the party of 3 ROSEATE TERN (1 adult with 2 juveniles) that were seen there last Thursday (Aug 5) turned up again. The pager also confirmed what Trevor Carpenter had heard about 40+ BLACK TERN off Hill Head.

In describing the combination of colour rings which he noted on a Black Tailed Godwit (see Thursday Aug 5) Brian Fellows described the single ring on the left leg as a 'year marker' and Pete Potts has now sent him the following comment on the colour ringing scheme. Pete says that back in 1992 it was intended to use a single ring on the left leg as an indication of the year in which the bird was ringed but this fell by the wayside in view of the number of birds ringed and the need for as many combinations of colours as possible without crippling the bird with the weight of the rings. He says "by changing the colour in this position (on the left leg) it gives us another set of combinations therefore the top left (tibia) ring NO LONGER equals a year code. We use 7 colours so each colour gives us 49 individuals - however we stopped using dark green last November to try and stop confusion with dark blue at least for the moment. We have used the following colours on left tibia ie above joint: white, red, blue, yellow & orange (though both the latter have not yet completed in full). Orange is only used so far for birds marked in Southampton Water".

It seems that the SWANS dispersing from the moult flock at Broadmarsh are going east to Emsworth where this morning Brian Fellows counted a total of 82 for the Mill Pond and Emsworth Harbour (plus the still resident Black Swan). Mallard numbers are also increasing on the Mill Pond with 53 now present plus 5 more newly hatched ducklings. Out on the mud at low water in the afternoon Brian found 118 Black Tailed Godwit (highest number so far this autumn) with two colour ringed birds among them. Also on the mud were 71 Redshank, 6 Curlew, 3 Greenshank and 1 Whimbrel - surprisingly there were only 2 Oystercatcher with them. Inland around Brook Meadow 3 Wrens and 2 Robins were singing and a young Song Thrush was calling, and the patch recently burnt is already turning green once more.

John Goodspeed's poster which came today has an intriguing entry saying that on Sunday (Aug 8) a HOBBY dashed down Langstone High Street, came across some Swallows and unsuccessfully chased one back up the road. About this time last year I remember coming on a large party of House Martins which had made an overnight stop on their (unexpectedly early) way south using

the rooves of houses at the sea end of the High Street as their roost. I wonder if this Hobby had also found them last year and was purposefully trying his luck there again (or was it just chance that it flew down the street?). I presume that raptors, like any bird, get to know good places to find food, but they must also learn to make their appearances at any one place as unpredictable as possible if they are to catch their prey unawares. Does anyone have any info on the hunting strategies of falcons and sparrowhawks?

PLANTS:

SAT 14 AUG

Pete Selby and Eric Clement went planting hunting in the Fishery Lane area of south east Hayling today and found two native plants that are very rare in Hampshire plus eight or nine very unusual aliens, mostly grasses that probably originated in bird seed. The two native plants were TASSELWEEDS, both the Beaked and Spiral species (the latter marked very rare in the Hants Flora), both being found in the Fishery Lane campsite lake which you pass on the coastal footpath from St Herman's Road around the coast by the Mengham Sailing Club to the north end of Selsmore Avenue. I have been shown what I was told was Tasselweed in the bottom of the concrete based water channel running through the Sandy Point reserve and was not impressed but there it had no water to support it and I suppose that in sufficient water it could look like a fine leaved seaweed (and if you were very lucky you might even see its clusters of small flowers).

.....Plants found on dry land include the attractively named Common Amaranth (its general name of Pigweed is probably more suited to its looks - I remember being shown some years ago near the Waterloo Fire Station and thinking it was a large, leafy Goosefoot), and the genuinely pretty Flax of the large flowered sort grown as a commercial crop (though not in this part of Hayling). Next time I am nearby I will be looking for a collection of grasses that almost certainly come from birdseed and which include not only Millet and one or two species of Setaria (Bristle grasses) and Echinochloa (Cockspur grass) but also HAIRY FINGER GRASS (*Digitaria sanguinalis*). I have never seen *Digitaria* but its distinctive shape has often caught my eye in Francis Rose's book, and it should be easy to find as Pete tells me these grasses all grow together by a roadside oak tree outside flats 58-68 in an un-named road opening south off Fishery Lane opposite Kingfisher Close (between Marshall Road and Selsmore Ave). Pete also tells me to look out for a plant growing in the gutter of Fishery Lane on its north side just east of Kingfisher Close - they could not identify the species but thought it was another Amaranth.

The 'evening class' group took their walk today in Stansted Forest east of the road, walking up the Ladies Walk to Rosamund's Hill and making two notable finds, one of COMMON GROMWELL and the other of the cross between Corn and Water Mint called WHORLED MINT which can stand up to 90cm high and must be quite impressive (though not necessarily always that tall). Common Gromwell is described in the Flora of Hants as a plant restricted to the chalk but widespread (though only locally common) and often found following scrub clearance, which makes this part of the forest a likely place to look for it (though at this time of year only the rock hard seeds will give it away). Gwynne Johnson told me of these finds and also mentioned something that I had noted on Head Down this week - this is that PLOUGHMANS SPIKENARD, which in most years has an insignificant flower head with only one or two floret open at any one time, is this year making a large bold yellow show with many flowers out together

At the IBM North Harbour site a cluster of plants of CORN PARSLEY chose, many years ago, to grow on the edge of the carparks in ground dug up to bury an electric cable to the footpath 'pillar lights', but this is also one of the close mown areas so each year the plants get cut down to a height of about 1 cm yet they still survive. Today I found one flowering away quite happily and I expect to go on seeing them here for a good few more years. By the main reception lake I found good examples of both RED GOOSEFOOT (*Chenopodium rubrum*) and MANY SEEDED GOOSEFOOT (*C. polyspermum*), the first distinguished by its jagged edged leaves and the latter by its square stem among other factors. More colourful was the mass of NARROW LEAVED BIRD'S FOOT TREFOIL now flowering here as it was by the Langstone Harbour shore on Thursday.

FRI 13 AUG

The west shore of Mill Rythe on the east Hayling coast had its usual crop of CHICORY and LUCERNE flowers when I visited it today. Both species have passed their peak but both still had plenty of flowers to show - it looked as if there had been more Chicory than ever this year. The only new flower seen on today's trip to Hayling was 'Many Seeded Goosefoot' (*Chenopodium*

polyspremum) which I found on the 'mountain' at the Oysterbeds

THU 12 AUG

Today I drove up the minor road following the railway north from Finchdean and parked at Newbarn corner for a walk around Head Down. For various reasons I have not been in these downland woods for some time and it was a pleasure to find NETTLE LEAVED BELLFLOWER, WALL LETTUCE and COMMON VALERIAN flowering in profusion, but it was the mass of Hemp Agrimony lining every ride and attracting many butterflies which was the most prominent feature. The section of the Solent Way between Broadmarsh and Farlington Marshes is a good place for flower hunting, the more so since the footpath was rebuilt a few years ago when the existing ground was given a digging over and new plants came with the material imported to build up the track. The A27 embankment above it is also responsible for the introduction of many plants arriving unintentionally in the chalk and soil used for building it and intentionally in the planting of shrubs to 'landscape' it (plus the recent hard trimming of that growth). Cycling along it yesterday I found Broad Leaved Everlasting Pea still flowering on the A27 bank and a lot of WATER MINT on the footpath (I don't associate this plant with sea water) plus GOLDEN SAMPHIRE on the seawall but the most abundant flowering plant was NARROW LEAVED BIRD' FOOT TREFOIL (*Lotus glaber*). This could easily be overlooked as a small version of the very variable Bird's Foot Trefoil and is distinguished from it by having narrow, pointed leaves and pure yellow flowers (no red tinges) and checking out the differences I suddenly realised that in the past I had been reluctant to record this species (which is not uncommon along the shores and covers a great deal of the IBM North Harbour site) as I had been checking its distribution in the Hants Flora under the name of SLENDER BIRD'S FOOT TREFOIL (*Lotus angustissimus*) and finding that that plant is a great rarity. I hope I have now cleared my mental confusion about these two species with similar English names.

TUE 10 AUG

AUTUMN HAWKBIT can normally be found in flower from mid-summer but this year I have failed to notice it until today when it was flowering on the Berkshire downs along with SPINY RESTHARROW, a plant which I associate with the seaside here in the Havant area but which I see is widely distributed inland on heavier soils

MON 9 AUG

Rosemary Webb has an extremely keen eye for orchid spotting but this year she was taken by surprise when she found two spikes of AUTUMN LADIES TRESSES flowering on her own lawn, one of the plants having grown to full height and opened its complete spiral of flowers before she noticed it. She found the plants last Saturday (Aug 7) and they must have started to flower earlier in the week so if you have a favourite site for these tiny white orchid spikes maybe it is already time to go and check if the flowers are out there equally early.

At this time of year the wild flowers of spring woodland and summer meadows are past memories. Soon the harvest fields will once more be alive with 'arable weeds' but for the moment the wild flower focus is on the seashore and rough ground where the Goosefoots and their kind are flourishing with the sole purpose (it seems to me) of frustrating my wish to identify them. There is however one exception to this dastardly plot and that is the glorious GOLDEN SAMPHIRE of which we here on the south coast have the national treasure house, and one of the best places to see this golden treasure in full profusion and splendour is the Nore Barn shore at the west end of Emsworth. Here the seawall was rebuilt a good many years ago with one of the first attempts at being 'environmentally friendly' by using 'H' shaped interlocking concrete blocks in the cracks of which soil could accumulate and plants grow. Here that intention has been fulfilled.

INSECTS:

SUN 15 AUG

Mark Litjens was at Noar Hill early this morning and found 2 or 3 male BROWN HAIRSTREAK already out in a sunny spot by 8.30am. He probably did not see the first of the year (earliest dates for the past three years are given as Aug 7, 10, and 13) and I will certainly not be the first to see them in Sussex if I make my way to Harting Down where I saw them last year from the South Downs Way. Mark went on to Old Winchester Hill where the hillsides were alive with a mass of Chalkhill Blues and several Painted Ladies were to be seen - he says that "SILVER SPOTTED SKIPPERS are out there now" and I am not certain if this means he saw them or was told of their presence - I know they used to frequent the hill bottom below the carpark area but believe they can nowadays only be seen reliably on Beacon Hill across the valley (I'm sure Mark or someone will

correct this unsubstantiated view of their occurrence).

SAT 14 AUG

Near the IBM Lake today I came on a full grown female ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI spider on its web in the rough grass where its normal prey is grasshoppers but in this case the spider's diet must have included quite a few damselflies as the colourful blue and green remains of half a dozen were in the web. The spider's black, white and gold ringed body (excluding the legs) was probably a good centimetre long, so the change in diet had not done her any harm. Interestingly Pete Selby also found an example of this impressive spider today when plant hunting on Hayling and if you have not yet made the acquaintance of this beauty now is the time to search patches of dry tall grass, looking where there is a gap in the grass across which grasshoppers would be forced to jump – it is in these gaps that the spider builds its web, and although once seen the female spider is a dramatic sight the thing to look for is the whitish vertical central re-inforced section of the web (it looks just like a wisp of white smoke rising where someone has carelessly dropped a cigarette). In a few weeks time the spider will build an equally pretty container for her eggs, joining blades of grass together she will suspend from them what looks like a miniature pinkish 'Chinese Lantern'.

THU 12 AUG

The first Hampshire CLOUDED YELLOW for which I have a reliable report was seen yesterday by a friend of Mark Litjens on the coast south of Beaulieu - the place quoted is Park Gate but not the place of that name in the Fareham area close to Mark's home - this Park Gate is just west of the Needs Ore nature reserve (presumably associated with the Park Farm and Park Shore which I can see on my map close to what seems to be a hamlet called just Park). In addition to this sighting, and Barry Collins Helice seen on Thorney Island, Mark has heard from another friend currently in North Cornwall who does not know butterfly names but has noticed a number of 'ochre coloured' butterflies there.

For the past month GATEKEEPERS have been abundant everywhere (I have had at least half a dozen in my garden almost every day until the rain came at the beginning of August) so I was surprised to see only three of them in a long walk around warm and sunny Head Down woodland above Buriton today with plants of Hemp Agrimony lining every ride. The most abundant butterflies here were Green Veined White, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood with more than six Peacock coming next. I saw two male Silver Washed Fritillaries (one had lost the whole of one hind wing and other small wing sections), a couple of Large White, and single fresh male and female Brimstones but the best butterfly was a glorious fresh HOLLY BLUE. Interestingly I only saw one Silver Y moth. Earlier in the summer most of the crickets and grasshoppers to be seen were 'babies' waiting to split their skins one or two more times before growing to full size but by now most of them will be fully adult and today I saw a full size DARK BUSH CRICKET and also noticed several Grasshoppers using wings to carry them downwind further than they could jump - these wings being a privilege of maturity which the babies do not possess.

TUE 10 AUG

Barry Collins is the first to tell me of a CLOUDED YELLOW sighting this year. He had just one on Thorney Island recently and says it was a Helice (whitish) female. He also told me of a 'passing flock' of SILVER Y moths in his garden one day - by night time they had moved on and none appeared in his moth trap.

MON 9 AUG

Andrew Brookes tells me that he has recently had "several painted ladies, commas and red admirals in the garden, but the few PEACOCKS seem to have hibernated already. I never saw more than two at one time in my garden anyway, which makes it the poorest year for them in memory". Before receiving this message I was wondering if some of the Brimstones which emerged in July (and of which I have since seen nor heard anything) had gone into hibernation but my uneducated thought was that no insect could go into hibernation in this heat, surely they must remain active until the autumn air cools down during the day? Andrew seems to infer that it is common to find newly emerged butterflies hiding themselves away despite the summer heat and long days, and I wonder how common this is? If it is general it would explain another puzzle in my mind this spring – how could so many Brimstones emerge together when we had seen so few last autumn.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 14 AUG

The POINTED SNAIL (*Cochlicella acuta*) is an uncommon coastal species which I have only come across on the IBM North Harbour site and on the Thorney seawall at the west end of the Great

Deepes. I have seen a few at the Thorney site this year but was a little concerned for those at IBM where there is a plan to build a new road to join the Johnson & Johnson roundabout at the west end of the site - if that is built it is bound to cut across the rough ground that has been the snails favoured spot (though they have always been widespread there), but today I found a great mass of these snails in an area where they should be safe (on the north side of the fire road around the lake for about twenty yards west from the path leading to the underpass by the roundabout). If you want to see them go west from the buildings, over the bridge and past the children's pond, and look at the ground very close to the fire road immediately after passing the path going north. You may have difficulty in seeing them as they have tiny whitish grey 'church spire' shaped shells only 5 to 10 mm in height and the mass of them will be lying still on the ground like tiny chips of gravel though you may find others hanging from the stems of plants

TUE 10 AUG

Hot summer weather dries the ground and drives earthworms deep to hideaway crevices where they 'aestivate' in large groups, lying in wait for autumn rain to enable them to resume their ground breaking work. MOLES do not have the ability either to dig deep enough to find their food, nor any habit of 'suspended animation' to enable them to survive without regular food. The result is that dessicated Mole corpses are a common sight at this time of year and I saw my first today (no doubt many more die underground or in places where they are not seen). The only ones able to carry on through such weather are those living in river meadows or the equivalent where the ground remains damp.

In addition to the book on mammals which I mentioned last Friday (Aug 6) Chris Fairhead would also much like to have copies of two other out of print books. They are both from the Collins Nature Guide series and the titles are "WILD ANIMALS OF BRITAIN AND EUROPE" by Helga Hofmann and "HERBS AND HEALING PLANTS" by Dieter Podlech. Should you know of copies that Chris could acquire please email him at chris_fairhead@email.msn.com

WEEK 31 AUG 2 – AUG 8

BIRDS:

SUN 8 AUG

Trevor Carpenter walked all round Thorney Island today and found 4 WHEATEAR already on their way south with 3 EIDER going the other way up the Thorney Channel (he says 'towards Bosham' but I guess he saw them in the Thorney Channel on the east side of Thorney Island). These 3 Eider have been lurking all summer but the last report I had of them was from Barry Collins on June 21. I have not been round Thorney myself for some time and do not know exactly what Trevor found going on at the southern tip of the island which he says 'looked like gravel extraction' as if the MoD were creating more gravel pit habitat for birds - I think this is wishful thinking and what he saw was probably part of the work of breaking up all the old runways so that the MoD can sell off the concrete for road-making in order to pay off the bill for the hire of Earls Court for the Royal Tournament (which we hear they can no longer afford to put on). This has been going on since the spring with new mountains of rubble appearing beside the main road just inside the military area by the guard post.

This evening as Mike Collins was walking up the Hermitage Stream from Broadmarsh he had a close look at a duck which he believes was a GOLDENEYE. He says he had gone north under the Harts Farm way road bridge when "I saw a Goldeneye swimming downstream towards me. It swam right past me, looking like a female, but it showed some black feathers on its back. Could have been a young bird or maybe a drake coming out of eclipse plumage. I looked in a couple of old Hampshire bird reports and found no records of Goldeneye in Langstone harbour for August in them." Birds of Hampshire records a total of 30 summer birds seen in 17 years between 1963 and 1992 with 11 of the sightings being in August. It also says that in 1970 one bird spent the whole summer in Langstone Harbour. As Mike is an experienced birder and spends part of his time sea-fishing he is unlikely to have been confused by anything other than a look-alike escapee from a wildfowl collection so if you have other evidence of a Goldeneye in Langstone harbour this summer please let us know.

Brian Fellows saw SWIFTS entering a nest hole in an Emsworth house on both Saturday and Sunday this weekend (last year he saw three Swifts entering this same roof as late as Aug 15)

Despite the early rain I took a friend to visit Pagham Harbour this morning and the rain ceased as we pulled into the Sidlesham Ferry carpark. Wheatear were on the notice board as having been seen,

so be on the lookout for them passing through from now on, but we saw none. On and around the Ferry Pool we saw the colourful RUDDY SHELDUCK and a dozen of our regular Shelduck (one adult with 11 juvenile), four SHOVELER, a single drab TEAL and a male WIGEON (still in its grey plumage but with sadly depleted colour on its head. The water's edge was crowded with Black Tailed Godwit (30+) and among them we saw one GREENSHANK and three RUFF (one had a very white head and neck, a second had a more normal brown plumage - with the bright edging to its wing feathers - but show a whitish area around the back of its neck where its 'ruff' had moulted away, and the third was presumably a female - a smaller bird with brown head and neck showing no sign of a ruff). Up to 5 LITTLE RINGED PLOVER have been reported here but we only saw two and I could see the yellow eye-ring on one to help confirm that these were not juvenile Ringed Plover - other features were a slimmer bodied, longer legged look than a dumpy Ringed Plover, and both birds were more active and pecked for food more rapidly than the commoner bird (one of them was, like a Little Egret, doing the 'hokey-cokey' by putting its left foot out and shaking it all about to stir up small creatures from the muddy shallow water). I think we saw three Dunlin and one Common Sandpiper and of course a few Mallard and lots of Black Headed Gulls.

FRI 6 AUG

The SUSSEX recent sightings webpage tells me that a lone BEE-EATER sat on wires at Seaford today before flying east and that 2 LITTLE STINT were at Sidlesham Ferry. Here in Hampshire 2 ROSEATE TERN were seen on the beach at Titchfield Haven

.....Last Tuesday (Aug 3) 1 Roseate Tern was in Pagham Harbour off Church Norton were a PIED FLYCATCHER was in the churchyard and 5 LITTLE REINGED PLOVER were at Sidlesham Ferry. Out in Pagaham Harbour were 60 KNOT, 20 CURLEW SANDPIPER, 26 EGRETS and 6 LITTLE STINT. At Chichester Ivy Lake on the same day a female GARGANEY was reported.

.....The RUDDY SHELDUCK was last reported from Sidlesham Ferry on Mon (Aug 2) though David Parker saw it here on Aug 5 and it was still there on Aug 8

Here in Havant I walked around Bedhampton and Broadmarsh this morning, seeing a KINGFISHER fly past me upstream as I was standing near the old nest site opposite the overflow sluice from the water works. Just below the A27 bridge the pair of Swans with six cygnets were in the Hermitage Stream and odd Broadmarsh slipway I saw my first autumn BAR TAILED GODWIT among a mass of Black Tailed and a flock of 100+ Redshank so close packed on the mud that my first thought was of a flock of Knot. The Swan flock in the mouth of the Hermitage Stream was down to 39 birds plus one cygnet (excluding one Swan which I saw take off and fly east to demonstrate that they are now airworthy). Also worth a mention is that, on an overcast morning, many ROBINS were giving their sad autumn song – a few more Wrens are also singing. Before I set out a short scream caused me to look up and see a small party of SWIFTS (at least 3) disappearing behind the roof of my house as they sped east.

Brian Fellows visited both sides of north Thorney Island this morning, finding a mass arrival of 300+ REDSHANK and 50+ Curlew (the latter off Prinsted). Also on the east side of Thorney were 6 juvenile SHELDUCK and a lone Greenshank. Another Greenshank and a Whimbrel were on the Emsworth side with a colour ringed bird among the 50 Black Tailed Godwit (this one had a dark blue 'year ring' on its left leg and yellow over lime on its right)

THU 5 AUG

David Parker made a quick lunchtime trip to Sidlesham Ferry today, finding the RUDDY SHELDUCK still there with a RUFF, 2 LITTLE RINGED PLOVER, 2 LITTLE STINT and a Common Sandpiper

Brian Fellows went to Titchfield Haven after lunch and found it fairly quiet with a few Dunlin, Common and Green Sandpiper and Common Terns. He did not see the terns reported on Keith Betton's pager (below) but did spot a colour ringed Black Tailed Godwit with red on its left leg and pinky-white over red on the right. Brian does not give a count of the Canada Geese on the reserve but I hope that before long the reserve will be using the money from its entrance fees wisely in providing food for as many as possible of these birds to take them away from other sites.

Four GREEN SANDPIPER, plus a Heron, some Moorhen and a few Mallard were exploring the almost dry bottom of Aldsworth Pond this afternoon. I went there half expecting to find the pond empty, and now that it is I will not be surprised if it remains empty until February or even March next year – this pond is for me a good monitor of the water table and how quickly the level falls when there is no clay bottom to hold it.

Today's 'pager' news from Titchfield Haven is of 1 BLACK TERN and 3 ROSEATE TERN (1 adult

and 2 juvenile)

WED 4 AUG

Keith Betton today passes on news he has received of GARGANEY and WOOD SANDPIPER at Farlington Marshes, where the SPOTTED CRAKE that was first seen on July 15th is still showing well – it will have been there for three weeks tomorrow. He has also heard of yet another ROSEATE TERN sighting in Langstone Harbour last Monday (Aug 2) and I hear that John Badley was on Radio Solent yesterday still bemoaning the harassment of birds on his RSPB Reserve by the SAKER Falcon that must have been around the area for about a year now.

Brian Fellows was at Budds Farm this morning and spotted two colour-ringed birds among 44 BLACK TAILED GODWIT seen from Budds Mound at low tide – one of the birds was a local regular that Brian had seen several times last winter (this has yellow over green on its right leg) but one was a new comer having red over red on its left leg and red over yellow on the right.

Yesterday I thought the Swan population here was down to about 30 but Brian counted 44 of the 80+ that have been here recently. There were 31 Turnstone on the shingle today but Brian met someone who had seen over 100 there yesterday. Also on the shore Brian today saw 1 Ringed Plover and 1 Whimbrel plus 4 Curlew and many Redshank and Oystercatcher, and on Budds Farm Pools he counted 38 adult Tufted Duck with 22 young with 50+ Mallard, 2 Shelduck, 2 Little Grebe with a youngster and 1 Teal. He only saw one Common Sandpiper here. Back in Emsworth a lone SWIFT flew over at 5pm just before the rain set in.

Barry Collins rang me this morning to pass on news of two male KENTISH PLOVER with lots of CURLEW SANDPIPER in Pagham Harbour yesterday and to tell me that he had made another evening roost count of 154 EGRETS at Thorney last Saturday evening (July 31)

TUE 3 AUG

Brian Fellows checked out the Southsea Canoe Lake and Baffins Pond today. There were only three Swans at the Canoe Lake and no Med Gull, while at Baffins the situation is stable after the epidemic of Botulism. There was only one Tufted Duck to be seen (a female with 3 young ducklings) and Canada Geese were down to 22 but there were still 14 Barnacle Geese and the 2 Snow Geese. Just 98 Mallard was way below the equivalent count of 142 last year but there have been no more corpses. Perhaps the best news is that there has been no sign of any Terrapins at the pond since the disease struck

House Sparrows, like Collared Doves, tend to take a holiday in the country at this time of year when they find plenty of grain to be gleaned from the harvest fields, and the sudden appearance of a flock of 58 HOUSE SPARROWS in Brian Fellows' garden today may have been a gathering of all the Emsworth Sparrows getting ready to depart on their coach trip to the country. Interestingly Brian saw almost the same number on almost the same day last year (56 on Aug 5) – that was a one-off visit to his garden as I suspect this will be. A flock of a dozen Greenfinch arrived in the garden shortly after the Sparrows – Brian says he has not seen any Greenfinch recently whereas they, with Blue Tits, are perhaps the most numerous birds in my garden, probably because my neighbour keeps a feeding station supplied with nuts and seeds throughout the summer.

This afternoon Brian Fellows visited Farlington Marshes where he noted around 300 Lapwing on the lake and stream (plus a pair of Swan with no cygnets). The notice boards told him nothing of Lapwing breeding success here this year but had plenty of other information. Starting with what's in the harbour it reported 242 BAR TAILED GODWIT (the first back that I have heard of), 1 COMMON SCOTER, 2 BLACK NECKED GREBE, 1 BLACK and 4 ROSEATE TERN plus several Med Gulls and 40 Whimbrel, also 1 Osprey and 1 juv Marsh Harrier (I'm not sure what period these reports cover – it's a pity the entries are in general not dated). On the Deeps there have been 17 SHOVELER, 1 Wigeon (resident here?), 1 GADWALL, 1 RUFF, 1 LITTLE RINGED PLOVER and 5 CURLEW SANDPIPER. In the lake/stream area 75+ BEARDED TITS have been reported with 500+ Black Tailed Godwit and 52 Greenshank. 4 WOOD and 2 CURLEW SANDPIPER have been seen here with 8 Common and at least 2 Green. As well as the Spotted Crake there have been 3 Spotted Redshank and 4 Little Stint. Other general sightings include the notorious SAKER with 2+ Peregrine and 1 Hobby. Only 6 YELLOW WAGTAIL are listed (terribly low) with up to 16 Little Egret, 3 Stonechat and the first 2 autumn WHINCHAT.

Late this afternoon with the sky clearing, the sun shining and wonderful visibility after the rain, I walked down the Langbrook stream from Havant to the South Moors, disturbing a KINGFISHER from a perch on a Hawthorn overhanging the water just above the old IBM approach road bridge. In the same Hawthorns an autumn WILLOW WARBLER was showing off its bright yellow and green plumage. On the Moors I put up my first Green Sandpiper from the Tamarisk . Pool and on the

shore found my first two autumn WHIMBREL and a single DUNLIN with two Ringed Plover. At Budds Farm Pools I reckoned that there were 5 Teal together and two Green Sandpiper plus a single juvenile Shelduck on the concrete among the many Tufted Duck and Mallard. Coming home up the Hayling Billy Trail past Wade Court grounds a Grey Wagtail flew off and back at home three SWIFTS circled silently over the nest site area.

News from Goodwood comes this evening from Mike Collins where large flocks of SWIFTS were overhead yesterday (Aug 2) and a TURTLE DOVE was still purring. Mike is currently working in a part of the Goodwood estate where the valley is at times alive with warblers – mostly Chiffchaff but some Garden Warblers and Lesser Whitethroat with them. I also heard today from Sonia Bolton that she had driven past what might have been a roadside BARN OWL corpse near Funtington where Mike has seen a live bird hunting recently – I hope he does not confirm the corpse.

MON 2 AUG

News from Keith Betton's pager this weekend included the WHITE RUMPED SANDPIPER at Titchfield Haven throughout Saturday and Sunday (it was not seen today but could still be around) and the SPOTTED CRAKE still being seen at Farlington Marshes with 1 LITTLE STINT seen at each of these sites. An OSPREY was seen in the WARSASH area on Saturday when one of my favourite birds, a BLACK TERN, was at Titchfield Haven, hopefully the first of several on autumn passage (I have a feeling that Black Tern have already been seen in Sussex recently but can't find any details). At least one of the two ROSEATE TERNS was at Titchfield and Keith Betton adds a word of warning that there are now juvenile Common Terns on the wing with wholly black bills (but my guess would be that if these two are adult Roseate Terns they should still have black foreheads and longer streamers than any juvenile Common)

In Sussex the weekend brought the first CURLEW SANDPIPER to Sidlesham Ferry to join the RUDDY SHELDUCK, and the first WOOD WARBLER back at the coast near Bexhill. At the east end of the county a GULL BILLED TERN was at Rye with a PURPLE HERON, and a BITTERN at Pett Pools. Nearer to us two ROSEATE TERNS were at Glyne Gap near Bexhill. On Saturday David Parker had both Treecreeper and Nuthatch in his garden at Forestside, from where a short walk along the north edge of Stansted Forest gave him a good view of two SPOTTED FLYCATCHER, presumably parent and juvenile as when one caught an insect it was seen to feed it to the other. After about ten minutes these two moved off south through the trees.

Brian Fellows reports the first seven Canada Geese back at Emsworth where SWAN numbers have suddenly risen to 70. Mallards are still hatching fresh ducklings and at Peter Pond the Moorhen pair which has remained celibate through the breeding season have suddenly produced three youngsters (their own? or did they have to adopt them from abroad?). The Reed Warbler in the Peter Pond rushes is still singing at low intensity but most birds have fallen silent – a single burst of Chaffinch song was the exception. Should anyone have seen pictures of Fireman dealing with a blaze at Brook Meadow Brian says there is no serious damage done.

PLANTS:

SUN 8 AUG

This evening John Goodspeed sent me a copy of his plant list for July and in it I see he has found examples of BETONY with white flowers at Lyeheath, and found BLACK NIGHTSHADE in flower as long ago as July 22 (I only saw my first today). Another good find on Portsdown was ROCK-ROSE - it seems to have been an especially good year for this plant, and John confirms his find of ROUND HEADED RAMPTION on the hill

Having been shown the rare Maple Leaved Goosefoot (found in a Winchester carpark) last Saturday I was reminded of it by plants growing in profusion just above the tide line on the Church Norton shore today (go from the carpark to the beach, turn left and you will find them at the foot of bushes where you turn left again to go up the harbour shore towards the hide). Can anyone tell me what these plants are? Among them and elsewhere in the area I saw my first BLACK NIGHTSHADE of the year in flower today.

FRI 6 AUG

A walk around Bedhampton and Broadmarsh this morning started with a surprise in the small carpark on the north side of Solent Road (across the road from the big Tesco carpark). Among the Buddleias and brambles around its edge I saw a clump of Mugwort which instantly stood out as unusual because all the flowering spikes had a bright yellow tinge in place of the white or brown tinge you usually see (white with hairs around the unopen buds and brown as soon as they open and

show their brown petalled flowers). Knowing that one of characteristics of WORMWOOD (a plant I have never knowingly seen and am desperately seeking) is that it has yellow petalled flowers my interest was roused and sure enough I found densely matted white hair on the upper leaf surfaces (though mainly at their base only) and found the flower spikes gave almost as strong an aromatic smell as Sea Wormwood. I was now almost ready to believe I had found genuine Wormwood but later in this walk I found more similar plants in two other places, in one of which the yellow and brown flowered plants were intermixed and otherwise indistinguishable. I would be glad of further clues (both as to the separation of the species and the likelihood of finding it - the Flora of Hants says it is rare but is found around Portsmouth) and meanwhile must go back and measure the size of the flower heads (these are more than 3 mm in the case of Wormwood).

.....Also on this walk I found both Brookweed and Buttonweed still flowering at Bedhampton by the Hermitage Stream where my first GIPSYWORT was in flower. Also worth a mention were the delicious ripe MULBERRIES which I ate when passing under the Bedhampton Water Works tree where it overhangs the Wayfarers Way path - the tree has a tremendous crop this year.

THU 5 AUG

Earlier in the summer I could easily identify BRANCHED BUR REED in the canalised branch of the R Ems south of Westbourne (by the tarmac path) but could not be certain whether other plants were young examples of Branched or genuine UNBRANCHED BUR REED. Today there was no doubt that both species are present together with mature specimens of both to be found. Going on north to Aldsworth pond I found it effectively empty with the bottom still damp and a couple of pools of water in hollows. With the water gone the spreading forest of MARE'S TAIL plants can now be seen to cover almost all the bottom area of the pond, spreading further each year.

TUE 3 AUG

Walking on the South Moors this evening I was delighted to find BROOKWEED still flowering where Gwynne Johnson had seen it last Saturday when there with the evening class. I found one clump of six plants and another lone plant nearby, all with flowers. Among the mass of Sea Rush here lots of PARSLEY WATER DROPWORT is in flower, the widely separated rays and the more domed umbels picking it out from the much commoner Corky Fruited species with its dense flat umbels. The DUKE OF ARGYLL'S TEAPLANT was decked with many pretty purple flowers and in the 'orchid meadow' small plants of MARSH WOUNDWORT were in flower.

SUN 1 AUG

Today I made a brief trip to North Hayling to see if Lesser Century could also be found on North Common where we saw it last year but I found none. I was surprised to see the mass of white flowered GOATS RUE still looking fresh when most other plants have dried up. The great mass of FLEABANE now flowering attracted many butterflies, and there was still plenty of Common Centaury in flower. On my way home I noticed several more rapidly dying ELM TREES, including one by the Hayling Billy trail in Havant which is not an English Elm but a very large leaved WYCH ELM, so perhaps the fungus is not restricted to English Elm. At the top of the Billy Trail near Grove Road the DANEWORT plants are still flourishing in flower.

INSECTS:

SUN 8 AUG

Brian Fellows walked the Prinsted-Nutbourne seawall this afternoon and saw a single SMALL TORTOISESHELL as well as 1 Red Admiral.

Trevor Carpenter saw 'plenty of butterflies with WALL BROWN being particularly noticeable' as he walked round Thorney Island today, and he tells me that his garden butterflies have been disappointing this year and that he saw his first PAINTED LADY yesterday in a Titchfield garden where he had been invited to a barbecue.

SAT 7 AUG

Today's hot sunshine brought just one PAINTED LADY and one fresh RED ADMIRAL to my garden Buddleia. There were a few Gatekeepers still in the garden and several Small and Large Whites.

FRI 6 AUG

Mark Litjens listed 18 butterfly species in the Whiteley Pastures area of Botley Woods today despite the cloud. Silver Washed Fritillary, Large Skipper and Ringlet are still on the wing there and it sounds as if SPECKLED WOOD are doing well with a total of 23 seen (9 of them together on a gravel track). 5 PAINTED LADIES were seen plus some good dragonflies, starting with a BROWN HAWKER. Also present were 6 Emperor and 5 Migrant Hawker. Mark tells me that yesterday 2 Painted Ladies were enjoying a Buddleia at his home until a cat decided to catch and eat one.

In marshy vegetation by the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton today I saw my first LONG WINGED CONEHEAD waving its long antennae, and on brambles in a much dried place a large hoverfly with a bright yellow abdomen having two or three narrow black transverse bands was my first VOLUCELLA INANIS (not as impressive as V zonaria but very smart). I read that the larvae of this hoverfly survives as a scavenger in bee and wasp nests – which reminds me that there are still extraordinarily few wasps to be seen this year so far (just one pestered me the other day when eating a slice of bread and marmelade, besides that I have only seen two or three others)

THU 5 AUG

A COMMA came to my Buddleia today to join Large and Small White and Gatekeeper, but no more Painted Ladies nor Silver Y moths so far. The best I could do today was a SMALL COPPER on thistle beside Mill Lane by the Ems south of Westbourne.

WED 4 AUG

Mark Litjens walked round a cloudy Yew Hill today but nevertheless saw 75+ Chalkhill Blue and small numbers of Common Blue with many Large and Small Whites. Best butterfly was a lone SMALL TORTOISESHELL – I only hope it meets with another.

Barry Collins told me this morning that he and Margaret had walked around Thorney Island on Monday (Aug 2) and counted 48 WALL BROWN during the circuit.

TUE 3 AUG

It seems that SILVER SPOTTED SKIPPER emerged 'somewhere in Hampshire' last Sunday (Aug 1) and I have put this date in the table of first dates for butterflies on the What's New page but Mark Litjens had this info at third hand so we await more certain news from those who actually see this insect for themselves. In addition to this news Mark reveals his optimism about a butterfly bonanza in the late summer in the following message – "1996 was unforgettable for the numbers Painted Lady's and Silver-Y Moths. I have not had any Painted Lady's nor many Silver-Y Moths in our garden since, that is until now. Saturday we had 1 Painted Lady, today we have two. The last two evenings I have gone outside at dusk and our Buddleias have been covered with Silver-Y Moths. Two Painted Lady's isn't an invasion but looking back at my records this is what happened in 1996. Time will tell..... I just get a feeling this butterfly season is far from over." All I can add to this is the corpse of a Silver Y lying outside my front door this morning

MON 2 AUG

Pete Potts ran a moth trap at the Itchen Valley country park last night for a public audience and he tells me that huge numbers of insects came to the lights and wine ropes (it was a high class audience so they used wine instead of beer). The two moths which he gives a special mention are the impressive OAK EGGAR and a smaller moth that is quite scarce in Hampshire called a POPLAR LUTESTRING. Today he saw an ESSEX SKIPPER nectaring on Lavender in a garden at Bitterne, Southampton

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 8 AUG

Looking at the recent sightings listed in the window of the Pagham Harbour Nature Reserve building this morning I was puzzled and intrigued to see a line reporting "6 BLACK RATS and 5 SHIP'S RATS seen on Lundy Island" (I quote from memory and the numbers may be wrong). Leaving aside why this should be news at Pagham I was puzzled by the distinction between Black and Ship Rats as I thought they were two synonyms for the same species (*Rattus rattus*), and I also thought I had read that Black Rats are extinct in Britain. Referring to my Reader's Digest Book of Animals I find confirmation that the two names are for the same species but also read the "a few open-air colonies exist on islands such as Lundy, the rats evidently feeding mainly on plants, but their long term survival is in doubt". Can anyone tell us more?

Four COMMON SEALS were seen on Pilsley Sands today by Trevor Carpenter

SAT 7 AUG

Driving down the road from Lumley Seat towards Stansted House this afternoon I was passing Lumley Wood when I saw ahead of me a ROE BUCK rushing away from me on the roadside and frantically trying to get through the new wire fence which separated it from the open field on Rosamund's Hill. As I slowed down so as not to panic it any more I noticed another Roe buck, clearly an older beast with much bigger antlers, charging down the slope of Rosamund's Hill towards the road, presumably intent on seeing this young buck off the established territory without a thought of concern about the presence of the car. The fence separating the two bucks has square-

mesh 'pig wire' along its base, and above this there are perhaps three strands of plain wire each not more than six inches above each other. The end of the episode which I saw quite amazed me - the young buck in its desperation leapt at the top of this fence and somehow went clean through it with no more than a loud twanging of the wires. It did not go over the top, as I am sure it could have done if it had taken a run at the fence from a distance, but suddenly leapt from its position close to and parallel to the wire, to go through between the top strands above the pig wire. As its antlers alone were much taller than the gap between the wires it can only have got through by turning its head on its side, and once the head was through the body must have forced the wires apart to cause the loud twang I heard as they came together again. The young buck was clearly not damaged by the fence, but whether the older buck then caught up with it and did do it some damage I did not see.

FRI 6 AUG

Before the concrete blocks were removed from the bund walls of the Hayling Oysterbeds they provided 'Ideal Homes' for quite a few ADDERS and since their removal I have had fewer reports of Adders from that part of Hayling but today I had an interesting message from Alistair Martin to say that he had today seen a fairly small (c 30cm) and thin adder on shingle just south of the pillbox where a footpath joins the Coastal Path to West Lane. He had a very good view of it with binoculars, having chivvied it out of the vegetation in which it sought cover on his first approach, and says that the ground colour was a dull, brownish "brick red". If anyone is familiar with colour variations among adders both Alistair and I would like to know more. I believe that females tend to be a darkish brown and males to be more yellow (unless they are after a job on TV as a Black Adder) but Alistair is wondering if there are age related colour variations or other known causes for this sort of colour.

Chris Fairhead was in Stansted Forest recently and was able to pin down more than one 'barking deer' and see that they were Roe and not Muntjac and I have told him that I believe that the reason that Muntjac are sometimes called 'Barking Deer' is that they will at times carry on barking continuously for minutes at a time whereas my experience of Roe is that they give one or two barks of alarm and are then off, bounding away silently.

.....In pursuit of knowledge about Deer and other animals Chris would much like to possess a copy of 'MAMMALS OF GREAT BRITAIN & IRELAND' by PAUL MORRISON (ASTON PUBLICATIONS 1992). He has seen a library copy and says it is a beautifully produced book but is now out of print and all searches of the internet and other enquiries have drawn a blank on commercial sources. If it happens that anyone knows of a copy which Chris could purchase please get in touch with him - his email address is chris_fairhead@email.msn.com

THU 5 AUG

When BBC TV showed a new born SEAL PUP on Pilsey sands this summer we at last had proof that COMMON SEALS do give birth here on the south coast but it is possible that they have been doing so for years. Talking to Barry Collins about the birth this year he told me that last year a dead young pup which must have been born locally was washed up in Chichester Harbour, and I heard rumours of pupping in the Emsworth Channel area around ten years ago. This week a further item of evidence came to light when I was in the Havant Tourist Info office and a man working there told me he had seen a live young pup when canoeing off Fowley Island (between Emsworth and Hayling) last year.

SUN 1 AUG

Maybe I should rename this 'Other Wildlife' section as the Obituary Column as it seems to feature more news of death than life. Today's sad news comes from Brian Fellows who has been watching the progress of a Mallard family which first came to his attention on June 19 when I wrote "Back at his home in Emsworth a neighbour told Brian that a Mallard had just laid five eggs in a nest in his garden, so if the foxes don't get there first there will be yet more ducklings on the streets of Emsworth, heading for the millpond, next month" Today my guess of their likely fate came true and Brian today writes "Sadly I have to report that a fox got into my neighbour's garden early this morning and killed 5 of the 6 ducklings which my neighbours had carefully tended for since they hatched on July 11. The surviving duckling was injured and was taken to Brent Lodge Wild Bird Hospital. Apparently the fox had removed the heads from the ducklings, but had not removed the corpses. Is this normal fox behaviour?" I cannot answer that question authoritatively - we all know that foxes will rush round a chicken pen killing all the panicking birds with no intention or ability to eat them all, but why all the heads and none of the bodies had been taken is curious. Possibly it was easier to carry away the heads than the bodies, or possibly the foxes were after a

mineral supplement from the bills of the young birds. I say this because it reminds me of a report I read ages ago of mortality among Tern chicks on a Scottish Island – the culprits here were not Foxes but Sheep, which ate the feet off the chicks to meet their needs for mineral elements

WEEK 30 JULY 26 – AUG 1

BIRDS:

SUN 1 AUG

Bird song is currently at a low point with the only regulars being the Wood Pigeons and Collared Doves – very soon the latter may cease to sing in gardens as they join up in flocks to scour the harvest fields. The only other bird I heard sing today was a Coal Tit, prompting the question of when I last heard that most ubiquitous songster, the Wren. One bird noise in my garden recently has been the continuous ‘tucking’ of a Blackcap which seems to think there is perpetual danger – or maybe he’s got fleas.

On north Hayling this afternoon at high tide there were over 100 Redshank in Northney Marina with up to 50 Lapwing scattered along the shore. A couple of Sandwich Tern were fishing off the marina but the only other birds on the water were Black Headed Gulls with a few Common and Herring Gulls. At Wade Court the Egrets have chosen yet another tree for their high tide roost, this time an oak in which there may have been a good number though I could only see three of them.

Brian Fellows saw no SWIFTS yesterday and here in Havant it seems that most have departed and one or two which have stayed no longer have to shout to mates holed up in their rooftop nests. Watching the western sky for at least five minutes this evening I saw gulls lumbering south to the coast and feral Pigeons heading in for the town nightlife, with just one silent Swift making a double pass over the nest site. There was more to be seen in the east where it seems that the two pairs of House Martins that nest somewhere nearby now have three youngsters in the air with them, making much buzzing chatter. PS – just after sunset a faint Swift scream drew me to a window from which I saw just 5 Swifts overhead, and a late message from Brian Fellows reports 5 over Emsworth.

The SOS recent news is that the RUDDY SHELDUCK was still at Sidlesham Ferry last Thursday (July 29) and that the Egret roost count on Wed evening was 139 (not 159 as I misheard from passing birder and misquoted in my entry for Thursday).

SAT 31 JULY

Two more GREAT CRESTED GREBE, bringing the flock up to 35, were off the South Moors when the evening class were there this morning, and this evening a small party of SWIFTS paid a brief visit to Havant. The Swifts were also present in the morning when they were joined by a single noisy COCKATIEL which twice flew over the garden.

FRI 30 JULY

Next Monday the Autumn HOS Newsletter will be sent to all members and it contains news that a HOS website is now available. The address it gives is that of a prototype site set up by Peter Morrison at [HTTP://www.thornton07.freerve.co.uk/HOS.html](http://www.thornton07.freerve.co.uk/HOS.html) and this contains a link to another HOS website which I believe is likely to be the main HOS website in the future – this second site is part of the Hampshire County Council supported HANTSWEB and this is the one which you will arrive at if you use the link in my WHAT’S NEW page. Hopefully there will very soon be a further HOS website giving the latest news ‘as it happens’ but details of how this will operate have not yet been finalised. Peter Morrison is solely responsible for all that has happened so far and I congratulate him on getting the ball rolling but as a Hampshire birder I will not be satisfied until (a) news of all Hampshire rarities and other notable sightings is available on a ‘next day’ basis and (b) there is a team of birdnews correspondents in every corner of the county feeding news back to the central website ‘as it happens’ (these people may well also set up their own websites but that should not preclude them from emailing all their news to the central website).

It seems that Titchfield Haven is having a ‘Purple Patch’ as both Keith Betton and Peter Morrison use this phrase in telling me of the good birds currently present. Best buy is probably a WHITE RUMPED SANDPIPER as Birds of Hampshire only records 11 of these for the county and this is an earlier bird than ever before (previous records were all between Aug 10 and Oct 27). Also at Titchfield Haven there are/have been two ROSEATE TERNS (are these the same two that are oscillating between Hampshire and Sussex this summer?), a LITTLE STINT and a MED GULL. Keith also passes on Bird Line news of a PECTORAL SANDPIPER at Pennington and tells me that the SPOTTED CRAKE is still at Farlington Marshes where it was first seen on July 15th by Dave Mead

Kevin Stouse took a walk today from Warblington to Budds Farm, finding 30+ Swallows with a few

youngsters in one tree at the start and 4 Egrets in the Wade Court trees. Off Langstone Mill he saw one Greenshank and at Budds Farm he had close views of a LESSER WHITETHROAT eating elderberries. On the pools were GREEN and COMMON SANDPIPER with one TEAL. Six juvenile SHELDUCK were near Budds Farm outfall on the sea and one more was on the pools (I assume they can now fly and this was one of the seaborne party rather than one hatched on the pools – I think the two that did hatch there soon died). Also at Budds Farm there were around 100 more Swallows, provoking the sad thought that when the reconstruction of the sewage works is complete next year the ‘enriched water’ which gives off the flies on which these and other birds feed will be hygienically enclosed and there will be no food to attract the birds. Some birds will survive – for example the GREY WGTAIL family (female plus two juveniles) which Kevin found by the boatyard slippway on the Brockhampton stream.

Late this afternoon I toured Budds Farm, the South Moors and Langstone but all I can add to Kevin’s news is that a flock of 33 GREAT CRESTED GREBE were in Bridge Lake just north of the Hayling Oysterbeds and visible distantly from the South Moors. Later in the evening, surprised to hear no screaming SWIFTS and wondering if the local birds had already gone, I cycled round the central Havant area where they nest – I did see seven Swifts high in the air over the nests but they were more or less silent and just circling high with no diving to the houses so I may well be right in thinking that the local birds have left and that these were present by accident.

John Goodspeed found a family of STONECHAT on the field south of Skew Road and west of Portchester Common proper where I saw what I thought was one juvenile with one adult back on June 6th.

THU 29 JULY

With the heat almost unbearable I waited until evening before cycling along to Thorney Island where I enjoyed brief glimpses of half a dozen BEARDED TITS at the Little Deeps (where the Swan pair had three cygnets on the open water and a single male POCHARD was among many Mallard, most of them probably refugees from a drained Mill Pond at Emsworth) and both heard and saw a purring TURTLE DOVE on a dead Elder tree beside the track leading east from the military fence gate near the Egret roost. Plenty of Black Tailed Godwit on the Emsworth Channel mud but not an Egret in sight at 8pm. I went on to Thornham Point and found two pairs of birders vainly looking for the Osprey, one of whom told me that he had heard that the Egret roost count is now up to 159 (I would not be surprised, but must emphasise that this is an unconfirmed figure PS the actual figure was 139, see Aug 1). While enjoying a colourful sunset 50+ SWIFTS and a similar number of Swallows drifted east overhead, and I was told that Sand Martins are now starting to appear on the Sussex coast.

WED 28 JULY

The latest news from the Sussex website is that on July 23/24 there was a PECTORAL SANDPIPER at Weir Wood reservoir (north of Haywards Heath) with one Dunlin, 10 Common Sandpiper and 4 Kingfisher for company. At Castle Hill between Lewes and Brighton the first autumn passage REDSTART was seen and the resident Grasshopper Warbler is still present. Similarly the Ruddy Shelduck was still at Sidlesham Ferry on the 24th (with 4 Little Ringed Plover) and the Osprey was still at Thorney.

Pete Potts points out that my account of his visit to Iceland (see July 26) had a couple of misleading errors, the main one being that I said that some of the Godwits we are now seeing were birds of the European race which winter on the Ouse Washes in East Anglia. This was reading too much into his statement that the birds we are now seeing are “a mixture of failed breeders from Iceland or from the European race, e.g. the Ouse Washes birds”. Pete tells me that these European race Godwits in fact breed on the Washes but winter further south, probably in West Africa and that any Godwits seen in East Anglia in the winter are almost certainly ones that have bred in Iceland. My second error was to assume that when he said he had found young pre-fledged birds they must have been at their nests – even I might have been expected to know that, like all waders (?), the young move from the nest almost immediately after hatching, following their parents to good feeding places where they have to find their own food from the word go – no feeding by the parents.

TUE 27 JULY

At the Southsea Canoe Lake this morning Brian Fellows found only 3 Swans among all the pleasure boats – now that they are once more mobile at the end of their moult I suspect the Swans are quite happy to give up their share of the crusts of bread intended for the pigeons and escape from the human pressure on their peace – on the water the boats chase them all day and all around the edge of the pond there is a continuous stream of people with their children and dogs.

At Baffins Pond Brian was expecting to find even fewer birds than he did last week as he had been told that

the total of corpses removed by the rangers had gone up from 94 to 162 (among the dead were 78 Canada Geese, 17 Barnacle Geese and 59 Mallard). In fact, so he tells me, he “was pleasantly surprised not only to find the remaining birds looking fit and well, but also that Mallard numbers were up on last week and some of the missing Barnacles had returned.” Today the live birds numbered 51 Canada Geese, 14 Barnacle Geese and 82 Mallard, so it does seem that the worst is over.

MON 26 JULY

Pete Potts returned from Iceland last night and sends good news of breeding success among the BLACK TAILED GODWITS. He tells me “we found many nests with big and almost fledged chicks and by the time we left the first juvs were feeding in hay fields in small flocks of adults. Some nests had broods of up to four almost fledged/fledged chicks so they seem to be doing well despite the skuas and gulls. We found two more colour-ringed godwits different from those found in our spring visit - both with chicks - one from Farlington & other from the Wash.” While in Iceland Pete saw a flock of more than 150 RED NECKED PHALAROPE, many spinning on the water within ten feet of him, but the real rarity of the trip was a COOT seen near Reykjavik. Pete confirms that the Godwits we are currently enjoying will almost certainly be failed breeders and thinks they are likely to be a mixture of the Icelandic birds which winter at Farlington and the European birds which winter on the Wash.

More domestic news is that (following Brian Fellows observation of the first autumn ROBIN song heard at Stansted yesterday) the first thing I heard in my garden this morning was that same wistful song. I see that last year I heard the first autumn song on July 26 but that the birds did not really start up until Aug 11 so give them a chance to get going. While the Robins “think it’s all over” the fecund Mallards have not yet lost their sex drive – today on Langstone pond yet another family of new hatched ducklings were on parade.

Maybe the Swans are completing their moult and, like the Canada Geese, once more able to fly and leave the security of the moult flock. This could account for the decrease in Swan numbers seen at Emsworth today by Brian Fellows who could only find 49 of them where there have been 59 or more up to a week ago, and it could be the reason for the whistling noises being made by the BLACK SWAN (does he want to call the flock back for company, or is it just another sexual urge). A newcomer to the Mill Pond today was a Cormorant (these are regular on the Slipper Mill pond but not the Town Mill pond). Brian made his round in the morning and I cycled along the Emsworth shore in the afternoon seeing a small group of Lesser Blackback gulls off Nore Barn where there were 15 Swans. I also found the Slipper Mill pond refilling, so I presume the repairs to the sluice gate are now complete.

PLANTS:

SUN 1 AUG

Today I made a brief trip to North Hayling to see if Lesser Century could also be found on North Common where we saw it last year but I found none. I was surprised to see the mass of white flowered GOATS RUE still looking fresh when most other plants have dried up. The great mass of FLEABANE now flowering attracted many butterflies, and there was still plenty of Common Centaury in flower. On my way home I noticed several more rapidly dying ELM TREES, including one by the Hayling Billy trail in Havant which is not an English Elm but a very large leaved WYCH ELM, so perhaps the fungus is not restricted to English Elm. At the top of the Billy Trail near Grove Road the DANEWORT plants are still flourishing in flower.

SAT 31 JULY

This morning I joined members of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Flora Group at Browdown (on the Solent shore between Gosport and Lee on the Solent) for a hot day’s plant hunting organised by Pete Selby to fill in some gaps in the coverage of the Atlas2000 Survey. Although there was not a cloud in the sky Pete generated a pall of sadness and regret with news of the death this week of Paul Bowman, long time Hampshire Plant Recorder and part author of the Flora of Hampshire. Paul had gone swimming at Calshot and was found collapsed in the water, but not until it was too late to revive him.

.....Before the party split to survey different areas we were all shown a great rarity discovered on Browdown last year and which has only one other known site in the UK (at Shoreham in Sussex). This is STARRY CLOVER, its large pale cream flower heads long over, but the distinctive star shape of the calyx still visible. It seems this plant is thriving here and there are more than a dozen patches of its remains spread over a 100 yard stretch of the dry earth slope of the collapsed cliff. To find the plants we walked from the carpark at SZ ***** across the grass area to the top of the steps to the beach but instead of going down them turned left through a well used gap in the fence and made our way down the cliff

there, finding the plants on both sides of us near the bottom of the slope. When they are in flower next May/June there should be no difficulty in finding them.

.....Another rarity found earlier was *CHENOPODIUM HYBRIDUM* or MAPLE LEAVED GOOSEFOOT, a tall upright plant with leaves living up to its name. This had been discovered in a carpark at Winchester College. Pete Selby also brought along a rare clover which he had just found but I did not note its name and my memory of it as being Upright Clover seems unlikely from the description of localities giving in Stace for that species. During the morning Pete Selby and Eric Clement toured the streets of Privet in Gosport and found 145 different species including a rare grass (*ANNUAL BEARD GRASS* or *POYPOGON MONSPELIENSIS*) which I have heard is to be found at Farlington Marshes but have not heard of elsewhere.

.....Alan Thurbon and myself worked the Stokes Bay seafront at Gosport in the morning but did not find any rarities, but in the afternoon I was sent to the Fort Gilkicker area where I was delighted to find a mass of *PALE TOADFLAX* (*Linaria repens*) growing on shingle just west of the fort (this plant was new to me). Also abundant on the grass just north of the shingle west of the Fort was *LESSER CENTAURY*, its tiny star flowers difficult to spot but seemingly everywhere if you looked carefully.

Gwynne Johnson tells me that when the evening class were visiting the Langstone South Moors this morning she found the elusive *BROOKWEED* on the bank of the tiny streamlet feeding the Tamarisk Pool. Over a good many years I have searched diligently for this plant here but have only spotted it twice. Gwynne found a single late plant in seed but with one flower still showing, hidden in a place where the cattle could not eat it.

FRI 30 JULY

John Goodspeed and Richard Jones made an authorised expedition to the private site on the banks of the upper Wallington River (or a tributary) at Lyeheath today. The *Betony* and *Sneezewort* they found was no doubt attractive but the plant which caught my eye in John's list was *BOG PIMPERNEL*. Not uncommon in many Hampshire bogs, where it will have been flowering for a month or more, I do not know of anywhere that it grows in the immediate Havant area. Until last year it appeared annually on the lawn of a house in Maisemore Gardens at Emsworth but sadly this anomalous site has now been extinguished by one careful owner of the property.

WED 28 JULY

My only news of plants today is second hand from the radio on which I heard that *ALDER TREES* are dying somewhere in the Thames valley and this is thought to be the result of a fungus that has been spreading across the country in recent years and which could be as disastrous as the Dutch Elm disease, leaving our river banks lined with dead alder trees as many of our hedgerows now are with dead English Elm (looking at Warblington cemetery from the shore as you pass the skyline looks like a winter scene on a battlefield where every tree has died from cold or bullet wounds). The spread of the Alder disease has I think been much slower than was anticipated a few years ago, but possibly this hot weather will accelerate the spread.

INSECTS:

SUN 1 AUG

A single fresh *PAINTED LADY* was on my garden *Buddleia* this morning along with one Peacock, but the best butterfly of the day for me was a *SMALL TORTOISESHELL* seen on North Hayling this afternoon (possibly one or two others glimpsed) After the Gatekeepers and Madow Browns the *COMMON BLUE* was the most numerous butterfly there at Northney where I saw just one *SMALL COPPER* and what was almost certainly another Painted Lady.

This evening a message from Mark Litjens speaks of two fresh *PAINTED LADIES* at Old Winchester Hill (seen by a friend of Mark's) and one on the *Buddleia* at his Whiteley (Fareham) garden yesterday. Earlier on Saturday Mark was at Needs Ore nature reserve at the mouth of the Beaulieu River where he found 9 *WALL BROWN*, 1 Grayling and 1 Small Copper plus a *RUDDY DARTER* dragonfly. I wonder if Mark will be first with news of Silver Spotted Skipper due out this week?

Yet another *PAINTED LADY* was seen on a Havant (Denvilles) garden *Buddleia* today by Kevin Stouse who comments on its freshness.

The last message today came from Geoff Butland who says "On Selborne Common today, Sunday, several of us saw a large, blue, butterfly (note lower case). It was much bigger than the Gatekeepers around (which I assume were male) - about the size of a Small Tortoiseshell I would guess - and smaller than the Peacock there. It was on the large clump of Hemp Agrimony near the top of the Zig-zag path. One member of the group claimed the underwing was blue - but I did not see it. Any comments, suggestions?" My first thought is that this was the equivalent of the escaped cage bird - an exotic from a

butterfly house managing to survive in the hot weather – or even something like a Small White which had been painted by some scientist studying butterfly movements (rather like the ‘yellow arsed’ Brent Geese at Farlington last winter). I do not think it could have been a LARGE BLUE, even a continental invader, as I think their season is over by mid-July and they prefer Thyme rich short grassland, not the wooded habitat at the top of the zig-zag path, nor do I think there are any moths that could cause confusion, but we await the comments of the experts. The only genuine blue which they could have seen, which is the largest species that can be found in Hampshire, is the Chalkhill Blue so the question back to Geoff is what was the tone of blue (bright sky blue like Common or Holly, or pale mikly blue like the Chalkhill?)

SAT 31 JULY

COMMON BLUE were reasonably common on the Fort Gilkicker to Browndown shore today, and in seafront gardens I saw one HOLLY BLUE with Small Whites, a Peacock and one Speckled Wood to add to the Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns

FRI 30 JULY

John Goodspeed was out again today in the Lyeheath area west of the Southwick woods but only noted COMMON BLUES and an unidentified ‘very pale thing’

THU 29 JULY

Today John Goodspeed saw a PAINTED LADY when walking the Wayfarers Way through the Southwick woods, re-inforcing the theory that locally bred insects of this species are now emerging. A WHITE ADMIRAL also seen here had probably been on the wing much longer – this species also vanish with the coming of August.

WED 28 JULY

In yesterday’s heat Pete Potts saw at least four PURPLE HAIRSTREAK which had left the tops of the oaks in Kites Copse at Titchfield Common and were low down on Hamp Agrimony and marginal pond plants, and he assumed they were trying to escape the full heat of the sun. The only times at which I myself expect to see Purple Hairstreak within close view are either early in the morning when I have seen them apparently drinking dew or when forced down by heavy rain – as the sun comes out again they can sometimes be seen stretching the wings to regain strength from the sun before once more going aloft. Another message which mentions Hemp Agrimony comes from Chris Fairhead, though he was only commenting on the fact that it is now in full flower and should be attracting butterflies. Chris’ message was in fact to tell me about a GARDEN TIGER moth. He says “I read that Garden Tigers are seldom seen by day. In which case I must have been lucky, since I saw another one yesterday evening (Monday 26th July). It was asleep or resting on a rose hedge at the top of Westbourne Avenue in Emsworth. I think from its markings that it was a female and it was fairly large as well, each wing was about 4 cm long. I could clearly see the ‘brown bear’ fur around its thorax and a fine scarlet ring between the head and thorax.”

TUE 27 JULY

Yesterday afternoon Andrew Brookes was working the Botley tetrad in search of butterflies and found two excellent insects to make up for a low score of only 6 butterfly species seen. The best find was a PAINTED LADY seen nectaring on a thistle (this butterfly’s preferred caterpillar food plant, from which the insect gets its scientific name of *Cynthia cardui*). This is only the fourth Painted Lady I have heard of this summer – one was on South Hayling on May 29 and the other two were both seen on Thorney Island on June 1 and June 23. It takes about seven weeks from egg-laying to emergence of the butterfly so it is possible that yesterday’s sighting was of the first offspring of these arriving at the end of May – if so I hope we begin to see a few more of them soon. The other good sighting was of a pristine SMALL COPPER found on Fleabane near Durley Mill.

MON 26 JULY

Although it has a wingspan of 7 to 9 cm and a dramatic ‘red underwing’ when in flight or with wings expanded, the RED UNDERWING moth can easily escape detection during the day when it rests on the bark of a tree and hides its ‘red petticoat’ under lichen coloured fore wings. Maureen Coleman had no difficulty in spotting one which invaded her South Hayling house yesterday, and I can remember also finding one in broad daylight years ago, also on South Hayling, as it had gone to rest on a white washed wall at my eye level.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 1 AUG

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in Emsworth a neighbour told Brian that a Mallard had just laid five eggs in a nest in his garden, so if the foxes don't get there first there will be yet more ducklings on the streets of Emsworth, heading for the millpond, next month" Today my guess of their likely fate came true and Brian today writes "Sadly I have to report that a fox got into my neighbour's garden early this morning and killed 5 of the 6 ducklings which my neighbours had carefully tended for since they hatched on July 11. The surviving duckling was injured and was taken to Brent Lodge Wild Bird Hospital. Apparently the fox had removed the heads from the ducklings, but had not removed the corpses. Is this normal fox behaviour?" I cannot answer that question authoritatively – we all know that foxes will rush round a chicken pen killing all the panicking birds with no intention or ability to eat them all, but why all the heads and none of the bodies had been taken is curious. Possibly it was easier to carry away the heads than the bodies, or possibly the foxes were after a mineral supplement from the bills of the young birds. I say this because it reminds me of a report I read ages ago of mortality among Tern chicks on a Scottish Island – the culprits here were not Foxes but Sheep, which ate the feet off the chicks to meet their needs for mineral elements (obviously the farmer did not give them cornflakes for breakfast as the packets tell us that they have all we need of every mineral).

MON 26 JULY

Harry Marsden today passed on the belated news of another case of 'FROG MORTALITY' at a friend's house on South Hayling. This friend had told Harry that a lot of Toads were dying in and around his pond and I am awaiting confirmation that they were really Toads – Frogs are much more likely victims, but if they are Toads then perhaps the problem is entering a new phase.

More news today from John Goodspeed about the 'Black and White Squirrel Show'. It seems that the Portsmouth NEWS has recently published articles about the presence of White Squirrels in the city and those have elicited 15 different reports of sightings (though John does not say if these were all recent sightings) in an area between the old A3 and the new A3M south of Waterlooville, plus one from Gastcombe Park in Hilsa. From other sources I can add that these albino variations are not uncommon and I have heard that there are places in the USA which advertise them as a tourist attraction. Black Squirrels are less common and in Britain I thought they were restricted to Bedfordshire and Hertfordshire (plus of course four states of the USA!) but John Goodspeed has new information that they can also be found in Staffordshire – will pottery Squirrels be the fashion in the new millenium?

WEEK 29 JULY 19 - 25

BIRDS:

SUN 25 JULY

A phone call from Barry Collins this evening brought me up to date with his Thorney news before he set off for Farlington Marshes to check out the SPOTTED CRAKE which he believes is still there. Autumn passages is well under way on Thorney – the first passage GREENSHANK arrived at the very end of June and by July 15 he counted 89 GREENSHANK, mainly at the east end of the Great Deeps where they have a communal high tide roost. TURNSTONE are also passing as are SANDERLING of which he has counted 81 on Pilsey Sands this week (but Barry says they soon disappear if there are a lot of people around). Both HOBBY and PEREGRINE pass over Pilsey fairly regularly, and the OSPREY is almost certainly still resident in the Thorney Channel off Stanbury Point or on the landing lights at the east end of the Great Deeps.

This morning I cycled around much of Hayling but had little bird excitement – probably the best sight was of 10 LITTLE EGRET manning the rigging of a dead tree top at Wade Court as I passed with the morning tide high. At the Oysterbeds one Egret was fishing, four Cormorant resting, and two Common Sandpiper flitting with the Little Terns noisy on their nesting island but the only unusual sight there was of 8 TURNSTONE sharing the island with them. Oystercatcher were the only numerous wader (up to 100 seen), mostly on the bar of Stoke Bay off which just two Great Crested Grebe cruised by (where has the big flock gone?). Down at Sinah Lake six CANADA GOOSE flew north to the harbour as I approached and the Swan pair had two cygnets on the water on which Common Gulls are once more becoming common.

Brian Fellows is probably the first person to hear autumn song from ROBIN. He heard just one in the north west of Stansted Forest where Blackcap and Coal Tit were singing (with Wren, Woodpigeon and Stock Dove) when I was there on Friday. I think the Coal Tit use Duracell batteries and will still keep going when the rest have stopped but my last record of Blackcap song last year was on July 24 in the Q E Park so we will not be hearing much more of them)

SAT 24 JULY

Rosemary Webb's garden is within 300 yards of the busy South Hayling seafront but is isolated from the

bustle of human activity in every direction by 200 yards of quiet gardens. Several species of orchid grow on the lawn (Autumn Ladies Tresses and Green Winged orchids are probably native to the spot), both Foxes and Squirrels regard it as a safe haven for their young, and a great variety of birds come for food and to bathe in a bird bath set in the ground like a small pond. Today the bird list had a newcomer with a HOBBY bathing as Rosemary watched from the house.

Yesterday evening Brian Fellows took advantage of the calm sunny evening to visit the EGRET ROOST on Thorney with the tide high at sunset, bringing the birds in early. He did not make an exhaustive count but saw at least 42 Egrets, and this evening I made the same trip to find an estimated 50 Egrets in the trees making disgruntled noises as they were disturbed by each newcomer. The actual number present is always considerably more than can be seen by the passing visitor – partly because there is no viewpoint giving an un-interrupted view of all the trees, and partly because not all the birds perch in places where they can be seen (some are hidden within the foliage of the trees). – so I was not surprised to hear from Barry Collins that he had counted 53 Egrets arriving at the roost a week ago (July 16), using the only accurate method of sitting on the seawall for at least two hours to count each bird as it arrives (and even that is not foolproof if they come from the south and their flight is hidden by the taller trees)

Looking west from the seawall by the Thorney Great Deeps towards Langstone Bridge yesterday evening Brian Fellows saw, on the saltings just below the wall, his first autumn DUNLIN (11 of them) with 52 Black Tailed Godwit, 16 Lapwing and one Common Sandpiper skimming the water. On the Emsworth Channel just beyond the waders 3 BRENT GEESE were swimming – an unusual place to see summer birds which normally prefer the south of the Thorney Channel or the end of the Chichester channel at Fishbourne. On the Great Deeps behind him were at least 4 Heron and 3 Greenshank.

When I visited this area this evening I noted that Peter Pond and the Slipper Mill pond were both still empty (Brian Fellows found them drained yesterday and tells me they are repairing the sluice gates). On the Slipper Pond a second summer Great Blackback was hoping to scavenge something from the drying floor of the pool but flew off when the two resident Herring Gull flew towards it. At the Little Deeps the two remaining cygnets of the family hatched there were settling onto the old nest for the night while their parents remained on the water with a mass of Mallard and Coot (plus a few Swallows overhead) and continuing south I much enjoyed the smell of real hay from the newly cut field. One Common Sandpiper was in the ‘canal’ and another two were on the Great Deeps where five Greenshank flew around and at least another five were resting near the bend of the northern shore. Although the sun was setting both LITTLE and COMMON TERN were still fishing and the latter flew off west with a substantial fish in its bill.

This morning the Evening Class group visited Old Winchester Hill where butterflies provided the main interest but, in addition to five or more singing YELLOWHAMMER they heard the mewing of BUZZARD and watched a pair soaring above them. This news came from Brian Fellows who also found House Martins nesting in Meadowlands, a road opening off Wellsworth Lane on the northern edge of Rowlands Castle, seemingly far from a source of mud and water for their nest building. Yesterday when passing Stansted House I scanned the west front and thought I could see nine House Martins nests, again with no obvious source of mud. Perhaps this faithfulness to traditional sites without regard to changes in other factors, is part of the downfall of this species?

FRI 23 JULY

With the return of summer weather I set out early for a walk round Stansted Forest this morning and came home with some excellent items of news. The first was my not unexpected first encounter with a couple of juvenile SPARROWHAWK flopping from tree to tree and crying piteously for food. These were at SU 746116 in compartment 5A just north of the ‘Rough Avenue’ which goes north west from Stansted House. A little way further east I had the best two birds of the day, both by accident as I heard them while retracing my steps to look for a pen I had dropped. The first sounded in the distance to be the ‘chwit, chwit’ of a Nuthatch, but the sound continued to come towards me and passed right over me and the Larches under which I was standing, turning into the ‘Chup.chup’ of a CROSSBILL as it did so. This happened to be right at the place (north side of the clear felled compartment 5B) where I had seen the ground strewn with Larch cone flakes (looking just like the result of Crossbill feeding) that I had seen earlier in the spring (March 13) and today there were other carpets of Larch cone flakes to be seen. Within a hundred yards of this spot I heard the sneeze of a Marsh Tit when I first passed, but while retracing my steps to look for the pen I heard the quite different and unmistakable ‘Zurr, zurr’ of a WILLOW TIT – I heard it three or four times but never saw the bird as it moved through the area and away (the Marsh Tit remained there). This was at roughly SU 749116 and the Willow Tit was moving south. (Again this is close to other sightings of Willow Tit in past years, including one memorable family party). The next birds of interest were a family of four SPOTTED FLYCATCHER and these were in the

'Wood Pasture' at the south end of the Ladies Walk around SU 757108. I watched them (two adults and two juveniles) for some time, at first perched on the many dead branches of a fallen tree, but then high in the canopy of the tall trees. I was hoping to refresh my memory of their calls but they remained silent throughout. Finally I came on a bunch of waterbirds while using my permit to walk through the Nature Reserve. On Brick Kiln pond I had a brief view of a female MANDARIN, quite clear enough to be certain, but when I had moved to a spot with a clearer view of the water the duck had disappeared into the vegetation around the water's edge (in moving round I discovered the SWAN pair with their single cygnet hiding in the shade of a little bay where they would have been invisible from the road). On the nature reserve pond that cannot be seen from the road I was left in no doubt of the presence of two GREEN SANDPIPER which flew up noisily, attracting my eye to the place where they had been and where I saw two other Sandpipers standing unperturbed by the alarm – these were both very pale with notable eyestripes but too distant to see the flecking of their wing feathers to confirm my strong suspicion that they were WOOD SANDPIPER

A visit to the SOS Recent Sightings website this evening tells me that a RUDDY SHELDUCK has been at Sidlesham Ferry since Monday (July 19). There were four AVOCET with it on Monday but only one now (Friday) though there is now also a RUFF and 81 Black Tailed Godwit on the Ferry Pool and a MARSH HARRIER. HOBBY and 6 Common Sandpiper have been seen nearby on the west side of the harbour. Yesterday (July 22) a first summer Med Gull was at Church Norton and a Grasshopper Warbler continues to reel on Castle Hill (near Brighton). A figure of 38 Little Egret for Thorney Island last weekend was presumably a roost count.

THU 22 JULY

A message from Ian Calderwood makes it seem less likely that the majority of LITTLE EGRET will desert the Thorney Island roost in favour of the Elson Wood site at Gosport – the message also gives me a good clue to help pick out juvenile Egrets by the colour of their feet. He says "The Little Egrets seem to be visiting the heronry less and less, I only see one or two a day flying in now but most of the Egrets I have seen in the area have greenish yellow legs and feet which are the juveniles, I did see up to four together but they are usually in ones and twos. Lots of herons including juveniles are still in the area and still going in and out of the heronry. The number of redshanks was up to 50 today, around the estuary area with two Common Sandpipers, four on Tuesday and a Kingfisher. Around the lake, in the NE of Frater, the Coots are onto their third brood with Moorhen and two young, Mallard down to only one duckling and the same or another Kingfisher. On the field nearby we have had up to 30 Lapwing at high tide." Ian also asks if I know about a BITTERN seen at Titchfield Haven during the past week and the answer is no – but if you do please pass on the info. This seems a very early date but I see that Birds of Hampshire records two in July and two in August spread over the years from 1976 to 1991 – I suppose these are failed breeders which could not find a mate at their normal breeding grounds now desperately seeking one in a different reedbed, or could it be that there was a pair breeding at Titchfield which had agreed with the management not to do any booming in case there was a demand from the birders for the reserve to be open at night (only joking).

This evening I went to check out the Swans at Broadmarsh (still 80 there) and two things I saw reminded me of the disaster at Baffins Pond which Brian Fellows reported yesterday. The first was perhaps good news in that I saw and heard the first two flying CANADA GEESE for more than a month, indicating that maybe some of the 36 Canada Geese unaccounted for at Baffins may have been able to fly away before disaster struck. The second may have been bad news – I could only see about half the 40+ Tufted Duck I expected on the Budds Farm Pool, making me wonder if they too have been struck down by botulism

WED 21 JULY

Brian Fellows regular visit to Baffins Pond this afternoon found the shadow of death heavy on the pond – not in terms of corpses, for they are regularly removed by the city rangers, but in the shape of bold notices proclaiming a severe outbreak of BOTULISM 'affecting the wildfowl but unlikely to affect humans' and in the absence of 172 birds that were there on Brian's last visit. While some birds will have flown away (possibly to die elsewhere if they have already contracted the disease) the city rangers have removed 94 corpses among which were 43 Canada Geese, 33 Mallard and 15 Barnacle Geese. These latter seem to be the greatest loss from our point of view as the flock here were unusual 'hangers on' in the bird world (half tame, half wild). The only BARNACLE GEESE which Brian could see today were two adults with three tiny goslings whose chances of survival must be slim. Interestingly the loce EMPEROR GOOSE and the two SNOW GEESE have both survived so far. My only experience of Botulism affecting birds is that I know it to be a hazard to the gulls which feed on rubbish tips, and in past hot summers I have seen numerous gulls dead and dying around the IBM Lake. Brian says that the disease is unlikely to affect humans, and I am sure this is true in so far as people walking in the area are unlikely to suffer but the

disease does affect humans and you would be very unwise to handle the corpses without taking every precaution to avoid direct contact with them.

On a more cheerful note Emsworth Harbour had more colour and bird interest today with a GREENSHANK and 57 BLACK TAILED GODWIT back on the mud along with 2 Little Egret and other waders – still no ‘Silver Plover’ (summer plumaged Greys).

Brian Fellows has also passed me a message sent to him from someone who combines the roles of bird recorder for Greater Manchester with that of being a Jane Austen fan. Visiting Chawton for the AGM of the Jane Austen society she was delighted to find SPOTTED FLYCATCHERS (probably breeding) at the B & B where she stayed in Ropley. She also noted a moult flock of 55 Mute Swan at Old Alresford “on the mere by the Globe at Old Alresford” which I suspect means on the pond though I am not familiar enough with the place to know of the ‘Globe’.

MON 19 JULY

Mike Collins was fishing from a boat off Selsey yesterday and was surprised to see six COMMON SCOTETR flying east. I have no knowledge of their status off the Sussex coast in the summer but from the Birds of Hampshire I gather that they can be seen in unpredictable numbers throughout the year, and that while autumn movements from July onwards are generally to the west some birds do head east – perhaps, like Mike, they were ‘going fishing’ and had heard rumours of good fishing up channel.

This evening I accompanied Daphne Green and Maureen Coleman to Havant Thicket in the hope of NIGHTJAR and we were not disappointed, hearing two or three males churring and at least one female uttering a loud ‘Quip’ call while one bird gave good views in flight and worked the tree tops above us making the quiet and continuous ‘kip, kip, kip’ noise I heard on my last visit. The bonus this evening was to both hear and see (in brief silhouette) a baby Tawny Owl whose calls I can best describe as a cross between a whistle and a sneeze. When we first heard this noise it was accompanied each time by a sharp note from the female and it was difficult to tell whether the combined sound was coming from one bird but the female must have heard us coming and went quiet while the youngster continued making its calls, seemingly hardly able to fly and sometimes being on the ground, sometimes in the air – the only glimpse I got of it was fluttering near the branch of a tree and apparently failing to land on the branch it was aiming for and crashing down to the ground. (Strangely enough, when I got back to Havant and was walking up the road to my house, it looked as if a leaf blew across the road until I realised it was a mouse dashing across and then along the pavement near me)

This morning a family party of four SPOTTED FLYCATCHER appeared in Sonia Bolton’s garden at Stansted “dancing among the wires, trees, and bushes of the garden drinking/bathing in the bird bath”. It is just possible that these had nested locally, perhaps in Oak Copse opposite the house, but it is equally likely that they came from the distant north and are moving south as a family. I would draw the latter conclusion about this group and about the bird seen in Catherington churchyard last Saturday since there have been no reported sightings in either area throughout the breeding season.

Brian Fellows reports that there are still 58 Swans in the Emsworth area, including the one with a prominent ring and the Black Swan – this is roughly the same number as this time last year. Over the Slipper Mill Pond a couple of SWALLOWS were making lots of noise and chasing Black Headed Gulls after mobbing Brian who assumed they had a nest or young close at hand. The number of young Coot here and at Peter Pond has declined from around 13 chicks to 5 and someone has destroyed one of the nest boxes on one of the rafts but that had not deterred 2 Cormorant from using the raft. A pair of Swans (those recently on Peter Pond?) were in Dolphin Creek alongside the Slipper Mill pond.

PLANTS:

SUN 25 JULY

New flowers for me today were DODDER, SEA HOLLY and SALTWORT seen on Hayling. The Dodder in the Sinah Common Gorse had plenty of pretty pink flowers today but I can only detect one patch of it – if you want to find it go south from Ferry Road on the track into the gorse starting almost opposite the road into Sinah Warren and turn half right where it forks. This brings you into a grassy bay and the Dodder grows close to the edge of the grass in the south east segment of this semi circular bay, clothing the top of the gorse with a mass of fine brown threads looking like Spanish Seaweed. The Sea Holly has probably been flowering for some time and is probably at its best, but this plant never produces a mass of colour all at the same time, preferring – like Teasels – to open the flowers on one flower head at a time, spreading its season.. Sea Holly is fairly widespread and can be seen at Gunner Point (not much), in Sandy Point reserve – especially the south west corner – and along the Black Point causeway (where a

single plant of COTTON THISTLE catches the eye on the left as you turn north onto the straight section heading to the sailing club). SALTWORT (*Salsola kaoli*) was the most difficult to find. I looked first in the 'half fenced' area of sand dune east of the Sandy Point reserve fence but could not find any. I then turned onto the shingle where the path around the north of the reserve reaches the shore and found much more SEA KNOTGRASS than ever before but no Saltwort, eventually find a fair number of fresh plants at the northern end of this area of sand and shingle (north of the protective posts) and assume that the difficulty of finding it was because I was early in its season. I was hoping to check out the Chicory and Lucerne along the western shore of Mill Rythe bay on my way home but I had to choose between that and the two attractions of home (lunch and the Austrian Grand Prix), the latter winning.

SLENDER HARE'S EAR should be appearing on the scene at any time now but searches of the Langstone South Moors seawall recently and the west Hayling shore today produced no sightings – have you been more lucky?

FRI 23 JULY

The nature reserve meadow by the Pond Cottage at Stansted had my first PEPPER SAXIFRAGE on flower and a lovely mass of BETONY which is not new but nonetheless a magnificent sight. Another first flowering for me was COMMON HEMP-NETTLE which has come out en masse with much Heath Groundsel on recently cleared ground in the Broad Avenue of Stansted Forest at around SU 745113 little north of where the public path from Rowlands Castle to Forestside crosses this avenue that it is currently being greatly widened to suit its name of Broad Avenue and which runs south to the Main Avenue. Before reaching this point from the carpark I had managed to find just two flowers on the LESSER SKULLCAP which Maureen Coleman discovered a few years back when the compartment 11A had been coppiced and light was reaching the track on which many of these tiny plants grew (at roughly SU 748111). Now the chestnut is regrowing little light reaches the track here and the plants will soon rest for a few years. While in the forest I looked for Beech mast but could find very little and that only on mature trees, and I also noted the demise of the last tree flowering for the year with the ground covered with pale ropes of Sweet Chestnut flower.

WED 21 JULY

Today I visited Havant Thicket to check on the progress of the BROAD LEAVED HELLEBORINE plants and found them to be in excellent health with many flowers open but none as yet past its best. What's more the best specimen is very easy to find – just go to the forest gate opposite the end of Castle Road at Rowlands Castle, enter, and turn sharp left to follow the newly mown track running south right alongside the main road. As soon as the long straight track comes into sight look for a young Willow leaning into the track from the right about twenty yards down from the wooden fencing of the entrance. Go to this willow and you will currently find a superb plant flowering at the foot of the willow on its south side having been missed by a hair's breadth by the mowing machine clearing the path. If you want to test your skill as a finder of this orchid go back to the entrance and go west along the 'yellow brick road' for perhaps 100 yards until there is a well trodden path on your left leading into the pine trees. Turn in here and when about half way to the far side of the pines turn right where there is no path but less obstruction by brambles, etc, and search the area from here westward – you should find at least another half dozen plants flowering but they are scattered around the area, some growing up from brambles and at least one right up by the main track going west outside the pines.

I also went on the Catherington Village Pond to follow up what Gwynne Johnson had told me about the NEW ZEALAND PYGMY WEED (*Crassula helmsii*) flowering in it. Sure enough I found lots of this tiny 'stonecrop' and most of the plants had beautiful but minute pink stars of flowers. The pond was by now empty of water and its bottom drying out so the plants may soon wither.

TUE 20 JULY

This afternoon I cycled round part of the course of tomorrow evening's walk in the lower Ems Valley and found three puzzle plants. First I went to where the walkers will end their route as they come from the meadow footpath on the west of the river and go under the A27 road. When this new road was built I guess that a packet of wildflower seed was scattered over the south facing embankment around the footpath underpass as a mass of Oriental Poppies and *Lychnis Coronaria* (Rose Campion) grow here along with other unusual plants. My first puzzle was found here, above the centre of the underpass and adjacent to the remains of a large bush of Oriental Poppy. The plant in question was probably just CANADIAN FLEABANE but when I got close to it I noticed that a greyness which I had noticed from a distance was caused by great pubescence on the stems and leaves so when I got home I checked for hairy look-alikes to Canadian Fleabane and found that Guernsey Fleabane (*Conyza sumatrensis*) would answer the description, but if this were the latter plant it should have bigger flower heads (5-8mm wide rather than the 3-5mm of Canadian Fleabane) and should have tightly packed tiny hooked hairs on the edges of

its leaves rather than the longer, sparser, erect hairs of the Canadian. I will return to check these hairs, and must also check out the Guernsey Fleabane plant found earlier this year by Peter Selby on the north side the Ferry Road on Hayling, immediately to the west of the telephone box outside the Hayling Health Society 'village' on the west shore of the Kench.

The second of my puzzle plants was found close to the first, this time on the south side brickwork of the bridge that takes the path under the railway, and it was a FERN growing horizontally from a crack in the brickwork. I know this plant was not there last year as I found what was almost certainly the same species growing on the north side of the railway about this time last year and when I went back to check it out I found the whole brickwork had been 'cleaned' of all plants. I also know that young ferns can be difficult to identify, not just because they have no sori but because they can be different in shape to the mature plant, but this one (like the one I found last year) seems to have some significant features, the first of which is its rigidity. The very thin rhacis (leaf stem) comes out of the brickwork horizontally and terminates in a triangular 'leaf' measuring perhaps 10 cm to its tip and perhaps 6cm across the base of the triangle, the whole being equally rigid and stiff to the touch. The main divisions of the leaf (frond) are called pinnae and these are narrow, well spaced from each other along the rhacis, and curve forward at their tips. The second division of the frond is made up of the pinnules which occur along each side of a pinna, and in this fern they are smoothly lobed with no sharp points. The only fern which I can find which approaches this description is GYMNOCARPIUM ROBERTIANUM (Limestone Polypody) which the Flora of Hants believes to have occurred in the Hawkley area of the Hangers but which is now thought to be extinct in Hampshire though still known at one location in Sussex where it grows on chalk scree in an ash wood. If there are any fern enthusiasts out there please come and have a look at it before it is once more 'cleaned' by British Rail.

The third puzzle was solvable – when approaching Westbourne on the east of the river I arrived at the south end of the 'tow path' connecting Mill Lane to Westbourne church and stopped to look at the Lesser Water Parsnip (flowering profusely), the Skullcap growing from the brick wall above the water, and the Branched Bur-reed growing up from it. Where I stopped were tufts of tall grass which I thought might be Giant Fescue but I was puzzled by their 'hairy knees' (nodes bristling with hair like *Holcus mollis*). When I got a specimen home and looked at it closely I found more hair around the base of the leaf blades, and spikelets having three florets, the outer two of each three having bent awns on the back of their lemmas. To cut a long story short this was an example of False Oat Grass being false to its own description in almost every respect, luckily C E Hubbard allows for these eccentricities in the plant where Francis Rose's keys do not.

MON 19 JULY

I see that I forgot to mention the most significant item in Gwynne Johnson's news of yesterday – her discovery of a plant which, although it has been known in Hampshire since 1924, is still rare but increasing in the east of Hampshire. This is a small yellow flowered Balsam called IMPATIENS PARVIFLORA which grows in damp shady woodland. Gwynne's discovery was on private land but should serve as a reminder to us all that there are new discoveries to be made each year. This SMALL BALSAM has the advantage of being described in Francis Rose's Wildflower Key where he says it continues to flower from July to October.

INSECTS:

SUN 25 JULY

This evening Barry Collins told me that the summer brood of WALL BROWN are out on Thorney Island (I did not check the date and may be wrong in thinking he saw them today). I myself saw my first GRAYLING at Sandy Point today (they started to fly last Sunday 18 July) – sometimes these insects can be difficult to spot but today the first thing I saw as I looked over the reserve fence near the end of the promenade was one settling on a Sea Holly flower to be chased off by another, and later one flew right up to my legs and around them like a sniffing dog. In yesterday's sunshine Red Admiral, Peacock and Small Skipper were all seen on my Buddleia (very few butterflies on my two bushes so far this year). Cycling round Hayling this morning there was little butterfly variety – many Small White and Gatekeeper with some Meadow Brown, Large White and Small Skipper plus the occasional Red Admiral and Speckled Wood to add to the Grayling.

In the north west of Stansted Forest Brian Fellows saw a WHITE ADMIRAL today (around SU 745117) quite close to where I saw one on Friday – in previous years I have only seen them in the Groves, around the Ladies Walk and in Lyels Wood so maybe they are extending within the forest.

SAT 24 JULY

Mark Litjens has sent me this account of his visits today to both Old Winchester Hill and Whiteley by the Boltey Woods. He writes "I started off at Old Winchester Hill this morning and found it covered in CHALKHILL BLUES, quite a sight especially on the east slopes. Most of the butterflies looked fresh so I guess they have only just emerged in numbers. Also there are 29 DARK GREEN FRITILLARY, c80 Marbled White, good numbers of "small" Skippers, 9 Small Heath, 4 SMALL TORTOISESHELL (glad to see), 8 Brimstone and 1 Small Copper.

.....On to Whiteley where Brimstone were out in good numbers, a MIGRANT HAWKER looked as though it had just emerged and was resting on the bushes as were quite a few Common Darter. The lake by the Zurich building had 1 RUDDY DARTER along with a few Common Darter, Emperor Dragonfly, Black-tailed Skimmer, Azure, Blue-tailed, Large Red and Common Blue Damselfly. Common Blue are now out in small numbers here but "small" Skippers are still quite numerous."

Brian Fellows and the Evening Class group joined up with Pete Durnell who was leading a walk at Old Winchester Hill for Portsmouth members of the Wildlife Trust and they also remarked on the SMALL TORTOISESHELL (not yet extinct!) and on the colourful and very numerous SIX SPOT BURNET moths nectaring on Scabious and Knapweed – there are seven different species of Burnet moth to be found in Britain, and the Five Spot Burnet comes in two sub-species, but I think that Six-spot is by far the commonest and is the only one we are likely to see at this time of year (the downland form of the Five Spot is out in May and June only). The striped CINNABAR caterpillars were prominent on Ragwort – they are easy to spot but you can also still find the caterpillars of the Six Spot Burnet where there is Birds Foot Trefoil in the ground – even though the adult moths are now flying some of these small green caterpillars (with distinctive transverse bands of gold trimmed black) insist on staying as caterpillars for a second year and so overlap the emergence of the adults.

FRI 23 JULY

Ian Calderwood (see his news below) tells me that COMMON BLUE are just starting to appear again on the grass of the Naval Munitions Depot at Frater (Gosport) and this was one of sixteen butterfly species I saw in this morning's walk around Stansted Forest (I saw three males in the nature reserve Meadow and what was presumably a female near Stansted House). I was even more behind the times in this being my first encounter with SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY for the year but I enjoyed five males and one female of this species in four widely separated places around the forest (I always think of the males as the nearest thing we have to 'TIGERS' in our tame jungles and I was not disappointed in their rich colour and fast purposeful flight today). Strangely I saw only one WHITE ADMIRAL but I made up for that with sightings of both male and female fresh BRIMSTONES within a few yards of each other but both of them enjoying the nectar of Fleabane flowers to the exclusion of thoughts of mating. No such reticence on the part of a fresh pair of GREEN VEINED WHITE that were flying coupled. Both COMMA and PEACOCK were out but no sign of Small Tortoiseshell – will we see them in September? Other species seen were Gatekeeper, Meadow Brown and Ringlet, Large and Small Skipper, Large and Small White, Marbled White and Speckled Wood. No doubt there were Purple Hairstreaks for those with eyes to see them. Although the Stansted nature reserve ponds are said to be very good for dragonflies I only saw Emperor, a Hawker (probably Southern), and a mass of blue damselflies patrolling close to the surface of the Brick Kiln pond (presumably the Common Blue Damselfly)

The following message from Mark Litjens echoes my worries about the absence of SMALL TORTOISESHELL and confirms that WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAK are continuing to expand their range (perversely in a year when more English Elms than ever seem to have died). Mark says he "had a lunch time walk around Yew Hill today as the weather was sunny for the first time this week. White butterflies were prevalent as were Chalk-hill Blues, Small Skippers and Gatekeepers. Though Marbled Whites are nearly over but a new species for me at this site was at least 1 White-letter Hairstreak in the elms just outside the main reserve. Missing are Small Tortoiseshell, I haven't seen one this month yet where they were numerous this time last year."

THU 22 JULY

An email from Ian Calderwood gives the first news of the recent emergence of the summer COMMON BLUE butterflies at the Naval Munitions Depot, Frater, at Gosport where every oak now has its Purple Hairstreaks. It also tells me that there was another Butterfly Conservation visit to the site a fortnight ago (presumably July 10 or 11) which I guess Andrew Brookes was unable to attend as Ian tells me they saw both White Letter Hairstreak and (near the Fleetlands fence) at least one White Admiral.

Today I had a phone call from Grace Mitchell, known to local naturalists as the last secretary of the Portsmouth Natural History Society before its recent demise, to say that she had heard that a resident in a road separated from Farlington Marshes by the railway line, had found a BOG BUSH CRICKET in her garden. Whether this was a guess from 'looking it up in a book' or whether it was an informed

identification I do not know but I suggested that perhaps Martin Baggs or Graham Roberts who both live fairly close to the find might be able to go and confirm the identification. Chinery tells me that the species is uncommon on Britain but is active during the day in bogs and damp heathland from July to November.

MON 19 JULY

Yesterday Nik Knight was walking from Stansted to West Marden and back with his family and en route through Watergate Hanger they "saw a female PURPLE EMPEROR butterfly. We are certain of the identification because we had a clear view of the eyespot under the wing when it was settled on vegetation. Also we noted the large size and strong flight up to the tree tops. Rosemary spotted it first." Following the remarks I made on July 13 about his first sighting of an OAK EGGAR moth at Goodwood Mike Collins today saw another which seemed to bear out the theory which I had read which says that only males of this species fly during the day, endlessly searching for females which only fly at night. Today, in Southleigh Road in north Emsworth, Mike saw a dark brown male fly into a porch and then found it mating with a light brown larger female which had presumably been spending the day hidden in the porch.

Andrew Brookes and the Portsmouth Area group of Butterfly Conservation members missed both Purple Emperor and White Admiral in their outing to the "helicopter repair base at Fleetlands, Gosport on Sunday to search for butterflies. A dozen species were found, including many Purple Hairstreaks, Common Blues and Marbled Whites. The small area of ancient woodland, full of large Oak and Ash was a disappointment, however, and none of the anticipated White Admirals were found."

The appearance of a fresh SPECKLED WOOD in my garden, where I have not seen one for weeks, backs Mark Litjens account yesterday of a new brood emerging. Another newcomer to my garden has been a female Large White. A phone call from Heather Mills added further confirmation of Mark's sighting of freshly emerged BRIMSTONE yesterday – Heather also saw at least one at Old Winchester Hill.

An old tree stump which remains in the ground for several years can suddenly produce a surprising crop of STAG BEETLES and it seems this is currently happening in the Woodbury Avenue part of Langstone close to the Langstone roundabout. John Goodspeed passes on a message from a lady who has been seeing the beetles each day for some time and yesterday had two females in the garden together – hopeful they too will find rotting tree-stumps in which to perpetuate their kind though the chances are often stacked against the beetles as they need to remain as huge white grubs eating the rotting wood for up to four years – a long time for a tidy gardener to leave an 'eyesore' in the garden. If you hear anyone threatening to root out an old stump try to dissuade them ...

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 24 JULY

At the west end of the Thorney Great Deepes this evening, where I rested my bike against the foot of the seawall in order to look at the Egret roost, plants of Black Knapweed, grasses, and other vegetation rising above the baking hot ground had a good collection of the tiny POINTED SNAILS (*Cochlicella acuta*) which had climbed to places where the slightest wind was available to reduce the heat which threatens to fry them if they remain on ground exposed to the midday sun. They have 'spire shaped' shells with a whitish back ground and grey or gingery stripes and are at most one centimetre long – their preferred habitat is the sea shore and they are uncommon along our coast.

FRI 23 JULY

A message from Nik Knight has given me the address of an excellent website to answer all your questions about BATS, particularly how to care for grounded bats until help arrives. It has pages on the status of the bat species and details of where and when you'll find them, what to do if you think you have a bat colony in your roof and much more. The one thing that rather surprised me was that, knowing we have a thriving Bat Group in the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, when I clicked on details of 'your local bat group' for Hampshire and various other southern counties I arrived at Andrew Watson's personal website (Nik Knight once had a home made bat detector in a tin biscuit box that had been built by Andrew Watson – nowadays technology has advanced) and found that as well as Bats this website would give me information on Finnish Stamps and Windsurfing. It looks as if our local bat group needs to make itself know in cyberspace.

In addition to the BAT WEBSITE (<http://www.bats.org.uk/>) Nik has passed me various other information such as the address of The Bat Conservation Trust at 15 Cloisters House, 8 Battersea Park Road, London SW8 4BG (Tel: 0171 627 2629 Fax: 0171 627 2628 and email: enquiries@bats.org.uk). There is also a

telephone BAT HELPLINE on 0171 627 8822.

Yesterday in Havant Thicket I came on large yellow RUSSULA toadstools and today in Stansted saw my first Russula with a plum coloured cap, and I would think that if we get some thundershowers after the next few days of settled hot weather we can expect a good number of the larger toadstools to appear. Also in Stansted I disturbed a ROE doe with a small but sturdy fawn which raced off to shelter further into the woods – I was impressed by the rich red colour of the doe's summer coat.

WED 21 JULY

Two minor items may be worth a mention – the first concerning Squirrels. My sister in law has just arrived from Bedfordshire and mentioned (in connection with our Albino Squirrels in this area) that there has in the past been a small population of BLACK SQUIRRELS in that county but that she has not seen or heard of any recently – one book I have mentions this and says that ‘black varieties of Grey Squirrel from North America were released in Bedfordshire early in the 20th century’. Locally Cath Cooper told me of unusual behaviour of a Grey Squirrel here in Havant – she saw the Squirrel coning vertically down the trunk of a tree and stopping there to raise its head away from the trunk and “bark” repetitively. She could not work out the cause of the barking but she did note that the Squirrel had not splayed its legs outwards to maintain its position, they were still under the body as if it were running along a level surface.

The second observation was of a very fast moving MOUSE running along my road and along the pavement as I came home late on Monday night in the dark – at first I thought a gust of wind was blowing a leaf across the road, then I saw the tiny creature running along the pavement. I don't know the species or the reason for its presence (perhaps it had been brought from elsewhere by a cat and had escaped), but I did wonder if the warm weather had encouraged a population explosion and that we would soon find mice everywhere, invading our houses and no doubt looking for cliffs to leap off into the sea.

WEEK 28: JULY 12 - 18

BIRDS:

SUN 17 JULY

John Gowen was out around the South Moors area today and had several interesting sightings – the best being that of a KINGFISHER flying south down the Brockhampton stream from the old mill site where the stream cascades down from the brickwork of the old mill wheel just upstream of the footbridge. Someone who also saw it said he had seen it a couple of days ago and at a guess this is the same bird that Kevin Stouse saw flying up the Langbrook last Tuesday (July 13). It is probable that this bird has come from inland (a youngster or a breeder for whom the season is now over) but it could be a local breeder that has been here through the early summer – if so, where did it nest, the Hermitage Stream site was almost definitely not used. The idea that one did remain in the area is backed by an undated recent sighting (June?) hereabouts by Alistair Martin.

John also spotted the beginnings of a GREAT CRESTED GREBE FLOCK off the South Moors. We have probably had a few in Langstone Harour through the early summer but John saw 19 birds together today following the dozen seen off Farlington Marshes by Kevin Stouse's party last Wednesday evening (July 14). Last year 14 turned up here on July 14 (same date as Kevin's birds) and the flock had grown to 24 by early August. 7 summer plumages BLACK TAILED GODWIT were back on the mud and six well grown young SHELDUCK were in the Hermitage Stream mouth, but the only cygnets in sight were once more the two I saw on Broadmarsh slipway on Friday (two families of four and one of six cygnets seem to have vanished).

Here in Havant Flying Ants drew a cloud of at least 200 gulls (Black Headed and Common) over my house in the afternoon. In the evening up to 35 SWIFTS circled and screamed after a couple of days with only ten birds each evening. Brian Fellows had up to 40 over Emsworth last night when Havant was quiet and this could support a theory of small numbers of nesting birds that visit their nests whenever the weather allows, plus a larger social group not tied to nests but faithful to a general area, one night joining the Emsworth nesters and on the next evening performing over Havant.

Other sightings by Brian Fellows include 13 BACK TAILED GODWIT at Langstone, where the local Swan family are still intact, and a Sparrowhawk flyng north over Emsworth

More MED GULL sightings have been reported from Hayling by Nick Green who saw an adult at the Ferry Inn on July 9, 1 adult plus a 3rd summer (thin black linings to outer primaries) at the Ferry Inn on July 10 and one adult in full summer plumage at Beachlands funfair on July 11.

Recent sightings reported on the Sussex OS website include a note of the Farlington SPOTTED CRAKE still showing on July 16 in the afternoon, the OSPREY still at east Thorney last week-end (July 12) and one or two ROSEATE TERN at Pagahm Harbour on July 14. It seems that at least two ROSEATE TERN have been moving around in our area this summer, and birds seen from Thorney by Barry Collins and over the Langstone islands by John Badley in recent weeks are probably the same couple now at Pagham. More distant records were of a GRASSHOPPER WARBLER at Brighton on July 14 and a PURPLE HERON at Rye on July 9.

SAT 17 JULY

Early in the morning with the sky still overcast the local breeding Swifts and House Martins were enjoying their insect breakfast when the Martins told me danger was about. They remained circling high in the air, but gathered into a tight bunch, giving the alarm calls for what seemed like a minute before I saw what was worrying them – the shimmering wings of a falcon high in the air and heading directly towards us from the east, the long, pointed, rapidly beating wings stiffening into the characteristic ‘giant Swift’ shape of a HOBBY as it glided on in its straight line flight, clearly not hunting but making good progress west, with minimum effort, over 200 feet up. It went right over my head but all I could see was the arrow shaped silhouette against the high white overcast. The Martins must have detected it when it was about a mile away to judge by the time before it came into my sight.

FRI 16 JULY

John Badley was watching over his reserve from the top of Budds Mound when I arrived there this afternoon and, as well as pointing out to me a falcon perched on North Binness (his disruptive SAKER has been elsewhere for a couple of months but recently flew over the islands without stopping and this bird was too distant to identify and could well have been a Peregrine), he also gave me details of breeding success on the islands. MED GULLS have done well, with the same number of nesting pairs as last year (14 pairs) but with an increased count of young to 17 chicks – one of the adults flew past us while he was telling me this news. SANDWICH TERN have shown a great drop in nesting pairs from around 150 last year to only 59 this year but their success rate has been good with 63 young birds raised. LITTLE TERN are not doing well, with only 91 pairs nesting and only 24 young raised (but I think this excludes the six pairs which John tells me nested on the island in the Oysterbeds lagoon, raising several young). Summer high tides, which in some years are a major factor in reducing nesting success as they wash out nests that are too low on the shore, have this year been kind to the birds. John also told me that only one pair of Swans nested on the islands so the origin of two or three of the families seen at Broadmarsh recently remains a mystery.

The SWAN COUNT at Broadmarsh today was 81 birds, including one pair with just two cygnets which I did not recognize, but excluding two Swans on the Budds Farm pools and three pairs with families that are normally present. On Budds Farm pools the Tufted Duck were living up to their reputation as late breeders there were three large families of tiny ducklings present and one of mature ducklings. One Shelduck was also present.

John Gowen also visited Budds Farm and Langstone this afternoon and we both admired the new woodwork of the footbridge over the mill sluice – the County Council footpath team doing the work assured me that it was just business as usual and not a special welcome gift to the new owners of the Mill who took over from the Storks this week. Going on round the pond until the Wade Court yew came in sight we got even more enjoyment from the ‘fairies on the Christmas Tree’ spectacle of roosting EGRETS and HERONS. John counted 12 Egrets and I saw 5 Heron, and there may well have been more (I had also seen one Egret on the South Moors Tamarisk pool).

This morning Dave Mead rang to tell me that he had just had good views of a SPOTTED CRAKE which had arrived at Farlington Marshes yesterday and was showing well at the lake today. A rather drab SPOTTED REDSHANK was also present and Dave passed on news from a third party of a small flock of CROSSBILL seen at Acres Down in the New Forest yesterday.

THU 15 JULY

Kevin Stouse led his scheduled Wednesday evening walk around Farlington Marshes on a rather dull and windy evening. His message describing the walk tell me that they saw 12 DUNLIN, a pair of TEAL, and a pair of SHELDUCK with two youngsters on the lake. They also saw both Sparrowhawk and Kestrel carrying prey north and saw a dozen Great Crested Grebes with four Little Egret in the harbour, and there were good views of both Reed and Sedge Warbler.

Here in Havant this evening with much better weather the normal aerial display by Swifts did not occur – until fairly late in the evening I was wondering if the birds had left but eventually about ten birds could be seen going quietly about their business – very different from the screaming crowd of 30 to 40 birds we have seen recently.

A message from Mike Collins describes how he watched two Sparrowhawk soaring over Goodwood last Tuesday (July 13) – one high in the air and the other calling to it from lower down. As the flew around a Buzzard also appeared on the scene high above the and Mike wonders if the noise was triggered by the presence of the Buzzard – as I did not hear it I cannot say, but this is the time when young Sparrowhawks can be expected to make lots of noise as they try to persuade their parents to bring them an endless supply of food.

WED 14 JULY

A new species for the British list is said to have set out on a north westerly course from Bembridge at 07:45 this morning, and as far as I know it followed it never arrived on the mainland. This was a BLACK WINGED or BLACK SHOULDERED KITE (*Elanus caeruleus*). According to Brian Fellows it is “about half the size of a Red Kite and about the same size as a Sparrowhawk which might be the most likely confusion species. It is mainly found in Spain and North Africa and is non-migratory, though some individuals wander, though not, so far as I am aware, to Britain (as yet).” No comment on whether any captive birds are kept in Britain.

More than 100 STARLINGS invaded Emsworth today according to Brian Fellows – I wonder if these are part of a larger flock using the Thorney reed beds as a roost and coming into the nearest town to grab some breakfast? At this time of year I would expect them to be finding plenty of food in the country but I guess they might be hedging their bets by clearing the local gardens before heading off to the fields.

TUE 13 JULY

The KINGFISHER is back on the Langbrook Stream which separates Langstone village from the South Moors, where Kevin Stouse flushed it this morning. This is not the first Kingfisher to return to local waters – Brian Fellows saw one at Thorney Little Deeps on July 2 and Alistair Martin saw one on the Brockhampton stream even earlier. In the mouth of the stream the Swan family from Langstone pond was present with all seven cygnets, allaying fears raised by Brian Fellows last Friday when he could only see six. Other things seen by Kevin this morning were six Grey Heron off Langstone (as with the Kingfisher this is the first observation of a typical non-breeding season sight), and a COMMON SANDPIPER at Budds Farm pools where the two Shelduck are still present with no ducklings to guard. He did not see or hear the Green Sandpiper which I suspect is in the area and which I think I saw at Budds Farm yesterday, but my confidence in my sighting is supported by Brian Fellows hearing one flying over Langstone last Friday.

A phone call tonight from Pam Charles concerning dead and dying Frogs in her Emsworth garden pond also brought good news of a third BARN OWL that you might see hunting at the present time. We already know of chances to see this lovely bird at Thorney Great Deeps east end, and near the ‘Radar Station’ at Funtington, and Pam tells me that a bird which has been seen in previous years along the road south from Bosham towards the Itchenor Ferry flew towards her as she was walking there last Wednesday (July 7), only veering off when less than 20 yards from her. If my memory serves me this bird is thought to be based in buildings at Southwood Farm, very close to where the road leaves the shore south of Bosham.

Brian Fellows today cycled up the Ems valley as far as Ell Bridge (corruption of Eel Bridge?) on the Emsworth Common Road before going west to Aldsworth and Brick-kiln ponds. Other than a Yellowhammer singing near Ell Bridge the only other item of note was a flock of more than 50 HOUSE MARTIN over Brick Kiln pond. Brian wonders if the Martins came from the nesting colony on Stansted House, and I hope he is right and that they are flourishing there but such a flock suggests to me that these are non-breeding birds already thinking of moving south.

MON 12 JULY

Geese seem more tolerant than most bird species towards strangers in their midst, and in any large flock you are quite likely to see one or more oddities, either hybrids or complete strangers – this is certainly true of the type of flock that collects at somewhere like Baffins Pond, or in one of the large flocks of Canada Geese that are now in their moulting flocks and cannot easily get away from each other even if they wish to. I suppose this may be a function of the bird’s tolerance for humans and the human environment – town pigeons share with the geese this characteristic tolerance of strangers, as do chickens on a farm. These remarks are provoked by a note from Chris Fairhead who was in the Cambridge area last week and tells me that “in Ely one evening there was a procession of about 80 Canada Geese, which one by one jumped into the water and swam along the river in single file. This in itself was quite a sight, but one of the geese was a Greylag. Neither it, nor the others, seemed to take any notice that it was a different species, and it took its turn in the queue with the others”.

There were 86 SWANS in the low water channel of Broad Lake between Budds Mound and Long Island this afternoon. I could not see the family with four cygnets that is often in the Brockhampton Stream but the Bedhampton Mill family (still four well grown cygnets) were back on their Mill Pool and the family with

six small cygnets which must have come from the islands was under the Harts Farm Way bridge. On Budds Farm pools there were 46 or more Tufted Duck plus two sets of very young ducklings (one seemed to have eight ducklings but they would never stop diving to be counted). In addition to the Coot and Mallard I believe there was a female Shoveler in this distance. Two Shelduck with no young were still on the east pool, and on the concrete at the back of the west pool a GREEN SANDPIPER (to judge by its very dark back and contrasting white underparts), insisted on preening with its back to me. As I left I also heard the piping of a COMMON SANDPIPER.

News from Emsworth does not account for the increase in the Broadmarsh Swan flock – Brian Fellows still has 57 at the Mill Pond (and there may be another 15 along at Nore Barn). The Black Swan is still present but the main news is of the drama of a disabled duckling hatching in his neighbours garden, with telephoned instructions from Brent Lodge on how to transport it to the water of the Mill Pond – we hope it survives.

A further account of the fascinating behaviour of SWIFTS comes from Brian Fellows, who says “Enjoyed watching the Emsworth Swift display again tonight (Sunday). It really is quite fascinating. It began at 20.45 and finished at 21.35 – about 5 minutes later than last night. Main flight behaviours: flickering and gliding when feeding, low fast flight when screaming around the houses. I counted 9 low screaming display sessions at about 5 minute intervals, during which the birds would be flying high and mainly feeding, with some chasing and screaming. Screaming displays involved between 6 and 16 birds, though I would estimate about 25 BIRDS were in the air at any one time. Towards the end of the period I noted 3 examples of a tightly packed group of birds flying high – going to their aerial roost? I tried to observe the nest hole in my neighbour’s roof throughout the period and recorded one bird leaving at 20.35 and one entering at 20.42, though I could well have missed others.” I too have seen tightly packed bunches of Swifts circling into invisibility with height and dusk and suspect that they sleep in this formation, perhaps with a brain half awake so that it can make and respond to the sounds which keep the pack together, but I have also noticed, as I think Brian did, the birds coming together high in the air in this slower, tightly packed, formation several times during an evening display (this is when I attempt to count them). Within a minute of slowing to this tight ‘conger chain’ the exuberance of the birds seems to overcome them and they break off to make their wild dives and soarings in one, twos and small groups which vanish out of sight only to meet up again over an agreed spot just like aircraft at an air display – the only thing they lack is the coloured smoke. One thing I would warn Brian about if he tries to investigate their nest holes – they are afflicted with large, black, crab-like ticks which I would not want to get on my flesh (I can remember them falling from the high wooden ceiling of the ‘big dormitory’ when I was at school and landing on my bed – much nastier than having someone put a slow-worm between the sheets).

PLANTS:

SUN 18 JULY

Gwynne Johnson today gave me news of the Evening Class visit to Catherington Down yesterday when they found the Dropwort going over but 5 FROG ORCHIDS on show. They were also impressed by the abundant plant life in Catherington village pond – Gwynne specially remarked on the MARES TAIL (if you want to see this in an abundant natural state have a look at Aldsworth Pond) and CRASSULA HELMSII, the NEW ZEALAND PYGMY WEED, with which I am not familiar. This latter plant is apparently dumped from aquaria and is becoming a menace in many waters but it is not described or illustrated in Francis Rose’s key or in older books so I must learn to recognize it using the description and line drawing in Stace’s Flora. I suspect I overlooked it in favour of the prettier PARROT’S FEATHER which is also in this pond and is I think a similar menace in some ponds.

Pete Selby tells me that he is only aware of PHACELIA TANACETIFOLIA (see July 13) from six records in the north west of Hampshire and one personal sighting near Fordingbridge. On the matter of why it is planted he agrees with Stace and Chris Palmer that it is normally planted to attract bees, and not likely to be found en masse as an alternative to chemical pesticides (by attracting Hoverflies and their aphid eating larvae)

Visiting my eldest son who lives in Newtown near Soberton I made my annual check on the SAW-WORT which grows there and found just one plant covered with buds in a ditch beside Ingoldfield Lane at SU 614134 (almost opposite but a few yards west of the entrance to ‘Southend Plain’)

I often hope to see WORMWOOD but every plant I look at turns out to be MUGWORT (or Chinese Mugwort which is not uncommon in the Broadmarsh area and some other places). The Hampshire Flora indicates that it has been found in the Bedhampton tetrad (SU 7006) and in the Milton Common tetrad (SU 6600) so please let me know if you find any Mugwort which not only has silky hairs both on top of

as well as below the leaf, and has yellow petalled flowers where Mugwort is brown – it is of course very aromatic.

FRI 16 JULY

This afternoon I visited the stream which flows alongside Brookside Road in Bedhampton (eventually flowing into Bedhampton Mill Pond). Here MONKEY FLOWER grows wild in the stream and you can compare the plants and flowers of FOOLS WATER CRESS with LESSER WATER PARSNIP (this is the only Havant site I know of for the latter plant – the nearest other site being by Westbourne Church as far as I know). Later, by the Hermitage Stream, I found sizeable WILD PLUMS on trees and on the ground.

THU 15 JULY

This morning I took a walk around Havant and found the first edible BLACKBERRIES of the season along with flowers on PRICKLY LETTUCE and an unexpected plant of STICKY GROUNDSEL growing in my own road. Behind the Fire Station I was interested to find several plants of Prickly Lettuce with the wavy edged leaves that I associate with Great Lettuce – I will have to keep an eye on those plants and check their seeds

A message from John Goodspeed speaks of Round Headed Rampion being found (not by him) in flower on Portsdown, and then another message suggests that this plant now longer occurs on Portsdown. I would have thought that it did but I cannot find any record of it for my own visits to the hill last summer – do you know if and where it can be found?

TUE 13 JULY

Today a fascinating and baffling new plant entered my world. The story started several days ago when a lady who is a great Rambler asked me if I could identify a flower she had seen on Walderton Down beside the footpath at around SU 791102, and today I went to see if I could solve this mystery. I found nothing corresponding to the description I thought I had been given but did find lots of FOOL'S PARSLEY in field edges, and a mass of some species of CORNSALAD among the acres of Poppies flowering at the top of the down (all white flowered and I suspect Valerianella dentata rather than the comoner V. locusta or carinata). What really excited me was that, lurking among the acres of Poppies, were half a dozen widely scattered examples of a plant which I had never seen before but which had such obvious characteristics that I thought I would identify it in no time when I got home to my books. These plants were erect to 50cm or more, and sometimes quite bushy with additional flowering stems arising from leaf axils on the main stem. At the end of each stem was a cluster of cymes, each uncurling like a tongue to allow flower after flower to hold pride of place while it was open. The flowers immediately reminded me of Vipers Bugloss but they were a pale lilac in colour. The leaves, however, were nothing like those of any member of the Borage family, being much more like the leaves of the Upright Hedge Parsley that lined the field edge. I must have spent an hour going through every possible plant (within the Borage tribe) in Stace's comprehensive flora before I gave up and rang Eric Clement, the authority on alien plants who happens to live in Alverstoke at Gosport. He immediately told me that I should have been looking on page 539 when I had been starting at page 540, and that the plant was called PHACELIA TANACETIFOLIA. He went on to say that this plant is now being widely planted by farmers as a natural form of Aphid control (and has additional advantages in enriching the soil when it is ploughed back at the end of the season) – the way the aphid control works is that this plant is especially attractive to Hoverflies, and their larvae are great eaters of aphids.

MON 12 JULY

The field along the north side of the Bedhampton Mill pool, between the pool and the public path by the railway, has in the past earned from me the name of the "Vervain Field" and it is once more living up to its reputation – although there are coarse weeds in it the small of them have sunk in the sea of ice blue which must closely resemble a Lavender Field. Well worth seeing.

INSECTS:

SUN 18 JULY

GRAYLING are on the wing at Sandy Point on Hayling where Maureen Coleman saw 15 (I think that is what she said) today. Last year the first was seen on July 14 (but it was out on July 8 in 1997 and July 4 in 1996).

Mark Litjens also saw GRAYLING today, seeing 4 in the Hatchet Pond area. As usual Mark has had a busy week-end and his message reads "Saturday morning spent an hour or so around Whiteley pastures. Purple Hairstreaks are now out in numbers, there was 1/2 flitting around every Oak tree. SPECKLED WOOD are now out in number again, we've had a couple out in garden for over a week. Gatekeepers and

Ringlet are also numerous with BRIMSTONE starting to emerge again. In the afternoon I visited Swanwick NR by the new air control centre looking for Dragonflies and Damselflies. The pool by the visitors centre was full of Common Blue Damselflies, Black-tailed Skimmers and 5 Emperor Dragonflies with the odd Azure and Blue-tailed Damselflies still. I was surprised to find 5 RED-EYED DAMSELFLIES on one pool, I wonder how widespread these are. Also there: Peacock, Purple Hairstreak

.....Sunday I started at Puttles Bridge in the New Forest, which is 2-3 miles west of Brockenhurst. Steve Brooks book "Field guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of GB and Ireland" mentions this site for White-legged Damselfly. Walking through the heather besides Ober Water I did find 4 WHITE-LEGGED DAMSELFLIES, 1 male and 3 female, but they were far from numerous as Steve suggested. Also there were plenty of Small Red Damselflies (mainly female), Keeled Skimmers, Silver-studded Blue and Large Skipper. I stopped at one spot by the stream and watched 1 Golden-ringed Dragonfly patrolling that area of the stream and a mature male Southern Hawker, which kept dipping into the water. This does seem an odd behaviour though I expect there is an explanation.

.....On to Hatchet Pond/Hatchet Moor where again Common Blue Damselflies were numerous. Emperor Dragonflies patrolled over most of the ponds, Black-tailed Skimmers and Common Darters around most of the edges. On the pools around Hatchet Moor I found 4 mature male EMERALD DAMSELFLIES with the Common Blue. Keeled Skimmers seemed to be everywhere. Also GRAYLING have now emerged, I saw 4 around the Hatchet Pond/Moor area."

My garden Buddleia have been flowering for a week or more but not until today that have I seen any butterflies on them – today a PEACOCK settled to nectar but the Gatekeepers and at least one Green Veined White preferred other plants. I have not seen Holly Blue in my garden for several days but there was one in my son's garden at Newtown near Soberton today (also Small Skipper). Yesterday evening Tony Gutteridge told me he had recently seen White Admiral on Bow Hill above Kingley Vale. Yesterday morning a COMMA spent some time moving among nettles in my garden but I could not detect it egg laying.

FRI 16 JULY

The new issue of the English Nature magazine arrived yesterday and I was much interested in an article by Steve Brooks about his interest in dragonflies (Steve is the author of a Field Guide to the Dragonflies and Damselflies of Great Britain which has been highly acclaimed). One fact which was news to me, and which struck me as fascinating, was that in his special study of Downy Emerald dragonflies Steve discovered that the males have a rota system for sex. The lucky male whose turn it is to have a go patrols a selected bay of a pond for around 20 to 30 minutes and if a female arrives while he is there he takes her off into the treetops where mating can continue for 90 minutes. If no female shows up during his allotted 'shift' he retires from the scene and another male takes over, and so on through the day. Although there are probably many males in the area there is never more than one 'on duty' at any time, and each male remains on duty for roughly the same time. Mark Litjens tells me that the Southern Hawker has a similar rota system – how on earth did it originate?, how do the males time their shifts?, and how do they know whose turn it is (when one finishes just one turns up to take over)? Mark tells me that he carries both Steve Brooks book and Dan Powell's "Guide to the Dragonflies of GB" when he goes dragonfly hunting and finds them both invaluable. Their sex life may seem orderly but when it comes to eating it seems they grab the first thing that comes with their reach. Mark goes on to say "Last Sunday at Hatchet pond I found a sheltered spot out of the sun, parked myself down and watched them flying around. The Chasers were trying to take out the Skimmers. When a 4 spot Chaser got hold of a Skimmer by the tail the Emperor joined in until the Skimmer eventually freed itself."

THU 15 JULY

Mike Collins tells me that he saw what he believes to have been an OAK EGGAR on the wing at Goodwood last Tuesday (July 13). The date is about right for their emergence, but if it was one it is likely to have been a male as I understand these fly freely during the day, never abandoning their search for females, but the females are said to be strictly nocturnal – I wonder what happens if a male finds one during the day? Mike also found a dead HUMMING BIRD HAWK MOTH.

Here in Havant I saw a single COMMA, but otherwise it was just Gatekeepers, Small Skippers, Marbled Whites, Meadow Browns and various white species (Small White for certain).

TUE 13 JULY

News of last week-end's insect observations comes from Mark Litjens who saw the first DARK GREEN FRITILLARY and female CHALKHILL BLUES on the wing but failed to spot DAVID ATTENBOROUGH officially opening the extended MAGDALEN HILL DOWN butterfly reserve at Winchester.. Mark's news reads as follows "Saturday (July 10) started at Yew Hill Butterfly reserve

finding Marbled White and Ringlet still very numerous with more Meadow Brown and Gatekeeper out now. Since the initial Chalk-hill Blue of last Monday a few more had now emerged including a few females. Also Small skippers had emerged in good numbers during the week. One surprise was a Black-tailed Skimmer and Southern Hawker on the footpath to Yew Hill from Oliver's Battery.

.....After Yew Hill we walked along the Itchen Navigation from Shawford and found Banded Demoiselle again very numerous. Stopping near a large Buddleia we found 4 SCARLET TIGER feeding on the Buddleia flowers confirming my query of last week.

.....Sunday I spent in the New Forest starting in the Crockford area. Silver-studded Blue are now numerous along with Large Skipper and Small Heath. One surprise was a DARK GREEN FRITILLARY feeding on the heather just north of the eastern side of Crockford bridge. Keeled Skimmer seemed less numerous than last week in this area along with Golden-ringed Dragonfly, Common Darter, Southern and Small Red Damselfly. A mature male Broad-bodied Chaser showed well in a sheltered area.

.....On to Hatchet Moor I found a female Emerald Damselfly with small numbers of Small Red and Common Blue Damselfly.

.....By the time I arrived at Hatchet Pond the temperature was in the low 20s and plenty of Dragonflies were flying: Emperor Dragonfly, Common Blue, Small Red, Large Red Damselfly, Keeled and Black-tailed Skimmer, Broad-bodied and Four Spotted Chaser, Common Darter (some mature males), Downy Emerald, Common Hawker.”

Another person who has seen SCARLET TIGER moths is Simon Woolley who sent the following to Brian Fellows. “Here in Winchester, Scarlet Tigers have been flying since 28th June, though in quite poor numbers”

MON 12 JULY

Andrew Brookes tells me that the summer brood of HOLLY BLUE were out as early as July 2 when he saw a couple on Horsea Island along with the White Letter Hairstreaks. This weekend Andrew received permission from the developers of the Priddy's Hard site at Gosport to walk around that area – he found the oaks full of PURPLE HAIRSTREAK and many Marbled White on the grassland and no doubt carried away from his visit a feeling of sadness that this unusual site, with its naval history and its recent status as an island of the natural world in the congested Gosport townscape, will soon become another housing estate in which every attempt is made by the developers and new residents to replace everything natural and old with the latest products from a mail order catalogue (the name ‘Great Universal Stores’ carries the appropriate ring of world wide sameness that is enveloping our planet). Andrew made a wiser choice on Sunday, walking in what is still I think a rural area around Durley, going through the fringes of a large area of woodland appropriately called Greenwood which is one of the relatively few places in south east Hampshire that I have not walked. I can remember walking from Bishops Waltham via Tangier Farm towards Durley but then turning south east to Durley Mill and following the old railway line back into Bishops Waltham, and I see that you could make what is likely to be a pleasant five mile walk starting on the same path but crossing Durley Street (the road, not the hamlet) to follow footpaths all round the periphery of this Greenwood to return along the same track on which you set out. At this time of year Andrew found both SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY and WHITE ADMIRAL in the woods, and no doubt there is plenty of other interest to be found in the fields and hedges.

In my garden today ten GATEKEEPER were flying where three is usually a good number, and if that is repeated across the countryside there will be more Gatekeepers than gates. A single Holly Blue and Small White were no surprise but I was pleased to have to guide a SMALL TORTOISESHELL out of the house into the fresh air. At least one Red Admiral crossed my path while I was cycling at Bedhampton this afternoon.

This evening a group of Havant members of the Wildlife Trust were invited to a splendid summer evening at Gwynne Johnson's house in the Meon valley and as the sun set someone asked what were the large flying insects circling the tops of the full grown trees (Limes?) which could be clearly seen through binoculars to be some type of flying beetle. My immediate thought was of COCKCHAFERS but then I thought that it was too late in the summer for a display of what many people call ‘May Bugs’. Without the evidence of seeing one of the insects clearly I think they must have been “SUMMER CHAFERS” which Michael Chinery says ‘swarm round deciduous trees, mainly in dry places, in June and July’ During the evening I was told by Jo Herman, who lives close to Havant Thicket, that she had within the past few days counted 87 GLOW-WORMS in the Thicket. Another piece of insect info came from Chris Fairhead, who recently called in at the Shell Garage at Whicher's Gate where the main roads from Emsworth and Havant meet at Rowlands Castle. On the ground was a brightly coloured moth which had probably been hit by a car and was unable to fly and Chris was able to make certain that it was a GARDEN TIGER MOTH.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

TUE 13 JULY

Hot weather at this time of year inevitably brings stories of FROGS dying in droves, usually in and around a pond which they left sometime ago after spawning. When people see this their first re-action is that there is a problem with the water in the pond whereas the problem is the dreaded Red Leg disease which has attacked the frogs wherever they may be (in gardens or fields) and the frogs, feeling very 'hot and bothered' return to their pond to seek relief in cool water. Unfortunately neither the pond water nor anything else can cure the disease and the frogs die where they happen to be (in or around the pond). If the dead bodies are left they will almost certainly spread the disease and pollute the water (carnivorous Newts still in the pond will not benefit from nibbling the dead corpses). So if this disease does strike almost the only thing you can do is to ensure that the corpses are disposed of as quickly as possible after death – ideally they should be burnt but if that is impracticable then they should be put into as durable a plastic bag as possible, sealed and buried.

WEEK 27 JULY 5 - 11

BIRDS

- 11/07 Summer plumaged BLACK TAILED GODWITS arrive back in Emsworth Harbour earlier than last year.
- 10/07 SWIFTS now giving great displays over their nest sites
- 10/07 COMMON SANDPIPER and 181 CANADA GEESE on the IBM Lake
- 10/07 The KESTRELS at IBM North Harbour seem to have flown the nest
- 09/07 GREEN SANDPIPER back at Langstone with increases in many shore birds witnessed by Brian Fellows this evening.
- 09/07 TURTLE DOVE purring on Chalton Down and couple of 'rare' KESTREL sightings.
- 09/07 LITTLE OWL at Warblington with juvenile Green Woodpeckers seen by Tony Gutteridge
- 09/07 The debate on THAT MARSH WARBLER at Pagham has come down heavily on the side of its being a "MEGA MIMETIC REED WARBLER" - read the evidence from the professionals
- 08/07 NIGHTJARS, WOODCOCK & TAWNY OWLS in Havant Thicket and SANDWICH TERN over the garden
- 08/07 The THORNEY EGRET ROOST is once more in business with 16 birds in for the night as 100+ SWALLOWS over the Little Deeps signal that autumn is here with a vengeance,
- 07/07 GULL BILLED TERN arrives at Chichester's Ivy Lake (News from Dave Mead, Alistair Martin and Doug Yelland)
- 07/07 Is it a MARSH WARBLER or a very clever REED WARBLER singing at Pagham?
- 07/07 If you miss the Osprey at Thorney Island you have a good chance of seeing BARN OWL in the evening (Adrian Martin)
- 07/07 Brian Fellows says those SHELDUCK at the Oysterbeds could still be nesting, and tells us the news from Baffins Pond
- 06/07 Strange SHELDUCK behaviour at the Oysterbeds – nesting when all others have flown off to moult?
- 05/07 Brian Fellows Emsworth news – the Black Swan was there today and the Ruddy Duck yesterday
- 05/07 OSPREY back on Thorney Deeps landing lights but Ruddy Duck not seen since yesterday.
- 05/07 MARSH WARBLER still at Pagham showing its orange gape while imitating many species

PLANTS:

- 10/07 AUTUMN GENTIANS flowering on Portsdown
- 10/07 LESSER CENTAURY flourishing in Portchester chalk pit and TRAVELLER'S JOY is out on Portsdown
- 10/07 COMMON TEASEL, STONE PARSLEY, TANSY and HAWKWEED OX-TONGUE flowering at IBM North Harbour
- 09/07 BASIL THYME, PLOUGHMAN'S SPIKENARD and DWARF THISTLES flowering on Chalton Down.
- 09/07 UPRIGHT HEDGE-PARSLEY starts to flower as WAYFARING TREE berries turn red.
- 08/07 FROG ORCHIDS at Catherington Down and CANADIAN FLEABANE on Hayling
- 08/07 DANEWORT now flowering by the Hayling Billy Trail in Havant.

- 07/07 What causes colour variation in flowers?
 06/07 Thoughts on where LESSER CENTAURY is likely to grow, and a question on why GOATS RUE is white at Northney and blue at Stoke Bay
 05/07 'Acres of MEADOW BARLEY' lit by the setting sun on Thorney marshes

INSECTS:

- 11/07 WHITE ADMIRALS and SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY seen in Creech Woods west by Richard Hallett
 10/07 My first ARGIOPE spider of the summer, a second new HOLLY BLUE and SMALL BLUE still out.
 09/07 My first CHALKHILL and (summer) HOLLY BLUES and an egg-laying HUMMING BIRD HAWK MOTH
 08/07 An early MIGRANT HAWKER DRAGONFLY and possible SCARLET TIGER MOTHS seen by Mark Litjens by the River Itchen along with 150+ BANDED DEMOISELLE.
 08/07 54 GLOW-WORMS in Havant Thicket make a good start to this summers nightly display
 08/07 Barry Collins shows me some pretty moths at his moth light and tells me that CHALKHILL BLUE were on the wing in Hampshire on July 6th
 07/07 Another STAG BEETLE in Havant
 06/07 Two of my errors corrected – the Humming Bird Hawk Moth yesterday was at Stansted into Hayling, and I forgot to tell you of 121 PURPLE HAIRSTREAK coming to a moth light in the dark at Gosport Wildgrounds
 05/07 After a close view of PURPLE EMPEROR yesterday Mark Litjens sees the first CHALKHILL BLUE today
 05/07 WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAKS on Horsea Island by the M275 – at least ten seen by Andrew Brookes
 05/07 HUMMING BIRD HAWK MOTH in Hayling garden and my first SMALL SKIPPER on Thorney Island

OTHER WILDLIFE:

- 09/07 The BRITISH MARINE LIFE STUDY SOCIETY now has an internet magazine but you don't have to be online to join and share their interest in life below the waves.
 05/07 An exciting 'Satyr' day in Forestside produces a BABY GRASS SNAKE

BIRDS:

SUN 11 JULY

At low water in Emsworth Harbour around 6pm today Brian Fellows found 25 BLACK TAILED GODWIT feeding on the mud. Most of them were in summer plumage and had presumably just returned from their breeding grounds – it is tempting to say they had flown back a couple of days earlier than last year to avoid Pete Potts who has just arrived in Iceland to check on their breeding success, but I would expect that these first-comers will be birds that either did not breed or which lost their young – those that are rearing chicks will presumably still be there for Pete's inspection. Brian also comments on a recent increase in the number of Black Headed Gulls on the Emsworth Ponds as they abandon their nesting area on the Langstone Harbour islands at the end of another season, bringing a smattering of their ginger plumaged juveniles with them. Another change in the Emsworth scene is the arrival of a second singing REED WARBLER at Peter Pond. In addition to Brian's observations I can add that his local GREY WAGTAIL on the Westbrook stream which runs behind his garden was still present this afternoon. A message from Trevor Carpenter recommends anyone with an interest in garden birds to visit a website describing those in a Cheshire garden. I have not yet had a look at it but I think it has been recommended to me before and I'm sure its worth a visit 'when I catch up with myself'. The address is www.abcissa.force9.co.uk/birds Another website that might be of interest to people has been set up by Andy Horton (see Other Wildlife for a note about his Marine Life website) to cover wildlife in the Adur Valley behind Shoreham – the address is <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/BMLSS/Adur-3.htm>

SAT 10 JULY

A COMMON SANDPIPER, along with at least 14 Lapwing, was back beside the IBM Lake when I visited the North Harbour site this morning for the monthly WeBS count. On the lake the CANADA GEESE numbered 181 including half a dozen of this year's young that are now in adult plumage though slightly

smaller than their parents. The first TUFTED DUCKLING that I have seen on this water this year was a single downy youngster and a few Mallard still had small ducklings but there was no sign of the Great Crested Grebe family nor of the Swan family (which could well have been hidden in the overgrown canals). On the building I looked at the Kestrel's nest windowsill and found it occupied by Feral Pigeons so I assume the Kestrel chicks have flown – all I saw during this visit was one parent hunting in the distance. I was surprised to see only 8 Coot, but there is now so much cover in the reed beds that I guess quite a few birds must have been enjoying their cover and shade from the sun.

The Evening Class outing this morning was to Portsdown, starting in the Fort Nelson carpark area where not so long ago Corn Bunting were a regular sight and sound, either on the wires between the Fort and Nelson Lane or near the Nelson Monument or on the other side of the Fort by Swivleton Lane. Although they seem to be holding their own in the Hambleton area I detect a considerable decline in locations where they can be found and numbers at those places where they still occur. Hopefully the same will not happen with Yellowhammers of which two were heard at near Fort Nelson, and which we are told are 'doing well' on Portsdown this year.

At his Emsworth home this evening Brian Fellows was more than happy to spend the late evening in his garden watching SWIFTS. Brian says "The local Swifts put on a superb display on this warm evening. I watched them for an hour from my back garden as they alternated between screaming low around the houses in groups of 10-15 and catching insects high in the sky. Are there any other birds that seem to have so much fun themselves at the same time as giving such pleasure to human watchers? The total number seen at any one time has risen to 20, though I am not sure if any of these are young birds. I noticed birds entering a hole through a gap beneath the tiles of another neighbour's house, which means there are 3 or 4 possible nest sites in the immediate vicinity of my house. At 21.30, as it began to get dark, all Swift activity quite suddenly ceased and all was quite. Where do they all go? Consulting BWP I learned that breeders usually roost in their nests whereas non-breeders roost aerially."

FRI 9 JULY

Following Brian Fellows visit to N W Thorney yesterday, during which he found signs that autumn is upon us, Brian this evening cycled along the shore from Emsworth to Havant and noted more evidence of returning shore birds, notably a GREEN SANDPIPER, more than 10 COMMON GULL and 4 LESSER BLACKBACK, 50+ REDSHANK, 20 LAPWING, 6 CURLEW and a GREENSHANK. He also saw (good news) a MED GULL and (bad news) the Langstone Swan pair with only six cygnets (I demand a recount before admitting that these excellent parents have lost one of their seven cygnets at this late stage in their development). Earlier in the day Brian noted an estimated 15 SWIFTS over their Emsworth nests – has he got as many as 8 pairs there? are some young already out? Or had the locals got visitors?

I have made three or four visits to Chalton Down this summer and until today had not heard the purring of TURTLE DOVE which was a feature of every visit last summer (Barry Collins had heard them there once this summer so I had not given up hope). They were in the tall trees at the foot of the down at around SU 737153 which is their traditional spot. While on the down I was pleased to see that rare falcon, a male KESTREL come east over the down from Chalton village and disappear north along the railway line to Petersfield. Driving home along Woodberry Lane I came on another Kestrel hovering over fields at the edge of Southleigh Forest south of Lyels Wood, probably one of the pair which traditionally nest near Micheal Prior's official residence as Head Forester for Stansted.

This evening Tony Gutteridge told me that during his part of the Warblington CBC visit last Wednesday morning he spotted two juvenile GREEN WOODPECKE behaving like book-end on either side of a slim tree trunk, and also had a good view of a LITTLE OWL which presumably belongs to a pair that have been nesting somewhere on the census plot this year as they have in most previous years.

Brian Fellows has forwarded two messages concerning THAT MARSH WARBLER at Pagham which sum up the 'professional birders' view of the bird as a "MEGA-MIMETIC REED WARBLER". The first comes from someone who met Kevin Stouse's party at Pagham on Sunday and says "my wife and I had just found the Roseate Tern about half a mile away, and helped (Kevin Stouse's group) get onto it. We spent a good 1 and a half hours at the spot they were heading for, and only heard and saw the mega-mimetic Reed Warbler. I have very serious concerns over ALL the reports of Marsh Warbler at the site! I have never heard a Reed Warbler being so mimetic - it was truly amazing, the repertoire it was putting out, but it wasn't a Marsh Warbler. Perhaps I'm just unlucky, and dipped on 'the' bird. It's not being reported any more, so I guess I'll never know...." The second message comes from a Simon Woolley, who says "I spent well over an hour with the bird this morning, during which time it was singing almost constantly. I was also lucky enough to speak to several other people who had been seeing the bird since it's initial reporting last week (I hesitate to say 'arrival', as that would tend to bias the argument!), including (I think) the person who first found it, and there is no doubt that the bird that everyone has been seeing, at least on

- Sunday and today, is indeed the 'correct' bird.
-Just one problem - it is a Reed Warbler! The bird was singing MORE like a Reed Warbler today than on Sunday, with rather less mimicry, but still included an incredible variety, depth and intensity of sounds borrowed from other species. This is probably a non-exhaustive list, but I heard it use Oystercatcher, Ringed Plover, Great Tit, Chaffinch, Blackbird, Swallow, Linnet, Nightingale, Sandwich Tern, Green Woodpecker, Magpie, Willow Warbler and Curlew for sure, and possibly snatches of House Martin, Herring Gull, Black-headed Gull and Starling!
-Let me repeat : this is an extraordinary sounding bird, and extremely 'different' from regular Reed Warblers. It's well worth hearing if you're down there. But there is absolutely no doubt, in my mind, and I think in those of most people who are listening to it really critically, that this just ain't a Marsh Warbler. The rhythm is spot on for Reed, with none of the rapid and fluid notes of Marsh (which, I admit, I don't know at all well in the field), and it's singing long passages with no mimicry at all.
-I did manage to get a very poor quality sound recording of the bird before my batteries went flat, including a remarkable bit where it does a good snatch of Sandwich Tern. The sounds are available on the Web, at : www.jjcskw.demon.co.uk/ThePaghamAcrocephalus.html There are four rather brief samples here which you can download and have a listen to. They're of a Reed Warbler, right?
-As for plumage etc. - I can't say there was anything there that made me too worried. The bird is basically quite rufous (certainly not olive - the rump and tail in particular), the legs appear grey-brown (claws not seen well), the primary tips don't look particularly pale (they do a bit - but it's quite worn all over), and the bill is not held open particularly wide.
-Behaviourally, it's dead right for Reed, singing mostly from low down in reeds, occasionally emerging on top of them, and spending a bit of time in the low stunted oaks in the reed bed. Put it this way, if you walked past when it was doing it's pure Reed sections of song, you wouldn't even raise your bins. It's a Reed Warbler, folks. Any advance?" No advance on that from me – a superb speech, bound to get Fox Hunting banned in Parliament.

THU 8 JULY

SANDWICH TERN became a new addition to my garden list today – I only stepped into the garden for a few minutes in the afternoon but my eyes were immediately directed upwards as I heard the unexpected noise of Terns overhead and saw the large, long-winged shape of three Sandwich Terns – possibly parents with a juvenile as they were making an unusual noise, not the normal 'kirric'. Earlier in the day I had watched some 20 SWIFTS continuing yesterday's aerial display, and when I walked to the shops the few House Martins that we still have told me to look up and see a SPARROWHAWK soaring idly over the town. Late in the evening I spent an hour walking round Havant Thicket at dusk, seeing 54 Glow-Worms and hearing three separate churring NIGHTJAR (one in the southern scrub of Furzy Plain at SU 719103, one in the bracken filled open space of Long Wood at SU 717105, and one in the well established site at SU 717109). One of the Furzy Plain pair came to dance around my head as it searched for moths, and a second one – possibly for Long Wood, gave a more prolonged viewed as it circled half a dozen times over a large area around 716107. Both these hunting birds made continuous quiet and fairly rapid 'Kip, kip, kip' calls, quite distinct from the loud single 'Quip' call, and I almost had the impression they were echo-locating moths as bats do (not really serious about that). I only heard one 'Whissicking' WOODCOCK, confirming the impression that there are fewer of these birds here this year (Barry Collins told me of an interaction between two of them seen together on June 15, but that is the only such report I have had this summer). To end my round I heard male and female TAWNY OWLS making their distinct calls from the roadside trees at 721107.

Brian Fellows cycled to Thorney Great Deeps west this evening and counted 16 LITTLE EGRET in the roost – that graph of numbers roosting here is once more on the climb. Another sign that the breeding season is over and that autumn is upon us was a flock of 7 GREENSHANK at the waters edge below the Egrets. A juvenile Black Headed Gull was on the water, and over the Little Deeps more than 100 SWALLOWS were filling the air – can they already be camping out in the reeds here on their way south?

The GULL-BILLED TERN at Chichester may not be the one that was at the Cotswold Water Park according to Simon Woolley who says "It's moulting its inner primaries very slightly, so perhaps not the Wilts. bird of last week."

That daring young man in his flying machine is off to Iceland again tomorrow – that's Pete Potts heading back to check on his BLACK TAILED GODWIT population in its breeding quarters.. News of them anon.

WED 7 JULY

Roads leading to Chichester have been busy this afternoon as the twitchers head south from the Cotswold Water Park to our Ivy Lake following a lone GULL-BILLED TERN which turned up in Sussex today

(I've no idea if it is the same bird that has been in the Cotswolds but we would be lucky to have two of these birds in the country together). From what I hear it has been showing well and the only problem is seeing over the heads of the twenty people in front of you. For the uninitiated this is a bird of Sandwich Tern size but having none of the thin body and thin angled wings of that species – it has a much sturdier, broad winged, look and flies like a graceful gull. The bill is relatively short and thick and the head is also rounder and more gull like. The grey of the upper wings and mantle extends right back to the tail and the tips of the primaries are solid black both above and below. The tail has a short fork and no long streamers. No one has commented on its voice but Keith Vinnicombe tells us that as this is an adult the call is distinct from all other terns we are likely to see and is a low, deep “ger-erk” or “ger-vik”. Although it is a rarity in this country (only 11 Hampshire records listed from 1958 to 1982) a pair did once breed in Essex, back in 1950. Recently it has become a less frequent visitor to Britain with the decline of its breeding colonies in North Germany and Denmark. One slightly unusual feature of this bird's visit is the date – most previous records have been in May or June and only one of the Hampshire records was in July. Maybe this year the continental breeding colonies have shut down and this poor bird has nowhere to spend the summer (or maybe its here to avoid the eclipse)

Alistair Martin, after telling me about the Tern, told me that there are serious doubts about the identity of the Marsh Warbler at Pagham. He personally saw it clearly through his scope from about 50 yards and commented on it having black rather than grey legs and not having the grey edgings to its primaries, but no one disputes the vocal ability of this bird to imitate many other species and my personal view is that, as Keith Vinnicombe says that Reed and Marsh Warblers are one of the most difficult pairs to separate by eye, and as all birds have worn plumage by this time of the summer, I would allow the singing ability and the open-mouthed singing with orange gape showing to win the day for it being a Marsh Warbler.

Adrian Martin came over to Thorney from Southampton yesterday evening in the hope of seeing the OSPREY but it eluded him (as well as the old airfield landing light posts on which it can be seen without going through the military fence it has another favourite perch in the Thorney channel on a post at approx SU 772031 just north of Stanbury Point, but you have to go through the gate to see this and Adrian tells me the army does not admit anyone after 8pm). All was by no means lost for at around 8.30 pm a BARN OWL appeared and spent some time hunting on the marshes north of the Great Deeps, taking its prey south. It could be clearly seen from the the footpath gate, and Adrian was told by others who were there that it was a regular dusk sight – as I seem to remember it was at this time last year when people were looking for Quail here.

On a more local note I am pleased to say that the COCKATIEL which Brian Fellows first noted in fields west of Emsworth last Thursday (July 1) is still circling the Warblington Farm fields almost a week later (assuming it to be the same bird). It was calling non-stop during the two and a half hours that I was walking my part of the CBC plot this morning (for the last time this year) and showing no signs of weakness in its flight.

Brian sends me more news today which indicates that the SHELDUCK I saw at the Oysterbeds could still produce young if they have a nest there – it seems that young can hatch in the first half of July. He also passes on news from Heather Mills who was at Budds Mound on Monday (July 5) where she not only saw a COMMON SANDPIPER on the shore but also spotted 6 young Shelduck without an adult – possibly part of the family of 11 or 12 tiny ducklings following a single adult which I saw halfway between Broadmarsh and North Binness on June 13.

Baffins Pond is currently playing host to 152 moulting Canada Geese plus the Emperor which came with the Aldsworth Pond contingent of Canadas, and has most of its regulars, even the second Snow Goose has returned, but 14 of the 42 Barnacle Geese that were present until mid April this year have still not returned and have not been heard of anywhere locally. I see the Tufted Duck there are now down to 15 and that the Mallard count has dropped below 100 (now 96). It would seem there are still fish in the pond as two Cormorant were present (these seem to be returning from breeding areas now – I saw three off Warblington this morning – the first there for some time) and a pair of Little Grebe must be managing to find food for their two young.

I'm not sure what brought them over my garden tonight but there were at least 50 SWIFTS circling and chasing each other – I suspect it was a chance movement of non-breeding birds, perhaps aided by a good supply of insects in the updraught over the trees that now fill the old Hayling Billy line behind my house. The local breeders are probably only three pairs which I see regularly.

TUE 6 JULY

There was not a SHELDUCK to be seen on Fowley Island nor anywhere else in the channel off North Hayling either yesterday or today, and I had taken that as confirmation that all of these birds other than the few ‘creche guardians’ had left us to moult at Heliogland, when I saw a strange sight at Hayling

Oysterbeds this afternoon. I was watching some 15 Little Tern on the island in the lagoon from the southern seawall when two Shelduck flew into view, one landing on the 'island' near the Terns, the other on the northern shore of the lagoon. As I watched this second bird it walked into a large 'cave' and never came out during the time that I was watching from the south and then cycling round to a point above the 'cave' on the north shore. If you approach the north shore from the coastal path you have the lagoon on your left and the County Council 'Ragwort Field' on your right. Also on your left are two concrete posts marked HCC and if you continue west until you reach the second of them (further in from the edge of the lagoon than the first), and then continue for another five paces you will find you are above a bit of the 'cliff' which has recently slipped down and the 'cave' is one of the holes opening below you and running back under the path you are on. Surely it is too late for the bird still to be sitting? And surely if she has young she would not keep them in the cave? Any suggestions welcome.

Other birds seen today included 39 Redshank just off Langstone Pond and another 9 in the Northney marina, half a dozen Lapwing on both shores, and a single juvenile Black Headed Gull with some 200 adults on the shore. On the pond I saw an adult Coot leap a couple of inches out of the water to pull off half a Phragmites reed leaf which it offered to a well grown youngster which eventually swallowed it whole. In the reeds I could dimly see a Moorhen and three well grown young, and from these reeds came loud noises which I would associate with farmyard geese rather than a Moorhen – not for the first time I suspected the presence of a Water Rail, probably expressing its disapproval of the presence of the Moorhen.

The first juvenile BLACK HEADED GULL had reached Emsworth Harbour today when Brian Fellows set off to look for the Osprey on Thorney which he did not see as it was down at Stanbury Point at the time he arrived at Thornham Point. The Ruddy Duck was also absent from the Slipper Mill pond (could it be on the Little or Great Deeps?) but the two Swans which I had seen eyeing each other up from opposite sides of the Peter Pond yesterday were still sharing that pond today.

MON 5 JULY

Brian Fellows made his round of the Emsworth ponds just before midday, finding the BLACK SWAN present with 54 MUTE SWAN in and around the Mill Pond. Two Egrets were again feeding in the harbour but the RUDDY DUCK, which was still on the Slipper Pond yesterday, could not be found today though the Reed Warbler was still there

Late this afternoon Barry Collins called in on his way home to tell me that the OSPREY had been sitting on the old airfield landing light posts by the Great Deeps south of Thornham Point when he left less than half an hour before he saw me, and it was still there when I arrived perhaps an hour later. The post it had chosen was towards the west end of the southernmost row of posts and from the first viewpoint by the last bungalow of Thornham Lane the bird was sometimes hidden by the lights on nearer posts so I got the best views from the stile at the end of the seawall. At that same point in the windless evening sunshine I could not only hear Skylark and Meadow Pipit song with the occasional calls of Redshank on the Deeps but also the purring of Turtle Dove. On the way there and back I passed the Slipper Mill Pond but could not see the Ruddy Duck, and on Peter Pond two Swans were eyeing each other from opposite sides of the water – a new pair forming? I did not count the Swans on the almost drained Mill Pond but I guess there only around 50 including 14 birds at Nore Barn and there was no glimpse of the Black Swan and only one Shelduck to be seen from the Emsworth shore (two more on the Great Deeps east).

Barry Collins also told me that he had seen the Paghham MARSH WARBLER today and could vouch for its orange gape and for the variety of birds it imitated On Thorney he has recently had a Common Sandpiper.

John Goodspeed saw the Swan family at Thorney Little Deeps on Saturday morning (July 3) still with three cygnets. He also backs Richard Jones' statement that Yellowhammer are doing well on Portsdown this year and comments that there were lots of them at Martin Down on June 16 when he thought the population of Skylark there was denser than he had found anywhere since he was in New Zealand

PLANTS:

SUN 11 JULY

The Emsworth Westbrook stream which fills the town Mill Pond runs alongside a public carpark in Bridge Road and in the stream I was surprised to see WATER PLANTAIN flowering – although this is a common enough plant I do not know of it in any of the other streams and ponds in the immediate area of Havant (though it is in the north section of Farlington Marshes). Going from there to Rowlands Castle along Woodberry Lane I was pleased to see a good display of MARSH WOUNDWORT in the ditch on the west side of the road just before coming to the Sussex Border Path, but the best sight today came as I was almost home. In the New Lane allotments near the Kenwood Factory the small 'snapdragon' called

WEASELS SNOOT continues to flourish and it would seem that one allotment holder is cultivating this weed in his plot which is right against the New Lane fence and provides a great sight for anyone on the pavement – no need for binoculars to pick it out. If you want to enjoy this sight go to the south end of the allotments and walk north up the pavement past three small huts until you are approaching a cluster of huts with three prominent large blue waterbuts beside them – stop just before you reach them and look at the plot closest to you and to the waterbuts. I reckon there were well over 50 plants in good condition with many of the tiny pink ‘antirrhinum’ flowers on each.

SAT 10 JULY

The Evening Class group visited the Fort Nelson carpark area on Portsdown this morning and I hear that AUTUMN GENTIAN (or Autumn Felwort) were flowering there. When on Butser Hill a week ago I found some of them in bud but at Catherington Down last Sunday I could not see any to point out the difference between them and the slightly similar Clustered Bellflower – hopefully we will be able to find both at Catherington Down at the evening walk there next Thursday.

The first TEASEL flowers were out at the IBM North Harbour site this morning, along with PURPLE LOOSESTRIFE (probably out of a wildflower seed packet around the main reception lake), and FENNEL was in full flower. TANSY was very nearly out and at least one of the skeletal plants of STONE PARSLEY had raised its drooping flower buds and opened tiny white umbels (I am told it was flowering at Hilsa Lines two weeks back but this is the first I have seen). The big SHASTA DAISIES were imitating the Ox Eye daisies of last month (though many of those are having a second flowering) and the first genuine HAWKWEED OXTONGUE was out. I was pleased to see a new outpost of ALTHAEA HIRSUTA (Rough Marsh Mallow) which seems to be still extending its range, and to find a small clump of LYCHNIS CORONARIA flowering in the shade of a Willow..

On my way home from IBM I went via Portchester and up Hill Road onto Portsdown, stopping at the disused chalk pits just below the M27 to search for LESSER CENTAURY of which I found about 50 minute plants in flower. The large chalk pit, which opens onto Hill Road almost opposite Nyewood Avenue and which has been in use within my memory, is currently being cleared for the construction of more houses and I hope the small adjacent pits will not also disappear. On Portsdown itself Travellers Joy (or Old Man’s Beard) is now in flower everywhere.

FRI 9 JULY

A visit to Chalton Down in this morning’s sunshine brought a rich reward in both flowers and insects. I parked by the stile leading onto the down from the road just west of the bridge over the railway at SU 737155 and walked a peripheral circuit of the one large field into which that stile leads. In my opinion my best find was the BASIL THYME which was flowering, as last year, along a line of semi-bare ground where a slight scar runs up the hill slope at the southern end of the field. Near the bottom of this scar I found several patches of this plant, probably totalling four square feet in area if it were all brought together – not quite as much as I found last year but still the blue labiate flowers, with their delightful white markings on the lips, made a lovely sight. Among the many other flowers on the down I noticed half a dozen Pyramidal Orchids still in flower, Hairy St John’s Wort among a mass of Perforate, white flowered Creeping Thistle and one plant of Deadly Nightshade, but the ones that deserve a more prominent mention were the first UPRIGHT HEDGE PARSLEY (completing the spring to summer cycle of Cow Parsley, Rough Chervil and now this *Torilis japonica*), the first DWARF THISTLES, and my first flowers on PLOUGHMAN’S SPIKENARD. At the north end of the down I noticed one WAYFARING TREE with berries already turning red from their initial green, but not yet showing signs of their final black colour.

THU 8 JULY

Stephen Harwood tells me that the FROG ORCHIDS at Catherington Down should be in good shape for the evening walk there next Thursday evening – he has found three so far. Although they have been out at Noar Hill and some other places for two or three weeks we did not see them at Catherington on July 4th. If you want to see them you can join the walk led by Stephen by turning up at the Catherington Lane carpark for the down (opposite the village pond and school which are half way between the Farmer pub and the church) for a 7pm start on Thursday 15 July.

A inconspicuous plant that started to flower about a week ago had a superb example standing outside the Ladies Loo in the Elm Grove/Hollow Lane carpark on Hayling today. This is CANADIAN FLEABANE and you can’t miss it.

DANEWORT is the name I prefer for the plant also known as DWARF ELDER (*Sambucus ebulus*) which attracts my attention partly because it has attractive flowers (very similar in size and shape to those of the tree Elder, but with purple stamens, and growing on upright plants never much more than a metre high), partly because of its scarcity (the nearest colony to the sizeable one in Havant is probably at East Harting,

almost ten miles away), but mainly because of its supposed association with the marauding Danes which pillaged our coastline some thousand years ago – the plants are supposed to grow on sites where the victims of these invaders bled to death, and the pink tinge in the white flowers is said to be the remnant of their blood. Through it the ancient Danes can still make victims of anyone foolish enough to mistake its berries for true Elder-berries and make wine or eat them – the berries of this plant are poisonous. If you want to learn the difference join the Hayling Billy trail in Havant from the Town End House carpark (south of the East Street bridge over the railway) or from Grove Road. You will find the plants growing in profusion on both sides of the slope down to the level of the old track at this point, and they have recently started to flower.

Last night Andrew Powling led a walk from Stoughton village to the summit of Bow Hill above Kingley Vale and back on a circular route. Wild Basil and Marjoram were coming into flower and there was plenty of Ladies Bedstraw. The most impressive plant was a DEADLY NIGHTSHADE bush thought to be 5 foot tall found on the right of the track going down from Bow Hill towards Stoughton at around 809109

On Portsdown John Goodspeed found a very attractive white flowered PYRAMIDAL ORCHID yesterday and comments the the NETTLE LEAVED BELLFLOWER around the Fort Widley Nature Trail is now looking great.

WED 7 JULY

A recent note from John Goodspeed tells me that he has just seen more white flowered SELF HEAL along the Wayfarers Way in the Southwick Woods (around SU 656083 just after turning north into the woods from Purbrook Heath Road) following a similar find in West Walk on July 2nd, and in the past I have seen large patches of it in a beautiful pale pink form (on chalk in central/north Hampshire). Centaury, which has figured in these notes recently, also comes with a percentage of the plants having pure white flowers (at least on certain sites), and of course there is always Milkwort which chooses from the whole spectrum. I have a feeling that these variations are controlled by something different from the factors which determine true albinism or melanism, and I suspect there are other causes of variation as well – mineral elements in the soil such as the formic acid around ants nests which turns bluebells pink like litmus paper, and other impurities which turn the leaves of various plants red when they are normally green. It would be interesting if someone could enlighten us with some hard facts on this subject.

TUE 6 JULY

Today I returned to Hayling North Common (the open space behind the Northney marina) in the hope of seeing Lesser Centaury in a patch of grass where I have seen it in the past. There is a tremendous mass of Common Centaury there, but none had that distinctly deeper red colour to the flowers (Keble Martin's illustration captures it well) to justify closer inspection. What I did notice was the extremely dense ground cover of Creeping Cinquefoil, Bird's Foot Trefoil and other plants and this suggested that it was a vain hope that any small annual would germinate here without some disturbance of the soil. For this same reason I would not be hopeful of seeing it on Portsdown where it appeared in strength following the cutting of a new path which 'tilled the soil' for it, and I think that the only places where it can be expected to turn up every year are the bare chalk 'screes' where rain and erosion are for ever breaking the soil and preventing perennials from getting a permanent foothold. This theory may be partly borne out at what I believe to have been one of the largest colonies of this plant in Hampshire, at what used to be a second world war practice aerial bombing range in the New Forest (below Godshill, just 'downstream' from the Black Gutter Montagu's Harrier nest site of recent years). Tons of chalk were brought here to mark 'targets' on the ground, and no doubt exploding bombs broke it up to the liking of these plants, though I doubt even the chalk can now be seen – probably the modern equivalent are the steep motorway embankments on Portsdown.

While on Hayling I noted that the huge colony of pure white GOATS RUE on Hayling North Common differs from the Stoke Bay colony (in the carpark behind the Esso Garage) as the flowers there are mostly of the blue-mauve variety. Can you suggest a reason? The flowers there are easy to see all round the overflow carpark, and at Northney there are a few plants flowering within 25 yards of the car park there, beside an unofficial path going to the left of the main track in.

MON 5 JULY

SEA COUCH GRASS was today's only new flowering but on the marshes south of Thornham Lane at the east end the setting sun lit what appeared to be acres of MEADOW BARLEY as if it were grown as a crop in primitive conditions. Common Centaury and Dyers Greenweed added splashes of bright colour to this scene

INSECTS:

SUN 11 JULY

Richard Hallett lives in Denmead and regularly walks in the Creech Woods to the west of the Denmead-Southwick road, and he tells me that this morning "The hot sunny weather brought out large numbers of Meadow Brown and Marbled White in the more open grassy areas. Also Gatekeeper and one Small White. Best however were three WHITE ADMIRAL in different parts of the Wood, one basking in the sun within touching distance. Also two large fritillaries which I think were SILVER WASHED FRITILLARIES though they did not stay still. There were also many moths and Damselflies but beyond my powers of identification."

SAT 10 JULY

Today's best find was the first of the gold, black and white banded ARGIOPE BRUENNICHI spiders on its strange web in the long grass at the IBM North Harbour site this morning. Naturally the female spider was not as large as she will be in a month or so when she is gorged on small grasshoppers and full of eggs, but she was big enough to see from a yard or two away. These spiders are widely distributed in dry grass land around our area near the coast, and if you want to see one go to any area of tall dry grass which has grasshoppers and search for a depression in the grass across which the grasshoppers have to jump (rather than hopping from stem to stem). In the open area or at its edge look for what seems to be a tiny wisp of smoke coming up from the ground – it is actually a vertical re-inforcing strip in the otherwise sparse orb web that the spider makes. If she is on the web the female spider will be suspended just below the centre of the web and her body will be covering part of the 'wisp of smoke' which supports her weight. I say 'the female' because I have never seen a male on a web of his own – he is a tiny brown bodied spider with no obvious likeness to the female and although I have seen him on 'her' web I have never seen a male on a web of his own, which raises the question of how does he catch food to keep himself going – does he pursue females and steal some of their captures? I have quite often found webs belonging to this species with no spider apparently in residence, but I suspect that if these webs are still in good condition there will be a spider lurking very close, with a 'guy rope' connected to the web to bring news of any vibration in it. I have sometimes also found a female on the ground below the web 'feigning dead' when frightened by my heavy footfalls, but some webs appear to be in good condition but deserted (as was one this morning) – maybe these are made by the males who can hide nearby more easily than the big colourful females.

Several Emperor and Black Tailed Skimmer dragonflies were around the IBM Lake and I saw one unidentified dragonfly that was carrying the remains of a Marbled White butterfly, giving it a strange 'white flash' in flight. Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Small Skipper, Marbled White, Small White and Green Veined White were all quite numerous and I saw one Red Admiral and one HOLLY BLUE – this was flying low over the grass like a Common Blue but I saw it at rest. Later, on Portsdown in the Portchester chalk pits where I found Lesser Centaury, the first thing I saw was a SMALL BLUE which settled near enough for me to see it was still in good condition. While still at IBM I noted the common sight of a female 5 SPOT BURNET MOTH being grabbed by a male as soon as she was out of her chrysalis.

FRI 9 JULY

The first CHALKHILL BLUES which I have heard of were seen by Barry Collins on Chalton Down last Tuesday (July 6) and today I saw at least four on this down along with many Marbled White, Meadow Brown and fewer Gatekeeper, Ringlet and a couple of Large White. One Cinnabar moth and a couple of tiny day flying moths were seen, but the prize came just as I was about to leave the down - this was a HUMMING BIRD HAWK MOTH which was cycling an area of close cropped turf on which Lady's Bedstraw was one of the few plants. I noticed the moth hover in front of these tiny yellow flowers and admired the skill with which it (presumably, for my eye was not keen enough to see it) inserted its proboscis into the minute flowers to drink nectar. I then noticed that it was also visiting Lady's Bedstraw plants not yet in flower and was curling its abdomen round to lay eggs while still hovering. If anyone wants to search for the caterpillars that should emerge from the eggs in a week's time, and allows another couple of weeks for the caterpillars to grow to a reasonable size (they eventually reach 45mm), they should enter the down by the stile from the road at SU 737156 and follow the lowest of the uphill footpaths leading to the right and up, and look in the bedstraw on the downhill side of that path perhaps 50 yards from the stile.

Back at home in Havant this afternoon the first summer brood HOLLY BLUE was flying around Buddleia in my front garden and was later seen patrolling the back garden.

THU 8 JULY

At lunch time today Mark Litjens repeated his June 24 walk along the Itchen Navigation from Shawford and this time reckoned he saw 150+ BANDED DEMOISELLE where he saw only 40 on the previous

occasion. Better still he is confident that he saw a very early MIGRANT HAWKER along with a couple of Emperor and a single Gold Ringed Dragonfly.. There was nothing special in the six butterfly species that he saw but they included 6 RED ADMIRAL and two or three smaller moths which he is pretty certain were SCARLET UNDERWING (both time and place are right for their sighting). Mark would like to know if they are an uncommon sight by the river in July...

This evening Barry Collins showed me a collection of the better specimens that had come to his moth light on the previous night, ranging in size from Poplar and Elephant HawkMoth down to a SCARCE FOOTMAN whose slim body was tiny compared to a COMMON FOOTMAN. Also in the collection was a FOUR DOTTED FOOTMAN. There were several moths which I would not have recognized but whose names were familiar, such as the SETACAEUS HEBREW CHARACTER, the KENT BLACK ARCHES and the COMMON WAVE but there were two that were new to me – the SHORT-CLOAKED MOTH and a strange shaped, very ornamental, BUFF ARCHES. Looking at this when it came out of the fridge it was holding its wings in an almost tubular shape (very like the BUFF TIP which was also in the collection and which imitates a twig, the wings resembling a round grey-barked twig with their hind tips looking like the yellowish round cross-section of the twig where it had been snapped off to expose the wood below the bark). This Buff Arches at first had this tubular look with the added ornamentation of what looked to me like the vertical ‘shields’ on a Mandarin Duck’s wings when in breeding plumage, but as the moth warmed up and got ready to fly the wings changed shape in a more complicated version of the geometry of ‘swing wing aircraft’ to adopt a horizontal plane similar to the wings of most moths. Next to the Buff Arches for ornamental value came the BUFF ERMINE, and at the bottom end of this scale came the PINE CARPET, the CLAY and the FAN-FOOT (though beauty is in the eye of the beholder and those with better eyesight than mine can probably find subtle patterns and colours in what I see as the plainest of moths – certainly the more I look at them the more interest and beauty I discover). Resting on the outside of his window was YELLOW TAIL moth – pure white wings and similar size to a BROWN TAIL but the Yellow Tail has never been in trouble with the authorities.

I went from Barry’s house to Havant Thicket as dusk came on and in a walk of just under an hour I came on 54 GLOW-WORMS widely scattered around the woodland, the great majority of them being very close to the entrance opposite Castle Road (two were outside the fence and anyone wishing to see them with minimum effort can park in that entrance and walk around the circular open area inside the gate and go 100 yards up the rough track leading north from it, and they should see 50 or more in that area but don’t leave your car unattended blocking the entrance for the fire engines that have to go in on an almost daily/nightly basis). The peak of the Glow-Worm season is usually the second half of July, and Barry Collins tells me that in the past he has counted 191 of them by making a complete tour of the Thicket’s tracks – see if you can beat that.

On last night’s walk from Stoughton up to Bow Hill Andrew Powling was able to point out a SOUTHERN HAWKER dragonfly to the others – no doubt his identification was aided by the fact that the Southern Hawker regularly flies until dusk whereas the Common Hawker tends to roost as soon as the sun is hidden. The Southern Hawker also makes identification easier by its curiosity – coming to look people in the eye if they venture into its chosen beat.

WED 7 JULY

Yet another omission on my part concerns a the sighting of a STAG BEETLE on the pavement in our road when walking the dog last Sunday evening (July 4)

TUE 6 JULY

Apologies for my errors and omissions. First, the Humming Bird Hawk Moth reported yesterday was in Sonia Bolton’s garden at Stansted on some Honeysuckle which Maureen Coleman had given to Sonia, not in Maureen’s Hayling garden. Second, I missed a couple of paragraphs from Andrew Brookes latest message and yesterday’s entry omitted mention of 121 PURPLE HAIRSTREAK captured at a moth trap in Gosport Wildgrounds last week (presumably the light was under an oak and the butterflies thought dawn had come early). This fascinating item came from Dennis Bohea when Andrew Brookes saw him on a visit to the Gosport Naval Munitions Depot at Bedenham/Frater on Sunday July 4 – on that visit both Purple and White Letter Hairstreaks were seen plus a couple of White Admiral in Elson Wood but strangely no Ringlets were detected among the host of Meadow Brown

MON 5 JULY

A note from Sonia Bolton this afternoon told me of a HUMMING BIRD HAWK MOTH seen earlier today in Maureen Coleman’s garden (near Sandy Point on Hayling). In my own garden I had a Red Admiral and my first garden Gatekeeper while on Thorney Island in the late afternoon I saw my first two SMALL

SKIPPER together with Small Heath and Meadow Brown

Last Friday (July 2) Andrew Brookes visited Horsea Island (now part of the Port Solent reclamation of Portsmouth Harbour) and saw at least ten WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAK around the tops of the 20 foot high English Elm suckers that can be clearly seen from the nearby M275 where it crosses the mouth of Tipner Lake. On a previous visit these Elms had caught Andrew's eye as likely habitat for the Hairstreak that is currently increasing its numbers in Hampshire and I hope they will continue to flourish there but it sounds as if the trees are approaching the height at which Dutch Elm Disease will strike them dead along with so many others that we see around us. Returning to this present visit one of the earliest GATEKEEPER to emerge was seen with a few Small Heath and Marbled white but the great majority of butterflies were Meadow Brown with Comma coming a poor second in numbers

Mark Litjens spent the late morning and early afternoon of Sunday (July 4) at Bentley Wood on the Wiltshire border hoping for a sight of the PURPLE EMPEROR seen in the carpark there on July 3. After an hour in the carpark with no joy Mark took a walk in the wood, finding more than 300 RINGLET in a walk of about a mile. In the same distance he counted 25 SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY, 40 MARBLED WHITE, 6 RED ADMIRAL, 1 WHITE ADMIRAL and a solitary GREEN VEINED WHITE. Arriving back at the carpark there was the Emperor on the ground and Mark was able to watch it from some ten feet for more than 2 minutes – it was a male and more than once the purple gleamed as it turned around. Clearly a great occasion but what's happened to Doris Ashby's guaranteed technique for getting these beauties to pose for her camera – she said a sunny dawn was needed and you must go armed with fresh rabbit droppings and some water – you place the droppings in a sunny spot, add the water, wait for steam to rise and at that point the Emperor glides down an pirouettes in just the place you need it for the perfect photo.

Today Mark was at Yew Hill, recording around 330 Marbled White, 135 Ringlet, 12 or more Gatekeeper, Small and Large Skipper, Small, Large and Green Veined White plus 2 Red Admiral, and to top the bill, the first CHALKHILL BLUE

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 9 JULY

Interest in marine life is growing rapidly – our Hampshire Wildlife Trust would like to establish one or more marine nature reserves of their own and to judge by the popular interest in whales and dolphins currently being shown by the BBC there is a lot of public interest. So if you want to know more and get involved you may wish to know that the BRITISH MARINE LIFE STUDY SOCIETY has its own website and publishes its own magazine which is available both online or offline. If you are on the internet visit [HTTP://Ourworld.Compuserve.com/Homepages/BMLSS/](http://Ourworld.Compuserve.com/Homepages/BMLSS/) and if you are not you can contact its author, Andy Horton, at Glaucus House, 14 Corbyn Crescent, Shoreham-by-sea, Sussex BN43 6PQ (or ring him on 01273-465433) The email address is bmlss@compuserve.com I have just been sent a taster of what is available, and I recommend anyone with an interest in the majority of our natural world (the part below sea-level) to get in contact – you don't have to join the society to get their news but they will welcome new members. (I must admit that I was wary of opening the email which brought me this news – it followed closely on an email warning against a new and virulent virus which can sink your system without trace if you open an email entitled 'How to give your cat a colonic' and this large email from an unknown source came with the ominous title of TORPEDO – that being the title of their magazine. Needless to say it did not sink my system)

MON 5 JULY

David Parker has recently moved from Havant to Forestside and is clearly enjoying life in the country to judge from his highly appropriate mis-spelling of Saturday as Satyrday in a message to tell me of a small GRASS SNAKE (just 9 inches long – presumably hatched last year) which he found when shifting large stones in his garden. I await descriptions of the Satyrs that no doubt lurk in Stansted Forest along with the FALLOW DEER which were feeding in Sonia Bolton's garden over the weekend (I've heard plenty of tales of the damage done to gardens in the south by both ROE and MUNTJAC, and of the havoc wreaked in some Scottish Gardens by RED DEER in the winter months but somehow I seem to have missed out on the misdeeds of Fallow)

BIRDS

- 04/07 MARSH WARBLER and ROSEATE TERN head a list of 61 species seen by Kevin Stouse's walk at Pagham
- 04/07 Another BARN OWL sighting at West Meon by Gwynne and Nigel Johnson
- 03/07 CROSSBILLS in the New Forest. Seven seen by Dave Mead's group today (but I guess they are resident birds)
- 03/07 SOS website recent sightings – MARSH WARBLER, OSPREY and LITTLE RINGED PLOVER at Pagham and ARCTIC SKUA plus MANX SHEARWATER off Bexhill
- 03/07 Pete Potts heard 2 or 3 NIGHTJAR in Botley Woods (Tapnage) last night
- 03/07 BUZZARD flies down Grandfathers Bottom (How do they do that?)
- 03/07 No shortage of YELLOWHAMMER at Noar Hill but no mention of Turtle Dove or Corn Bunting from the Evening Class
- 02/07 TURNSTONE & DUNLIN on Hayling and Pilsey, RUDDY DUCK still at Emsworth and OSPREY on Thorney
- 01/07 Barry Collins still has 10 Egrets coming to his Thorney roost and still has some 25 adult Shelduck around the island
- 01/07 The escaped COCKATIEL season is once more on us as temperatures rise and people leave their windows open
- 30/06 RUDDY DUCK on Emsworth Slipper Mill pond – Brian Fellows is pretty certain that is what he saw there today
- 30/06 19 SHELDUCK on Fowley Island off Emsworth – are they the last flock of adults we will see before they leave to moult?
- 30/06 News of Kestrels and Lapwing from John Shillitoe at the IBM North Harbour site
- 29/06 I learn that the Emsworth Black Swan is a 'naughty boy' whose attempts to mate with Mute Swans are embarrassing the 'spinsters of the parish'
- 29/06 Two baby LITTLE OWLS at Goodwood and two MED GULLS off Pilsey seen by Mike Collins
- 29/06 Two MED GULLS and a LESSER BLACK BACK attend our 'Evening Class', so Brian Fellows tells me
- 28/06 The OSPREY was still around Thorney Island on Saturday but Barry Collins has no knowledge of a reported Harrier there
- 28/06 Two young SPOTTED FLYCATCHER leave their East Meon nest and evade a Sparrowhawk on their first outing
- 28/06 The Emsworth Black Swan has gone missing (news from Brian Fellows)
- 28/06 Redshank back on Langstone shore
- 28/06 At last we learn the truth about crop circles – a gang of Grey Heron seen creating one below the Cerne Abbas Giant.

PLANTS:

- 04/07 CUT-LEAVED GERMANDER, RED HEMP-NETTLE, BASIL THYME and YELLOW BIRD'S NEST seen at Micheldever Spoil Heaps by Gwynne and Nigel Johnson with the Wildlife Trust Flora Group,
- 04/07 HAREBELL flowering at Catherington Down with ROUND HEADED RAMPION, CLUSTERED BELLFLOWER and a good show of DROPWORT.
- 04/07 Catherington Village Pond in fine fettle with GREATER SPEARWORT, FRINGED WATER LILY and BRANCHED BUR REED in flower
- 04/07 COMMON COW WHEAT has flowered well at Yeoll's Copse in Horndean according to John Vigay.
- 04/07 A good list of plants in flower on and around Portsdown from John Goodspeed
- 03/07 COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS still out at Noar Hill with newly flowering FROG and a mass of tiny MUSK ORCHIDS plus DRAGONS TEETH in two places
- 03/07 A fine display of FUMITORY at Exton seen by Geoff Butland, but what of Fumaria bastardi at Great Salterns?
- 02/07 Geoff Butland and I both find LESSER SKULLCAP in flower and LESSER CENTUARY may have been found
- 02/07 BROAD LEAVED HELLEBORINES raising their flower heads in Havant Thicket
- 30/06 Gardeners beware – the GREATER PLANTAIN is in flower
- 29/06 GOLDEN SAMPHIRE puts out a first flower on the Emsworth Nore Barn shore where I find HARD GRASS (and possibly CURVED HARD GRASS) flowering

INSECTS:

- 04/07 MULLEIN MOTH CATERPILLARS thriving on Common Figwort at Catherington Down
03/07 PURPLE EMPEROR seen in Bentley Wood carpark near Salisbury today while Mark Litjens was dragonfly watching in the New Forest
03/07 Where are all the SMALL SKIPPERS? (Don't worry, their early appearance last year seems to have been a misprint!)
- 03/07 CINNABAR MOTH CATERPILLARS out on Ragwort at Butser Hill where I glimpsed a WOOD TIGER MOTH
03/07 Many MARBLED WHITE and RINGLET at NOAR HILL but no Chalkhill Blue as yet
02/07 Mark Litjens has his first WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAK and 19 SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY at Botley Woods
02/07 Several people discover that GATEKEEPERS are now with us
01/07 My first GATEKEEPER and fresh GREEN VEINED WHITE
30/06 DARK GREEN FRITILLARY seen at Yew Hill by Mark Litjens today with 200 Marbled White and 50 Ringlet
28/06 GATEKEEPER & ESSEX SKIPPER seen on Thorney by Barry Collins on June 24 (none since then)
28/06 Some good moths come to Barry Collins light – including VARIED CORONET which lives on Sweet William seeds
28/06 DOWNY EMERALD and RED EYED DAMSELFLY seen on Brick Kiln Pond by Barry Collins
- ## **OTHER WILDLIFE:**
- 29/06 Mike Collins has an exciting close encounter with BOTTLE NOSED DOLPHINS off Selsey

Ralph Hollins (01705-615528), 4th July 1999

BIRDS:

SUN 4 JULY

Those who joined Kevin Stouse for his Pagham Harbour walk today got excellent value with the MARSH WARBLER in the scrub half way from Sidlesham Ferry to Church Norton being seen and heard both on the way out and back. The bird sang constantly but the party had to wait patiently before they saw it. The other star was a ROSEATE TERN which gave good if distant views, quite sufficient to show those who had scopes that it is a very white bird in flight. The supporting cast included a single AVOCET at the Ferry Pool with 2 Black Tailed Godwit and a single TEAL. Out in the harbour 7 Dunlin, a few Turnstone, 2 Grey Plover and a single Whimbrel were seen together with 3 Little Egret and a good number of Common and Sandwich Tern. A Green Woodpecker accompanied them for much of the walk and in the churchyard they watched a young Green Woodpecker being fed by an adult. The only bird on the sea was a Great Crested Grebe

There are estimated to be 4,400 breeding pairs of BARN OWL in the UK (not so many less than the Little Owl with 6,000 but far short of the Tawny Owls 60,000) and I suspect that more than one pair can be found around West Meon where Gywnne and Nigel Johnson saw one today north west of the village in the area of Court Farm in the SU 6324 square. In the past I have seen one to the east of the village around Westbury Manor Farm (SU 6524) and have heard in the past of one being regularly seen around Wheely Down to the west of Warneford.

SAT 3 JULY

Dave Mead's Portsmouth RSPB members group was in the New Forest today and had a small flock of 7 CROSSBILL calling and circling above them in the Holly Hatch area (SU 2111 along the Dockens Water stream running south west from Fritham). There is a good chance that these are birds that have bred in the New Forest but we could be getting large flocks arriving from Scandinavia before the end of the month if it is to be a Crossbill year. In 1997 Dave saw a few Crossbill at Church Norton on June 29, then some at Stedham Common the next week, and on July 18 I saw a flock of at least 80 over the larches of Stansted Forest.

An elusive MARSH WARBLER is said to be in the reeds and scrub some 500 metres north of Church Norton church as you walk back to Sidlesham Ferry. It was recorded there on June 30 and July 1 and hopefully will linger (as you will have to do if you are to hear it). Reading Keith Vinicombe's account in the MacMillan Guide to Bird Identification it seems that you are more likely to come across Marsh Warbler in damp, rank vegetation than in reeds or the drier places that Reed Warbler prefers (that was true of the Titchfield Haven canal bird of past years), and that Marsh Warbler is such a good imitator of other bird's songs that you are more likely to confuse it with the bird being imitated than with Reed

Warbler. If you do see it you are very unlikely to be able to separate it from Reed Warbler by eye unless you have seen both it and Reed Warbler frequently, so I guess you have to listen for the song of some bird that is unlikely to be in the place the song is coming from (such as Skylark in a nettle bed). Just one gleam of hope comes from the fact that Marsh Warbler is more likely to sing from an exposed perch and to sing with its bill fully open revealing a brilliant orange gape.

That news of Marsh Warbler came from the SOS Recent Sightings web page which also reports an OSPREY over Pagham Harbour on June 25th (probably the Thorney Island bird on a day trip), and says that AVOCET, LITTLE RINGED PLOVER, COMMON & GREEN SANDPIPER can be seen at Sidlesham Ferry. On June 27 an ARCTIC SKUA and 3 MANX SHEARWATER were still to be seen off Bexhill along with two MED GULLS (I wonder if they are being seen on the inland fields of Sussex as they now are in Hampshire?)

In Botley Woods at Tapnage Pete Potts heard 2 NIGHTJAR (possibly three) of the 3,000 breeding pairs which I see to be the current estimate of the UK summer population according to a list published on the internet by the UK400 Club. Other similar figures are 3,300 for Kingfisher and 4,000 for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. Looking further down that list of summer population estimates I was interested to compare 2,000 Mandarin with only 570 Ruddy Duck (can that number really threaten the King of Spain?), and a figure of 50,000 for Yellow Wagtail against 34,000 Grey Wagtail..

When Mike Wearing was at the Q E Country Park which includes Butser Hill he would often refer to 'Grandfather's Bottom' as a valley somewhere below the hill where he could e.g. often see a Little Owl. As this name does not appear on the O S Maps I have never been certain where it was, but recently I have been told that the name applies to the very steep sided valley running north west towards Ramsdean from the hill top, and when I was on the steep sides of that valley this morning I had a close view of a BUZZARD flying down the valley at eye level. The headline I have used (Buzzard flies down Grandfather's Bottom) may be a poor joke but it is also a plea for enlightenment as to which part of the area has that name. The valley where I was is called Rake Bottom on the map, so I suspect it is not also called Grandfather's Bottom.

The Evening Class visited Noar Hill this morning and noted 21 species of bird including 6 YELLOWHAMMER, so it sounds as if they are in good shape there, but there was no mention of two species which used to be regular at this reserve – Turtle Dove and Corn Bunting. The only compensation for this loss was the sight of 2 Bullfinch.

FRI 2 JULY

John Gowen found 11 TURNSTONE at the Hayling Oysterbeds today and Barry Collins had 3 DUNLIN at Pilsey as well as a good number of Redshank now back. Both the Dunlin and Turnstone were probably summering birds rather than returnees from the north, as is the OSPREY which Barry Collins saw again today fishing near Pilsey then flying north to perch on the landing lights by the Great Deeps east end – I suggested that this might be a return of the juvenile bird which spent weeks in that area last autumn but Barry told me that most juveniles remain for three years in Africa before they think of returning here.

Brian Fellows found the RUDDY DUCK still present on the Emsworth Slipper Mill pond this morning and I saw it there in the late afternoon so it seems to have settled in. Knowing that Ruddy Duck had bred on the Little Deeps in past years I wondered if this might be a juvenile from a local nest – it may be, but Barry Collins assures me the males make sure that everyone knows of their presence and he would not have missed them anywhere on Thorney.

A KINGFISHER flew across the Little Deeps on Thorney, heading north, when Brian cycled past this morning (it seems early for their return to the coast) and in Emsworth Harbour an adult MED GULL was with some 50 Black Headed and near a Little Egret. On the Little Deeps in the morning the local pair of Swans were present with their remaining three cygnets, but in the afternoon I could only see just one adult. When Brian returned home at midday he found a GREY WAGTAIL in the small Westbrook Stream which runs close to his house before reaching the mill pond – it seems strange to see these birds apparently tking over from Pied Wagtail as town birds but they are now well established in Havant town centre and are spreading the habit to Emsworth it seems.

THU 1 JULY

The raucous cries of an escaped COCKATIEL disturbed Brian Fellows' quiet evening walk along the western shore of Emsworth this evening – it was moving from one perch to another around the large fields north of Nore Barn and immediately adjacent to the houses of south Emsworth. If it had any sense the bird would come down to the many people who will no doubt try to lure it to the safety of a cage but I guess it will refuse their offers and spend two or three days of freedom before succumbing to starvation, fox or sparrowhawk (once I came on the corpse of a blue Budgerigar on the mud of Tipner Lake – presumably it had never seen water before, landed on it and drowned). As temperatures rise and people

leave their windows open many of these birds escape and very few return to safety

On the same walk Brian spotted that one of the Swans in the Emsworth Mill Pond (temporarily drained) was an old friend with a yellow Darvic ring carrying a bold UYD identification, and Brian was also able to read its much smaller BTO ring serial (X2874) which he will report to the BTO. Earlier in the afternoon I was at Broadmarsh slipway and noted that one of the Swans there had a large plastic ring on one leg but I was distracted by a conversation with John Gowen and forgot to get a closer look. John and I agreed that there were at least 75 Swans off the Broadmarsh slipway, one of which had three cygnets over by the Budds Farm shore, and there were in addition two pairs, each with four cygnets, one up the Brockhampton Stream and one up the Hermitage Stream. I only spotted the cygnets by the Budds Farm shore when I was on Budds Mound from which I could not only see the pair on the pools (they have lost their single cygnet) but also a lone adult out on North Binness. On the Budds Farm pools I reckon there were 54 Tufted Duck, one of them having three downy ducklings.

At dusk yesterday (June 30) Barry Collins made his month end count of the Egret roost at the Thorney Great Deeps and found 10 birds still using it. This is good news as it indicates that the birds have not abandoned Thorney in favour of Gosport and this count is in fact double the equivalent count of 5 birds last summer. So despite the presence of 20 or more birds feeding around Farlington Marshes, plus others no doubt in Portsmouth Harbour, all using the Elson Wood heronry site within the Naval Munitions Depot at Gosport, the Thorney site still has a faithful following. I also asked Barry if he thought all the adult Shelduck have yet departed to moult and he said that he still had at least 25 adults around Thorney in addition to those acting as nannies to a small creche of juveniles on the Great Deeps.

WED 30 JUNE

Emsworth Slipper Mill pond had a newcomer this morning when Brian Fellows walked by – he is certain that it was a RUDDY DUCK (a first for Emsworth) but puzzled by its plumage as it appeared to be a female but lacked all trace of the dark line which should bisect the white cheek, running from the base of the bill to the dark neck feathers. This plumage would be correct for a juvenile and my guess is that that is what it was, having flown from an early brood perhaps on Chichester Lakes or even from Surrey – if it is too early for a youngster then my second guess would be that it is a female beginning to moult, but can anyone confirm that young of this species are already out roaming on their own.? On a similar subject Brian asks if it is too early for young Swifts to be on the wing as he has seen an increase in the number of Swifts flying over Emsworth this morning. I see that it takes 50 to 75 days from the start of incubation until the young fly (they can go into ‘suspended animation’ in the nest if the parents are unable to bring food in bad weather) so it is possible that eggs laid at the beginning of May could have turned into young fliers by the beginning of July but I think it is unlikely eggs were laid until mid-May at earliest, and my feeling is that as soon as the young are on the wing the adults start moving south with them so I would not expect to see young out until the second half of July. At a guess the extra birds were some of the large population of non-breeding young adults that have to be somewhere, so why not Emsworth? Later this afternoon Brian saw a SPARROWHAWK circling high above his garden, drifting north-east and I would assume this might be another female now able to leave her youngsters while she goes out shopping for supper. John Goodspeed tells me that he thinks he has already heard those piteous cries of hungry young Sparrowhawks in Stansted, and I would guess their mum was glad to get away from the noise for a bit. Brian raises yet another query by asking if the Osprey still being seen over Thorney is coming or going? My answer would be neither – it is presumably a non breeding bird idling the summer months away, having arrived as a migrant perhaps in May and not yet thinking of moving south again.

Telescopes brought to the Wildlife Trust Coffee Morning on a lawn overlooking Chichester Harbour from the west end of the Emsworth shore had little use this morning though they did reveal a single Egret and 19 SHELDUCK resting on Fowley Island. I see that last year the last local sighting of a flock of adult Shelduck was of 46 at Hayling Oysterbeds on July 1st, with no other sightings of more than six (adults which had drawn the short straw of staying to run the creches of juveniles while the adults are moulting on the sands of Heligoland or Bridgewater Bay) until the adults began to return on Sept 28th

At the IBM North Harbour site the KESTREL CHICKS are doing well. John Shillitoe says “all three are well feathered, but still with plenty of down left. They are also very lively, wandering along the window ledge and exercising their wings - and eating mice whole, when provided.” On the grass by the lake LAPWING are returning for the autumn – two there on Monday and twelve on Tuesday this week.

TUE 29 JUNE

Yesterday’s note of the disappearance of the Black Swan from Emsworth Mill Pond was untrue – it had been omitted by accident from Brian Fellows list of sighting, but that omission was helpful in discovering the sex of the bird (when I mentioned its possible disappearance to an Emsworth resident I was told that the nws would please certain elderly spinsters of the parish who had been perturbed by its frequent attempts

to mount the other swans on the pond)
A note with Mike Collins' description of his encounter with Bottle Nosed Dolphin off Selsey last week (see Other Wildlife) also tells of the appearance of two baby LITTLE OWLS in the grounds of Goodwood House last week (June 23) and of two MED GULLS seen off Pilsley on the way to fish off Selsey on June 24. My experience on the Warblington CBC where we also have Little Owls nesting in most years is that they are very hard to spot during the nesting season but when the young have left the nest they are happy to sit out on a telegraph pole or other prominent perch to watch the world go by and be seen by us. Brian Fellows tells me that the Evening Class last night had a very interesting talk about wildlife on Portsdown from Richard Jones (who manages the natural environment of the hill for Portsmouth City). Despite disheartening news from elsewhere Richard thinks that YELLOWHAMMER are having a 'good year' in his patch. Looking out of the classroom windows onto the Staunton school playing fields between Leigh Park and Rowlands Castle Brian and others saw among the gulls two MED GULLS and one LESSER BLACKBACK, echoing John Shillitoe's similar sighting a week ago (see June 22)

MON 28 JUNE

Barry Collins saw the Chichester Harbour OSPREY still around Thorney Island on Saturday (June 26) but can shed no light on a Harrier rumoured to have been there on that same day.
Two young flew from the SPOTTED FLYCATCHER nest in Christoph Harwood's garden at East Meon yesterday (see June 23) and only just escaped the talons of a Sparrowhawk that same evening – between them Christoph and the parent Flycatchers managed to drive the hawk away
Brian Fellows made the rounds of Emsworth Ponds today but omitted mention of the Black Swan (it was there on June 21) – maybe it has retreated to some more suitable spot to moult or maybe it has 'moved on' for good. 54 Mute Swan were still around and some Mallard still have young duckling but a general drabness is coming over the scene as the Mallard start to moult in earnest (will they be in total eclipse before the sun in August?) A Reed Warbler singing in the few reeds around the Slipper Mill Pond was the only bright spot in a fairly drab scene.
Two REDSHANK were back on the Langstone Pond shore this afternoon and single Egrets were in the South Moors Tamarisk Pool and the 'Wade Court Yew' to escape the high tide. The Langstone Pond Swans and their seven cygnets were present and correct on the shore by the Royal Oak and in Havant a Grey Wagtail was busy near the Homewell spring – I am fairly sure this is the bird which nests somewhere near the spring and comes to collect food on my lawn.
A chance conversation with Cath Cooper this evening brought me news the world has been waiting for – the final answer to the question of how crop circles are created. Cath was in Dorset recently and walking on the hill close to the Cerne Abbas 'Giant' when she noticed two Buzzards in the valley below, then saw a group of six or seven HERON flying together and landing in a cornfield where their heads remained visible above the corn. Perhaps you can explain what they were doing, but until I hear a better explanation I will stick to the theory that the Herons were waiting for the Buzzards to soar above the scene and give them instructions for creating a complex corn circle pattern. Clearly whoever carries out the task needs (a) direction from someone with a bird's eye view of the overall scene – the Buzzards are ideally suited to this and their far carrying cries would transmit the necessary instructions – and (b) an appropriate tool for flattening broad swathes of corn, maintaining an accurate width of the flattened swathe, without leaving footprints or other trails on the ground – and a Heron, half flying, half hopping along the ground is the ideal tool.

PLANTS:

SUN 4 JULY

This morning Gwynne and Nigel Johnson joined the Wildlife Trust Flora Group visit to the Micheldever Spoil Heaps led by Clive Chatters and saw the expected CUT LEAVED GERMANDER together with three unexpected bonuses (all right, boni) in the shape of BASIL THYME, YELLOW BIRD'S NEST (not a rarity but unexpected) and RED HEMP-NETTLE. Stace tells us that this latter rarity grows to 50 cm, as I would expect of a cornfield weed competing with a crop, but at this site on the spoil heaps the plants were tiny and Clive said they never grew more than 15cm high.
This afternoon I had been asked to lead one of several walks around Catherington Down as part of Open Garden at Stephen Harwood's home (which backs onto the nature reserve of which he is the reserve manager) and enjoyed a visit in which I found a mass of DROPWORT in flower (it is increasing in numbers and is now easy to see from a distance as the long grass which used to obscure it has been eaten either by sheep or members of Hampshire Conservation volunteers). ROUND HEADED RAMPION and CLUSTERED BELLFLOWER were out in reasonable numbers but there was no sign of Autumn

Gentian nor of Frog Orchids. I did however see one good example of HAREBELL with its first flower open, and this reminds me that when I was on Butser Hill yesterday helping Kate Stacey to identify plants as part of an exercise for here Open University Ecology Degree we both puzzled for some time over a number of leaves that we found with no other visible parts of the plant to which they belonged. These leaves occurred singly and were the shape of those belonging to Ivy Leaved Toadflax, but smaller (7-10mm across), and were held just above the surrounding grass on thin stems less than 2cm long. Luckily Francis Rose's key to plants of chalk grasslands came up with the answer – they are the basal leaves of Harebells. When I found the Harebell today I burrowed in the grass at the bottom of its flowering stem and sure enough found a couple of these leaves which I would never have guessed belonged to this plant and have never noticed anywhere before.

Also at Catherington today I admired the village pond (nothing to do with the Down) which attracted my eyes from a distance with a great show of GREATER SPEARWORT and when I went close I found BRANCHED BUR REED, FRINGED WATER LILY (*Nymphoides peltata*, the small yellow water lily), and leaves of both MARE'S TAIL and PARROT'S FEATHER as well as the remains of Yellow Iris. In the wild part of Stephen Harwood's excellent formal garden, around the pond, many of these were repeated with the addition of MONKEY FLOWER (*Mimulus guttatus*) and, on dry ground, much MEADOW CRANESBILL. Within the formal garden I was delighted to find, holding its own among many larger flowers, quite a lot of HEDGEROW CRANESBILL.

One other piece of plant news I heard today came from John Vigay who told me that COMMON COW-WHEAT has again flourished in Yeoll's Copse at Horndean this year. Yeoll's Copse is marked on my map at SU 689129 and has many interesting woodland plants – if you want to know more e-mail John Vigay on jvigay@interalpha.co.uk

A late but welcome piece of information came this evening from John Goodspeed in the form of a list of plants he has recorded in June. I see that my first HAREBELL seen today was almost a month after his first on June 9 and that on the Fort Widley nature trail the impressive but highly poisonous GIANT HOGWEED was seen on June 17 (I was once told by a professional gardener that the only way to get rid of this menace was to cut down and burn as much as you could, then to pour petrol down the hollow stems, throw in a match and run for your life). Two good plants seen at Hookheath on June 30 were HIMALYAN BALSAM (Policeman's Helmet) and COMMON HEMP-NETTLE. Two other first flowerings which beat my own records are of WILD MARJORAM on June 27 and WOOD SAGE on June 30

SAT 3 JULY

Walking northeast from the Exton Hill carpark on a field footpath beyond the wood (SU 601231) Geoff Butland was greatly impressed by a 200 yard stretch of FUMITORY and FIELD MADDER which I guess is well worth seeing if you are in that area. Geoff admits (as do I) to not being able to instantly recognize all ten species of Fumitory listed by Stace, let alone their many hybrids, but one that might be worth looking for in the Portsmouth area is the TALL RAMPING FUMITORY (*F. bastardii*) which was found at the Great Salterns in 1991 by Delph Smith. This keys out with Common Fumitory from which it is separated in Stace's key by the shape of its fruits (Common has fruits "truncate to retuse at apex, distinctly wider than long" while *bastardii* has fruits "rounded to subacute at apex, narrower than to as wide as long" (Stace has a page of good illustrations to back this). On first sight the larger flowers of *bastardii* should attract attention – they are 9-11 mm long and very pale pink to pink, where the Common Fumitory has flowers 7-8 mm long and pink in colour. In 1934 *F. bastardii* was also recorded at Portchester. Putting this rarity aside the Flora of Hants tells us that there is just one 'locally frequent' species that you might come across (though mainly in coastal areas in the south west of Hampshire) and this is COMMON RAMPING FUMITORY (*F. muralis*). This species has large (9-11mm) pink flowers in a raceme about the same length as its stem (peduncle) whereas in both the previous two species we have mentioned the raceme is longer than its peduncle. Finally we must not forget the Isle of Wight's famous "Martin's Ramping Fumitory" which I saw on TV earlier this year with school children interviewed at the roadside being surprised that they had a rare plant under their feet – the programme also said that seeds of the rarity were being sown in naturalist's gardens around the island to give it a greater chance of survival than it has in the one set of allotments where it is now found (at Carisbrooke?)

I was in the steep sided valley called Rake Bottom running north west from Butser Hill towards Ramsdean this morning and found quite a lot of HOUNDS TONGUE, mainly carrying its unique 'Hot Cross Bun' seed but still with a few of its deep red flowers. As usual the plants clustered on the disturbed ground around the rabbit burrows towards the bottom of the valley. Down in the bottom one first plant of WILD BASIL was in flower and masses of Marjoram were very nearly in flower

The Evening Class met at Noar Hill today and found many COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS still flowering

plus many PYRAMIDAL and a great mass of tiny MUSK ORCHIDS. A few FRAGRANT ORCHIDS were out and several FROG ORCHIDS plus the single FROG x COMMON SPOTTED HYBRID which Geoff Butland told us of on June 18. On this visit the group saw DRAGONS TOOTH in only two of the pits, not the three separate sites at which Geoff found it in mid-June.

FRI 2 JULY

In Havant Thicket today I at last found flowers on the patch of LESSER SKULLCAP which Pete Selby's team had found in leaf back in May, and by co-incidence a message from Geoff Butland tells me he found it on Wednesday at Woolbeding in the Midhurst area. It is not common in our area and the only places where I know it can be found around Havant are down at Sandy Point on Hayling and in two places in Stansted Forest but it is an easily overlooked plant and may be much more common in damp shady places. Today I also found the first flowers on the much more common WOOD SAGE and under conifers on your left as you enter Havant Thicket from the Castle Road entrance a dozen BROAD LEAVED HELLBORINE are to be seen, some already raising long flower heads.

Geoff Butland also believes he has found LESSER CENTAURY in a couple of places, one being in West Walk during the Wednesday evening walk led by Andrew Powling who seemed to think it was Common Centaury. On the few occasions I have found the Lesser species it has called out to me by having much brighter red flowers (like Scarlet Pimpernel) than the common species but I gather this is not a vital difference – what you should look for is a flower stem of more than 1 mm below the sepals before reaching the bracts which normally hide any stem from view. In Common Centaury this stem is 0 to 1 mm long, in Lesser it is 1 to 4 mm long. Other features that help to separate them are that Lesser is usually an annual with no basal leaf rosette, Common normally a biennial with a rosette. Common has normally a more upright stance with all the flowers in a cluster at the top, Lesser is a more open branched plant with flowers separated at the end of the various branches (though it is often a minute plant with a single flower on a single stem well under an inch high)

Also on Andrew Powling's walk in West Walk on Wednesday evening Geoff Butland came on the very unusual pure white form of SELF HEAL. I have seen this white form in the Southwick Woods (Drivetts Copse) where the Wayfarers Way enters them from the Purbrook Heath Road, and in some places on chalk I have seen the even prettier pale pink form.

THU 1 JULY

I was pleased to see that the great mass of VERVAIN in the rough field along the north bank of Bedhampton Mill Pond has not yet succumbed to the twin onslaught of pony grazing and the growth of docks and nettles and other coarse weeds – the field was a mass of pale ice blue flowers as I cycled past today. Also deserving its name of Hedge Bedstraw was the mass of this plant lining the path past the Bedhampton Water Works today, and the lovely yellow flowers of Perennial Sowthistle are also giving delight through force of numbers by the Hermitage stream and in many other places.

WED 30 JUNE

Leading a small group along the Emworth shore where I had been prospecting yesterday I added just one new flowering plant – the gardener's curse of GREATER PLANTAIN (why does it deserve the name of Greater when it is generally a small plant and has no 'Lesser' cousin, only the lovely Hoary Plantain of the downs which I see is *Plantago media*, not minor).

TUE 29 JUNE

GOLDEN SAMPHIRE was flowering on the seawall south of Nore Barn at Emsworth and HARD-GRASS had put out its minute white flags of flowers as if to surrender to the stormy sea shore world in which it found itself. Moving west into the south-east corner field of Warblington Farm I believe I found one plant of CURVED HARD-GRASS (*Parapholus incurva*) which might be an addition to its known locations in Hampshire – it was certainly curved and I see it was in an appropriate setting on a dry stony bank at the inland edge of a seawater ditch.

MON 28 JUNE

A week after Brian Fellows found MUGWORT in flower at Emsworth I found my first plant flowering in Havant today – the red-brown florets always look as if they are over as soon as they open and the clean white buds seem to become 'dead flowers' as they open.

INSECTS:

SUN 4 JULY

MARBLED WHITES performed well for visitors to Stephen Harwood's Open Garden at Catherington today with three or four posing on grass (in the meadow between Stephen's house and the nature reserve) with both open and closed wings. Other than them I saw one good COMMA, a few RINGLET and a fair

number of Meadow Brown plus one FIVE SPOT BURNET MOTH nectaring on Self Heal. The find which interested me most was of two well grown MULLEIN MOTH CATERPILLARS, not on Great Mullein but on Common Figwort on which they seemed to be thriving. I am glad I decided not to move them to Mullein plants as I see that Figwort is on their list of foodplants and a change of diet at a late state of development could have been bad for them.

SAT 3 JULY

Mark Litjens today "visited the Crockford area of the New Forest today as the weather was quite windy as it's an area that has good sheltered areas. On the dragonfly front Common Darters have emerged in small numbers and a few Southern Damselflies were showing well. Keeled Skimmers were quite numerous as well as Golden-ringed Dragonflies. Also there Large and Small Red Damselfly, Beautiful Demoiselle, Broad-bodied Chaser. Silver-studded Blue and Small Heath were in small numbers but plenty of Large Skippers were around. A White Admiral briefly showed before flying off."

Mark missed the first PURPLE EMPEROR which he tells me was seen by a friend of his from the carpark at Bentley Wood on the Wiltshire border. Also at Bentley this friend saw "good numbers of Comma, Red Admiral, Ringlet and White Admiral".

In all the butterfly reports that I receive SMALL SKIPPER were hardly ever mentioned in June. The 1998 Hampshire Butterfly report gave the first sighting as May 10 and indicated that they were present throughout June, though Jeremy Thomas' book indicates that they only become abundant at the start of July. Hopefully, like the Gatekeeper, this species will begin to feature regularly in reports from now on. (On double checking this I see that there is an error in the butterfly report as the text for Small Skipper disagrees with the chart on the first page the text says the first was not out until June 4 and that "large numbers did not emerge until well into July")

In the Bishops Waltham area Pete Potts now has "plenty of Marbled Whites and Meadow Browns out at Claylands and Dundridge" and saw several GLOW WORMS in the Botley Woods (Tapnagge) last night. Despite warm air a fresh breeze kept butterflies off the open downland of Butser Hill but I did briefly what I am pretty sure was a WOOD TIGER MOTH. The most interesting observation there was of the first CINNABAR MOTH CATERPILLARS on Ragwort

Our local Evening Class group were at Noar Hill this morning and saw many MARBLED WHITE and RINGLET but little else. The last DUKE OF BURGUNDY was probably seen a month ago and Common Blue are between broods while Chalkhill Blue have not yet emerged (the first was seen on July 6th last year, July 5th in 1997 and not until the 14th in 1996). Brown Hairstreak, the speciality of this reserve, still have another month to lie in bed.

FRI 2 JULY

The first WHITE LETTER HAIRSTREAK was out in Whiteley Pastures on the edge of Botley Woods at lunch time today when Mark Litjens took a walk there. With it Mark saw his first GATEKEEPER and 19 SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY plus numerous Large Skipper and Ringlet. Also there were Brimstone, Comma, Purple Hairstreak, White and Red Admiral. Dragonflies included Golden-ringed, Southern Hawker and Broad-bodied Chaser.

On the Gipsies Plain meadows south of Havant Thicket MEADOW BROWN are abundant but I saw few other butterfly species in Havant Thicket today – a few Large Skipper and one Red Admiral. On the north west Thorney seawall several SMALL HEATH were to be seen and three GATEKEEPER were on one bramble bush by the Great Deeps (Barry Collins saw others on the island).

THU 1 JULY

After a dull and windy day the sun broke through in the late afternoon and as the temperature rose several butterflies took to the wing. A Large White flew through my garden, and as I cycled past the Bedhampton Water Works three different COMMAs got up from the path. South of the A27, by the Hermitage Stream, I had a close view of a fresh female GREEN VEINED WHITE (several other 'small whites' were probably of the same species) and on the same bramble bush a fresh GATEKEEPER showed me its credentials

WED 30 JUNE

Mark Litjens made a lunch time visit to the Yew Hill butterfly reserve near Winchester today and saw the first DARK GREEN FRITILLARY that I have heard of. The reserve was in excellent shape for the butterflies and some 200 MARBLED WHITE were enjoying it with perhaps 50 Meadow Brown and 50 Ringlet plus Large Skipper and at least 2 SMALL SKIPPER

MON 28 JUNE

Barry Collins had news for me today of Butterflies, Moths and Dragonflies. Last Thursday (June 26) he saw both GATEKEEPER and ESSEX SKIPPER on Thorney Island (but has seen neither since then), and at

the Stansted Brick Kiln Pond he saw both RED EYED DAMSELFLY and DOWNY EMERALD dragonfly. At his moth light he recorded 24 species in one evening picking out as notable SCARCE SILVER LINES, PHOENIX, VARIED CORONET, LILAC BEAUTY, FOUR DOTTED FOOTMAN, BLACKNECK and BROAD BARRED WHITE. I have no idea how scarce these species may be but in looking them up I was interested to see that the Varied Coronet relies on the seeds of Sweet William flowers as its only larval food – long live the English country garden... Not a good day for butterflies, but I did encounter one RED ADMIRAL trying to warm up on the bare ground of a path where I was walking today

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 2 JULY

Walking along the Emsworth shore where many others stroll on summer days Brian Fellows was surprised and pleased to find himself watching a lovely red FOX less than 6 feet from him in a shore garden. The Fox showed no concern at Brian's presence and made no attempt to move away when he stopped to look at it.

TUE 29 JUNE

A message from Mike Collins (delayed for several days somewhere in the pipeline) gives a fascinating account of a close encounter with BOTTLE-NOSED DOLPHIN when he was out in a small boat heading from Chichester Harbour to Selsey last Thursday (June 24). In Mike's words "We were about a mile out from Chichester harbour when we saw a dolphin ahead of us, and it was not long before we became aware of two more even closer. Within minutes the two were right next to the boat and swimming along with us, at times riding right under the bow, at one stage one jumped clear of the water right along side us splashing all in the process. They were clearly bottlenosed dolphins. A few hours later when we were anchored off Selsey we saw them again but only two come anywhere near the boat, this time not so close. They did show a bit more interest when someone splashed the water with an oar. but they kept their distance this time content with tossing a piece of weed in the water. I count myself very lucky to have witnessed such a sight just off our coast."

WEEK 25

JUNE 21 - 27

BIRDS:

SUN 27 JUNE

At Thornham Point this afternoon Brian Fellows once more saw a HOBBY flying east towards the Little Deeps, well clear of the Swallows skimming low over fields at Prinsted. Further north where Stein Road coming north from Southbourne goes over the new A27, a couple of Yellowhammer sang to prove they are not extinct.

My own brief outing to Northney marina area found an adult Lesser Blackback on the shore with some 50 immature Herring Gull, saw the Langstone Pond Swans with their seven cygnets in the New Cut channel off Northney, and glimpsed Sparrowhawk and Heron flying over Langstone Pond.

SAT 26 JUNE

On his way to the Hilsea Lines for the Evening Class walk Brian Fellows stopped at Broadmarsh but could only see 65 Swans, and by Hilsea Moat he saw a Reed Warbler wearing a BTO Ring and came on five Whitethroat. Mallard, Coot and Moorhen had young but there were no Swans to be seen (usually one nests at the west end between the Texaco garage and the Peronne Road bridge and a second pair nests in the large reedbed of the pool at the extreme east end of the existing moat, east of the railway). He comments that he did not hear a single ROBIN at Hilsea, nor in the lower Ems Valley on his afternoon walk

FRI 25 JUNE

The first JUVENILE BLACK HEADED GULL I have seen was at Broadmarsh this afternoon. The SWAN HERD there had increased to 76 (the highest count for many years) and a new Swan family was there with six cygnets – they were not the Langstone family as I saw them shortly after (still with seven cygnets) in the stream flowing out from Langstone Mill. At a guess the family of four that has been there for some time were up the Brockhampton stream and the Bedhampton Mill family were presumably still up the Hermitage Stream. Out on the water of Langstone Harbour I could just make out a group of bobbing shapes which I think were 7 or more Great Crested Grebe. On the Budds Farm pools the Swan pair had their single cygnet out on the water and there were families of young Coot and Mallard. I saw one Little Grebe, two Shelduck and I think over 50 Tufted Duck but none of these had visible young. Off the

South Moors at low tide two Egret were fishing, while on the Langstone shore a couple of Lapwing were back and two COMMON GULL were present.

THU 24 JUNE

Last night's walk in Creech Woods turned out to be a bit of a headache for Kevin Stouse as leader (40 people turned up and firstly had problems with parking because the carpark is now locked at 8pm, and then had problems staying together in the dark) but a success in terms of excellent NIGHTJAR watching – at least four churring and giving close views (one churring in silhouette on a dead tree) – and TAWNY OWLS provided background music but not one WOODCOCK showed (they do seem thin on the ground nowadays). Two of the walkers had interesting news – one of a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER in her Horndean garden (eating her dragonflies) and the other of the BARN OWL which Mike Collins saw flying across the main road between Funtington and Marlpit Lane – the news is the owl 'is living in' a barn which must be near Hambrook Grange (where there is a Llama herd) on Cheeseman's Lane going south from the MoD site.

Pete Potts has failed to get permission from IBM to ring the Kestrels in the nest on their building at Portsmouth North Harbour (having had one past fatality of a person falling from the roof this is understandable) but has ringed four healthy Kestrel chicks in a nestbox at Chilling (near Warsash)

WED 23 JUNE

Christoph Harwood this evening told me that a pair of SPOTTED FLYCATCHER have nested in his garden at East Meon and raised two young. I wonder if this is the same garden in which Tony Gutteridge saw a Flycatcher on May 27? Could there be two pairs in East Meon? – nowhere else seems to have even one. If you know of any breeding Flycatcher in Hampshire this year I would love to know as they seem to have almost vanished as a breeding species here in South East Hants.

Alan Tuddy, head ranger at the Staunton Country Park, told me this evening that a LITTLE EGRET is still occasionally to be seen in the Park, usually in the secluded damp area (not open to the public) around SU 728094 between the Petersfield Road coming north from Leigh Park and the northern section of Prospect Lane (in one past winter a Bittern spent a few days there). This seems a strange place for an Egret to come to feed and makes me wonder if it has other reasons from being in the area (though if it finds the frogs are tasty here it could well keep coming back for more). Another piece of news reaching me in this morning's post came from Dennis Bill with copies of the March and April WeBS count summaries for Portsmouth Harbour – Dennis says that in the May count (May 15) a MONTAGU'S HARRIER was seen by Marc Moody.

Barry Collins today saw the OSPREY (which has been in Chichester Harbour for a week or more) perched on a post off Stanbury Point on Thorney east shore

TUE 22 JUNE

A message from John Shillitoe, referring to Sunday and Monday sightings of a MED GULL in a hayfield by West Walk woods at Wickham, came in just too late for inclusion in Monday night's update – John's message reads .. "I had a call yesterday afternoon (Sun 20 June) to say that there was a MED GULL on a recently cut hay field at Newtown at the Lodge Hill end of Hundred Acres Road. When I got there, it had disappeared, but there were 8 LESSER BLACKBACKS (adults and 3rd years) and 4 COMMON GULLS (adult and 1st summers), as well as a few Black headed. Interestingly, I have been seeing little groups of Lesser Black Backs over the last couple of weeks, flying around the area. Always the optimist, I took a look over the field this evening (Mon 21 June) and the Med Gull, had returned. Nice bird - full adult summer plumage." I am particularly interested in the Common Gulls – very few are here in the summer and they are mostly immature but breeding was first recorded in 1991. John also tells me that the three Kestrel chicks at IBM North Harbour are growing at a remarkable rate and he expects to see the first feathers appearing through their down soon.

Tony Gutteridge and I made our last but one CBC visit to Warblington this morning where the most notable birds were not birds that breed on the farm – the first was LAPWING, with 8 tatty looking birds out on the saltings to mark the return of birds to the coast, the second was MUTE SWAN, with three still managing to fly past before grounded by their moult, and the last was SPARROWHAWK with the female being seen twice during the visit – she usually nests in Nore Barn (adjacent to the farm) and her presence probably means that her youngsters are large enough to look after themselves while she goes hunting, and are in need of more food than the male alone can provide. A message from Pete Potts this evening confirms my view that 'autumn has started' as evinced by the return of the Lapwing to the shore – Pete notes "First CURLEWS ARE BACK again - c.20 at Dibden Bay today - autumn has started....."

Brian Fellows tells me that just one NIGHTJAR was seen in Havant Thicket last evening by the Evening Class group – one bird (maybe different from the first) churred briefly. Today Brian was in Portsmouth where the Canoe Lake Swans were down to 17 but the Baffins Canada Geese were up to 146 (plus 6

young) and were accompanied by the EMPEROR. Other species at Baffins were down in number – only one Snow Geese, 14 Tufted Duck and only 28 Barnacles (with just 2 young), but a pair of Little Grebe had 3 youngsters and there were still 114 Mallard with some ducklings. Also down in number were the Terrapin (4 where there had been six, but I bet the other two were lurking somewhere).

In the afternoon Brian Fellows visited Farlington Marshes and jotted down some interesting reports from the sightings board which records 60 BEARDED TIT (including their young), 130 Black Tailed Godwit, 22 Little Egret and 53 Canada Geese (which have probably moved on to Baffins Pond now). Smaller numbers were 2 Green Sandpiper, 1 Knot, 1 Little Stint, 1 Greenshank, 1 Snipe, 2 Spotted Redshank, 1 male Wigeon, a pair of Teal, 4 male Shoveler, a single male Pochard and 2 Brent. The list of gulls and terns included 1 LITTLE GULL, 10 Med Gulls, 80 Sandwich Tern with 200 Common and 180 Little Tern (I doubt these represent any official count by John Badley – just numbers estimated from the reserve). The SAKER is still listed (although I heard John Badley saying on the radio that it was no longer the problem with nesting gulls and terns that it had been at the start of the breeding season) with 2 Peregrine and 2 Hobby. After reading the notice board Brian walked round the reserve and saw around 40 Shelduck but no young, and a pair of Swans on the scrape with no young visible. He saw some Yellow Wagtail (the notice board gave a count of just ten birds which sounds very low). I share Brian's view that it is a pity that the sighting's board seems only to list the unusual birds and gives no news of the 'bread and butter' of the two reserves (marshes and islands) which are the nesting birds such as Lapwing, and the Little Terns on the islands.

MON 21 JUNE

Mike Collins was driving home from Goodwood at 9.45pm last Saturday, and had gone through Funtington and was near Marlpit Lane, when a BARN OWL flew in front of his car.

Colin Law has been on holiday at an excellent camp site in the Chilterns near Watlington just off the M40 and had "countless excellent views of RED KITE". Anyone wanting details of the camp site should contact colin.law@epid.eurotherm.co.uk - in addition to the Kites he could hear three TURTLE DOVES calling at the same time, not to mention views of BARN OWL, kestrels, sparrowhawk, buzzards, and HOBBY.

Thorney Island is once more top of the MoD league table for the number of wildlife species on any one site – to get the facts check out the latest issue of the magazine SANCTUARY which is published by the MoD and devoted to wildlife on military bases. As well as telling me that news this morning Barry Collins also said that at least one Ringed Plover and one Oystercatcher had found good nest sites among the jumble of concrete where a part of the runways had been pounded into fragments and left longer than usual before being carried off for sorting and adding the the huge modern 'tumuli' which now line the southern side of the Great Deeps east of the main road – as a consequence one unarmed guard (Barry) is on duty to enforce the temporary stop order on work that might disturb the nests. Other news from Thorney is off an OSPREY still present in the harbour with three EIDER, and of a NIGHTINGALE that only moved in to the scrub near the deeps after the breeding census period was over (probably a bird that had failed to breed elsewhere). Foxes have taken cygnets from both Swan broods on the deeps – the Little Deeps pair which hatched 5 are now down to 3 and those from the Great Deeps which had at least three are now down to two. Barry went on to confirm that any Egrets fishing on Thorney by day all appear to fly west in the evening – presumably to the Elson Wood heronry on Portsmouth Harbour shores. Finally I was told that the pair of Swans which I had been surprised to see with one cygnet on Aldsworth Pond last Tuesday (June 15) may well have come from a nest in the Stansted nature reserve behind Brick-kiln pond, having walked downstream to feed on the wealth of weed in Aldsworth Pond.

Brian Fellows today made his round of the Emsworth ponds, finding the Black Swan still on the Mill Pond with 56 Mute Swan on or near that water. Reed Warbler were singing by both Slipper Mill and Peter Pond and there were both Mallard and Coot families to be seen but the Moorhen pair on Peter Pond had no visible offspring. Out in the harbour immature Herring Gulls were the dominant birds but Peter Pond had a more ornamental pair of GOLDFINCH feeding on thistles (I have noticed them this summer on Thistles which as yet have no seeds – they seem happy to eat the flowers (maybe they are after insects?))

This afternoon I walked around the plateau of fields and woods to the north of Forestside, the only bird interest being a flock of 56 LINNET which rose from a field of Oilseed Rape to settle on telephone wires above the field near South Holt Farm; the presence of four widely separated singing YELLOWHAMMER, and a family party of Bullfinch

A message from Chris Fairhead tells me not only about a good view of a Heron raiding a fishpond in an Emsworth garden but also about an encounter he had with a baby Great Tit that had probably fallen out of the nest too early, asking my views on what to do in such circumstances. As this is a question which everyone faces at some time this is my reply

- ...The standard advice for young found apparently abandoned in normal circumstances is to leave them alone except where they are in imminent danger - their parents are almost certainly aware of the chicks and will do their best to look after them (there are always exceptions - you may have seen what I said about a mother Swan not being able to count and leaving the majority of her brood at the foot of a steep bank and walking away with what she took to be her whole family).
- ...If the young are in great danger from cats or cars, or are genuinely abandoned (parents killed), you then have to take a moral decision of your own as to whether humans should take on the responsibility of acting as parents (either looking after the babies yourself or taking them to a bird hospital). You may disagree with me but my view is that as more than half the chicks which hatch each season do not survive the first few months, and are destined to become part of the food chain it is 'appropriate' to let nature take its course - if they did all survive we would be overwhelmed with many common species and various predators, scavengers, and small creatures like beetles and flies would have problems in surviving
- ...I know it is difficult to 'pass by on the other side', but if you feel you must try to rescue the young creature you should take into consideration the time and other costs of looking after it. There are quite a few people who devote their lives to running wildlife rescue centres, but they still have costs in finding food, medicine, materials for cages etc and vets bills, so if you really want to rescue a young bird I think you should either do it yourself or make a reasonable donation to whatever wildlife rescue organisation you dump the bird on. It greatly embarrasses me when people ask me to take young birds they have found to someone like Anne McMahon or the Brent Lodge Hospital without making any contribution to the costs (even a tin of dogfood).

PLANTS:

SUN 27 JUNE

Brightening skies in the afternoon persuaded me to cycle across Langstone Bridge to Northney where I found the large colony of GOATS RUE in full flower on the open space south of the marina in the dell where it is protected by a ring fence of Teazels, Brambles and Blackthorn – from a distance the flowers look like a white version of the yellow Lupins now over on South Hayling. STRAWBERRY CLOVER was also in flower and one flower of COMMON FLEABANE had opened its yellow disk but had not yet put out any ray florets (in a few days it will be flowering everywhere). The grass 'lawn' behind the houses west of the carpark for this open space was thickly carpeted in yellow of Birds Foot Trefoil (I can't recall seeing quite so much in a small area) plus Creeping Cinquefoil, and Common Centaury was just starting to open in vast numbers. Lesser Centaury is also found here but I found none today – usually it stands out not only by its much shorter stemmed plants but also by the brighter red-pink of the flowers, though the characteristics which prove its identity are a longer flower stem (up to 4mm where Common is less than 1mm), a more openly branched plant with single flowers on each branch rather than a dense cluster at the top of the stem, and no basal rosette of leaves as it is an annual. On the edge of this 'lawn' a big colony of WOOD SMALL-REED (*Calamagrostis epigejos*) has just become noticeable, and back at Langstone I stopped on the seawall by the pond (close to the brick wall of the Mill) to search for and find the first flowers on LAX SEA LAVENDER (not easy to pick out at a distance)

Stephen Harwood tells me that there should be a good display of flowers on Catherington Down for his 'open garden' (adjacent to and including walks around) the reserve next Sunday (July 4). The ROUND HEADED RAMPION and CLUSTERED BELLFLOWER are coming along well (presumably not yet in flower) but the grazing sheep, now withdrawn, have apparently eaten all the spring orchids.

SAT 26 JUNE

Gwynne Johnson gave me details of the plants found on Hilsea Lines by the Evening Class today, starting with an '8 foot tall yellow crucifer' which was abundant between the main London Road and the Peronne Road bridge along the Ports creek side of the grass – my only suggestion is that this is over-exuberant Black Mustard which I have found there before. Just east of Peronne Road on the earth bank which acts as a defence against high tides overtopping the normal seawall there was a good show of a tall brightly coloured spurge which puzzled me when I first saw it in 1993 – I pointed it out to Dick Barrett and he sent a specimen off for expert determination and was told it was EUPHORBIA OBLONGATA (Balkan Spurge) and that this was only the fourth time it had been found in Britain, and I see that my name now appears in the Hants Flora as the 'first finder' and that the colony gets a mention in Stace's New Flora of the British Isles. On this occasion Gwynne made another discovery of a plant labelled 'very rare' in the Hants Flora – HIERACIUM MACULATUM (which has the admirable quality among Hawkweeds of being easily identifiable by the purple blotches on its leaves) I won't list the 80 plant species found by the Evening Class but the list included Pyramidal Orchid and Pale Flax.

The first COMMON FLEABANE was flowering by Mill Lane near the River Ems at Emsworth this afternoon where Brian Fellows found lots of Meadowsweet flowering in the river meadows.

THU 24 JUNE

The only new flower today was SWEET CHESTNUT, possibly the last tree species to flower (with the exception of the Strawberry Tree in late autumn), and it reminded me that I have not noted the flowering of LIME TREES which only just preceded the Sweet Chestnut. Common Centaury was flowering along some rides of Havant Thicket, and I saw just one flower of GRASS VETCHLING (*Lathyrus nissolia*)

WED 23 JUNE

Walking through Leigh Park Gardens I came out onto the southern side of the Gipsies Plain and climbed the gate to check out the lovely 'orchid ditch' where we recently found over 400 Common Spotted orchids. Those are now going over but I found five new flowering plants to keep up the interest here. First was the purple of BETONY, then the white of SNEEZEWORD and the mauve-pink of MARSH WOUNDWORT. Down in the ditch the less colourful SHARP FLOWERED RUSHES were out (*Juncus acutiflorus*) and over in the shallower western ditch along this track was a bright yellow ground cover of CREEPING JENNY. I found the latter plant also flowering the the small meadow between the long Avenue of Leigh Park Gardens and Hammonds Lands Coppice – this meadow has a great mass of Corky Fruited Water Dropwort among which a few specimens have less densely packed umbels and more complex leaves than others.

TUE 22 JUNE

An evening cycle ride to Emsworth and up the Ems Valley from Lumley to Emsworth found its objective in the lovely blue flowers of SKULLCAP growing on shingle outside the cottages at Lumley (where part of the stream runs in a channel between the road and the cottages), and from cracks in the 'towpath wall' going down into the water from the tarmac path between Westbourne Church and Mill Lane. In the latter section LESSER WATER PARSNIP (*Berula erecta*), which I find to be rare in my patch, was flowering with leafy bracts and bracteoles to distinguish it from the much commoner FOOLS WATER CRESS. Much of the Reed Canary-Grass here has the pretty purplish panicles of flower which are a delight to see. (elsewhere in the area the whitish form seems more common). On my way to Lumley from Victoria Road in Emsworth I made a detour up the path leading north from the gasholder under the new road and railway to the meadows behind Westbourne Avenue, and on the south bank of the A27 (above the underpass taking the path) there was the expected show of Rose Campion (*Lychnis coronaria*) in flower though the Oriental Poppies that also grow here were now over.

MON 21 JUNE

A circuit to the north of Forestside via Horsley and South Holt Farms and along the southern edge of Markwells Wood today added a few more flowers to my year list, the best being LONG STALKED CRANESBILL which I discovered (at SU753134) along a field edge by Markwells Wood last year in July so the fact that I only saw two flowering plants today does not mean there will not be more. ROCK ROSE was still flowering with it, but that is no newcomer. Three more plants that new to my flowering list were DARK MULLEIN, SCENTED MAYWEED and ROUND LEAVED FLUELLEN. Both HAIRY BROME and FALSE BROME were ready to open their spikelets and gave me a comparison of these two grasses whose hairy stems and erect stance could cause confusion but the spikelets of Hairy Brome are long stalked while those of the False Brome are stalkless and if you want more proof Hairy Brome has shorter awns (less than 8mm) and pointed auricles while the False Brome has no auricles and long awns up to 12mm.

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows found MUGWORT flowering for the first time.

INSECTS:

SUN 27 JUNE

In Lee Ground Coppice on the southern edge of the Botley Woods Mark Litjens saw both WHITE ADMIRAL and SOUTHERN HAWKER (which allowed him good views of itself at rest) as well as plenty of Large Skipper and two Comma.

SAT 26 JUNE

Mark Litjens was in the New Forest today and sent me this news of dragonflies and butterflies. He says he was "in the Crockford/Hatchet Pond areas and saw quite a few Odonata. KEELED SKIMMERS were plentiful around Crockford and a few were hawking over Hatchet Pond. A couple of Golden-ringed Dragonflies showed well in the gorse near Crockford as well as SMALL RED, Blue-tailed, RED-EYED, SOUTHERN (*Coenagrion mercuriale*) and possibly SCARCE BLUE-TAILED (*Ischnura pumilio*) Damselflies. Also flying were fresh SILVER-STUDDERED BLUE which looked as though they had only

just hatched. Large Skippers were also plentiful. Hatchet Pond hosted another Golden-ringed Dragonfly with DOWNY EMERALD and a couple of Four-spotted Chasers.” He went on north to “Bentley Wood where a couple of White Admirals showed well as did a late flying Small Pearl-bordered Fritillary and a few Silver-washed Fritillary. I found a Purple Hairstreak on the track which could not fly as its outer wings were crumpled. Very unfortunate as I doubt it will survive. There are plenty of Large Skippers there as well as everywhere else at the moment.” Finally, “On the way home I stopped off at Whiteley pastures and saw another White Admiral and more Large Skippers and a few Silver-washed Fritillary. Black-tailed Skimmers were plentiful around the Zurich pool and also along the Whiteley pastures track, as was a Golden-ringed Dragonfly.”

My first WHITE ADMIRAL in West Walk today was bonus for looking after grandchildren living in Newtown while my son sailed round the Isle of Wight in a 38 foot boat after just one day of sail training (I'm surprised he survived but he did and his boat came in first of the four crewed by staff from Prudential Insurance). The White Admiral was in the first ride on the right as you come into the woods from Newtown heading for Lodge Hill, and with it were three Marbled Whites in a grassy woodland clearing and a single SOUTHERN HAWKER which more or less proved its identity by coming up to look me in the eye as it patrolled its ride low to the ground. Nearby I saw a fresh looking GREEN VEINED WHITE with fairly weak veining on the underside of the hind wings – presumably a female of the summer brood. I am also reminded that when I was in The Holt at Rowlands Castle last Thursday I came one a small group of bright green OAK BUSH CRICKET larvae.

FRI 25 JUNE

At Budds Farm in the afternoon heat a butterfly shot by me and disappeared into the base of a nettle bed - it turned out to be my first summer COMMA and may have been a female egg-laying, though in that area they seem to favour the Hops which grow by the Brockhampton stream just north of Harts Farm Way by the pond.

THU 24 JUNE

At least three RINGLETS were flying in both Havant Thicket and The Holt today, but I did not spot Silver Washed Fritillary or White Admiral in the latter. Meadow Browns were abundant everywhere, but I was surprised at the lack of Speckled Wood (three at the most). One MARBLED WHITE (possibly three or four – I kept on seeing a single specimen which may have been following me) was out and several Large Skippers were seen with what probably were two Small Skippers but they would not settle. Over the pond at the head of the ‘Nightjar valley’ where the White Water Lilies are in flower an EMPEROR dragonfly was patrolling, a BLACK TAILED SKIMMER zoomed across and rested on a twig and I briefly saw my first SOUTHERN HAWKER (or was it COMMON HAWKER?). At the end of my visit I came on another old friend from previous summers – the big longhorn flower beetle STRANGALIA MACULATA – and also encountered a DRINKER MOTH caterpillar on its way to pupate.

Pete Potts tells me that he saw his first summer COMMA today at Titchfield Common and had his first 5-SPOT BURNET MOTH at Claylands reserve in Bishops Waltham last Sunday (June 20) where Ringlets were out on June 19 (in addition to those on that day seen by Pete at the B/W Moors). I am not surprised to hear he has not yet seen a Gatekeeper but am surprised that he has seen few Meadow Browns which seem abundant here in meadows and woodland rides.

Mark Litjens walked a half mile stretch of the River Itchen at Shawford yesterday and enjoyed many BANDED DEMOISELLE (40 in a quarter mile) plus RED ADMIRAL and fresh SMALL TORTOISESHELL. Today he drove to the Stonymarsh carpark across the River Test from Mottisfont and walked on the Test Way (which does not follow the river banks) seeing a fresh WHITE ADMIRAL in the carpark and one COMMA, a few Meadow Brown, RINGLET and late BRIMSTONE nearby. Back at home this evening he visited Whiteley Pastures and saw the first two PURPLE HAIRSTREAK in Lee Ground Coppice plus 5 Large Skipper, 1 COMMA and 30+ Meadow Brown.

WED 23 JUNE

Today Barry Collins saw both WHITE ADMIRAL and RINGLET during a walk from Leigh Park Gardens up the Avenue and then west to Bells Copse. Also today he had a PAINTED LADY on Thorney Island (his second, the first seen on June 1). Barry has also seen a couple of fresh COMMA recently, and on the water lilies of the Leigh Park Gardens lake he has seen RED EYED DAMSELFLY (*Erythronma najas*). In the panniers of his bike were two super Hawk Moths which came to his light last night and will be released tonight – one was a good specimen of PRIVET HAWK, the other an even rarer find – SMALL ELEPHANT.

My butterfly walk today also took me to Leigh Park Gardens but then through Hammonds Lands Coppice to the Gipsies Plain and back. I was hoping for Ringlet and Silver Washed Fritillary but saw (in addition to a multitude of Meadow Brown) a couple of RED ADMIRAL and one first SMALL SKIPPER. I also had

a Speckled Wood in the kitchen at home today – it went away unharmed.
If anyone with a knowledge of butterfly sites on the Isle of Wight would like to share their knowledge with someone who will be on holiday on the island in early July can they communicate with John Yates (John_Yates-1@sbphrd.com).

TUE 22 JUNE

At Warblington in the morning sunshine I saw my first fresh SMALL TORTOISESHELL on bramble, and later in the day found messages from Andrew Brookes and Pete Potts giving more butterfly news. Andrew, in addition to his sighting at Fort Nelson on Sunday (June 20), said that two pristine Small Tortoiseshells had been seen at Titchfield Haven on the same day by Pat Smith. Also on Sunday Pete Potts saw one or more at the Claylands nature reserve in Bishops Waltham along with 20+ Marbled Whites, plenty of Large Skipper and a single Small Copper. On Saturday (June 19) Pete had the first RINGLETS at Bishops Waltham Moors
At Emsworth in the evening I spotted my first BURNET MOTH roosting on grass, and also disturbed two Marbled White from their rest in a small isolated colony which I discovered last year at the bend (on the south side of the A27) in Mill Lane running north from Lumley.
Last night the Evening Class visited Havant Thicket and found six GLOW-WORMS – the graph of numbers has started to climb.

MON 21 JUNE

A message from Andrew Brookes this evening reads as follows “Theo Roberts and I surveyed Horsea on Friday (18/6) afternoon for the purposes of the Butterfly Atlas. The island contains numerous sheltered rabbit-grazed enclosures sequestered amongst the privet thicket, supporting a wide variety of chalk downland flora, particularly Birds Foot Trefoil. Ten species were recorded, by far the most common being the Meadow Brown [>50]. A few Small Heath were also noted, as was a solitary Marbled White. The first flush of Common Blues seems to be over, with only three very tatty specimens seen. Amidst the vast nettle beds on waste ground at the eastern end, a SMALL NEST OF TORTOISESHELL LARVAE (3rd instar) was found, the first seen by either myself or TR this year. 3 Commas and a single, very fresh, Red Admiral were seen basking in the late afternoon sunshine in the central part of the island, where there are numerous buddleja bushes along the margins of the old farm meadows. A few Large Skippers, Small and G V Whites completed the picture. Surprisingly, no Speckled Woods were noted. The eastern end of the island overlooked by the motorway contained extensive thickets of Elm (U. procera), and it is hoped that White-letter Hairstreaks will be found there later this summer. The sheltered grassy glades along the southern shore contained numerous violets, raising the possibility of Dark Green Fritillaries as well. Overall, a very interesting "island", offering a considerable range of butterfly habitats.”
Andrew’s message continued with encouraging news that on Sunday he had seen a very fresh SMALL TORTOISEHELL being blown briskly in the wind across the piece of downland adjacent to the Fort Nelson carpark, managed by the County Countryside Service, and earlier had seen a ‘tired’ female Brimstone prospecting bukthorn with a view to egg-laying.
Looking through last year’s ‘first dates’ for butterflies we now have a chance of seeing RINGLET (out on June 12 last year), WHITE ADMIRAL and DARK GREEN FRITILLARY (both June 19) and perhaps PURPLE HAIRSTREAK (June 21). Today in woods and woodland edges I saw a grand total of one Speckled Wood and a CINNABAR MOTH sleeping on grass.
Not to be outdone by Mark Litjens Barry Collins told me this morning that COMMON DARTER had been out on Thorney for a few days
A medium sized spider with a bright green abdomen attracted my attention in a hedge this afternoon – I noted that it had a very primitive web of just a few unco-ordinated strands stretched across the nettle leaf on which it had set up for business, and I see that it answers the description of Arianella cucurbitina in Dick Jones Country Life Guide to Spiders which says that this species is normally found about 1.5 metres above the ground in shrubs throughout the late spring and summer, and that it is common and widespread.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 26 JUNE

Several large TERRAPIN were seen in the Hilse Moat during today’s Evening Class outing here – Brian Fellows now has a practiced eye for spotting these one time pets turned dangerous predators.

FRI 25 JUNE

Cycling towards Langstone down Mill Lane this afternoon I took a shortcut to the High Street along a footpath and had to swerve to avoid a large SLOW WORM basking on the hot tarmac. I did not stop to inspect it and it may have been already doomed by some other accident (cats love to play with them and dead ones often have the puncture marks of cats teeth along their bodies), but I did shout a warning to a

cyclist going in the opposite direction. This reminded me of a story I had been told earlier in the day by someone whose kind hearted son had stopped his car and turned on the hazard lights while he got out to safely shepherd a duck and ducklings across the busy road – as the ducks were nearly at the far side this kind hearted young man had to jump for his life as a lorry roared by at full speed, killing every one of the duck family – I think the moral is that trying to interfere with nature from a standpoint of human emotions can lead to trouble for all concerned.

THU 24 JUNE

Margaret Collins came on a SLOW WORM in Havant Thicket recently and I found one there this morning but mine was incomplete and dead. A few minutes earlier I had been surprised by a moderately large FROG leaping from the long grass under my feet, and later I was less surprised to come on a lovely female ADDER basking on one of the rides and reluctant to retreat into the shade. Driving to the Thicket I passed the corpse of a young Fox cub on the road.

WED 23 JUNE

A message this evening from Jane Noble (whom some of you may know as the Forest of Bere Project Officer) tells me that at least 11 BROWN LONG EARED BATS are once more sharing her home at Rowlands Castle. Colleen Maintone (who is in charge of the BTCV in Hampshire) came over with a bat detector and helped to confirm the identity of Jane's furry friends. In a separate message from Brian Fellows I learn that the count of GLOW WORMS in Havant Thicket was up from 2 to 6 on Monday evening – but this is nothing compared to counts of up to 100 that can be expected in July. If you want to look for them go to the main gate into Havant Thicket (almost opposite the end of Castle Road in Rowlands Castle) and look just inside the gate (you may find some under the wooden fencing of the gateway but the best area is usually the rough track leading north from the gate close to the main road)

MON 21 JUNE

Today I asked Barry Collins if the six COMMON SEAL were still on the Pilsley Sands with their new pup and was told two things. First, that there are only four Seals which he can see now – no sign of the pup. Second that the pup born this year was not necessarily the first born on the South Coast as a fairly young pup was washed up dead on Thorney last summer.

In Markwells Wood near Forestside today I glimpsed what I thought must be a 'Ginger Cat' running along a ride until I looked the other way and saw a retreating Roe doe – the cat was presumably her fawn which had disappeared from view when I looked back

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 24

JUNE 14 - 20

BIRDS:

SUN 20 JUNE

If you are in need of a good BIRD BOOK Brian Rackett tells me that the latest COLLINS BIRD GUIDE is currently on sale in branches of Sussex Stationers (one in Chichester) for half the recommended price of £25 (i.e. only £12-49 to you). What's more Brian says "it really is superb- in my opinion the best guide to British & European birds yet." I don't know how much they are paying Brian to advertise it, but I can assure you I'm getting nothing for passing the message on.

Today Brian Fellows toured the Chichester Lakes (south of the A27) and recorded 22 CYGNETS in six families (numbers down on the 35 cygnets in 1998 and 28 in 1997 but some may have evaded him as 9 pairs of adults nested there last year and he only saw 6 this year). Surprisingly none of the 7 adult Great Crested Grebe that he found had young, but it was business as usual for the Coots and hopefully for the 50 or so Common Tern that are probably nesting on the Nature Reserve Lake managed by SOS. A single male POCHARD was still on the Chichester lakes (does anyone know if it has a mate there?), and the Chichester Canal Swan family had steamed upstream from their nest at Hunston to the Canal Basin in Chichester (near the railway station) – they had a healthy brood of 7 cygnets (back in 1997 they had 10). Perhaps Brian's best news was that there are still NIGHTINGALES at Marlpit Lane and they may well be a breeding pair – on his way home Brian stopped here and heard the male singing, and before he stopped a second bird made an alarm call described by Brian as "the distinctive 'hweet' followed by the deep churring 'krrr'". In addition to 5 Whitethroats heard at this site Brian heard a mysterious croaking, like a Woodcock, which remains a mystery.

SAT 19 JUNE

Brian Fellows visited Havant Thicket last night and heard three Nightjar fairly close to his position at SU 717108, and I guess these three would be in addition to two of those I heard last Tuesday night, one

much further south and one further west. Brian then crossed the road into The Holt and heard yet another Nightjar in the 'clearing' near the road and golf course. They have been heard in this area in past years but not recently to my knowledge (I suspect they have been there but few birders visit this area), but Brian did add to my knowledge of the inhabitants of The Holt by finding two Glow-worms there. Today Brian was with the Evening Class group at the South Moors where a LINNET was feeding young and a MEADOW PIPIT apparently guarding a nest, but their most interesting observation was of one COMMON TERN (among Common and Little Terns fishing offshore) seen catching a SHORE CRAB (the small green ones that are abundant on the shores) then flying up to drop it in order to crack the shell. Brian says this behaviour is recorded in BWP but it is quite new to me.. Later in the day Brian cycled to Thorney Great Deeps and found three Little Egret still fishing there with three Grey Heron. Common and Little Tern were over the water, 26 Oystercatcher on the shore with 1 Redshank (hopefully breeding nearby), and a Cuckoo and a Whitethroat were on shore. Back at his home in Emsworth a neighbour told him that a Mallard had just laid five eggs in a nest in his garden, so if the foxes don't get there first there will be yet more ducklings on the streets of Emsworth, heading for the millpond, next month. Late this afternoon I cycled round Broadmarsh and the South Moors, finding the Swan flock off Broadmarsh slipway up to 65, in addition to the pair with four cygnets that I think came from the islands and have been in Brockhampton stream (today they were in the Hermitage Stream just south of Harts Farm Way) At Budds Farm Pools the Swan pair that have been nesting now have at least one cygnet (which was alone on the water near the nest on which the mother may have had more hidden cygnets). The two Shelduck there had not visible ducklings, and there were still some 40 Tufted Duck.

FRI 18 JUNE

The first family party of LITTLE EGRETS has left their nest in the Elson Wood Heronry at the RN Munitions Depot on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour. The news reached me this evening in a message from Ian Calderwood saying "I saw a family group of four flying towards Farlington today, with another four individuals fishing in the Depot" From what I have heard there should be more young Egrets to appear on the local scene from the same source so watch this space. A further update from Ian Calderwood gives news of Titchfield Haven. He says "This afternoon there were two GARGANEY (up to five have been reported) and a LITTLE RINGED PLOVER on the nest, all in the north scrape." Today Brian Fellows made a tour of Havant Thicket by daylight where 9 Willow Warbler, 8 Blackcap and 7 Chiffchaff were to be heard, but only one Yellowhammer – the latter species is showing a sharp decline in numbers around Havant this year (there may still be two pairs in the Thicket but on Warblington Farm we seem to be down to a single pair)

THU 17 JUNE

Relieved to be on his way home from Heathrow Brian Fellows dropped in at Thursley Bog (luckily he did not 'drop in' to the bog itself) and saw six STONECHAT and 3 WHINCHAT looking very smart in their breeding plumage, surrounded by song from 12 Willow Warblers and 9 Whitethroat. Curlew were bubbling and Tree Pipits singing but no Redstart or Woodlark were to be seen, though Brian did spot one DARTFORD WARBLER and one HOBBY. In the marshy ground Bog Cotton and Marsh Orchids were flowering. The information about SWIFTS which Brian Fellows received recently from Chris Mead (see June 4) included a mention of 'banging parties' of two to three year old birds which have not yet started to breed and which descend on established nest sites in mid-June to see what adult life is all about. There was no explanation of what the word 'banging' might mean, but I think it may have a more innocent meaning to that which first springs to mind. This evening I watched at least 15 Swifts screaming around the houses of Manor Close in Havant and managed to find a spot (where the road into the Waitrose carpark turns off Prince Georges Street) from which I could see what they were doing. In twos or threes the birds would come down to roof top level and weave between the houses at what seemed like 60mph (100kph) and then swoop up to the eaves of a particular house, appearing to hang for a few seconds on the brickwork below what I assume to be the entrance to an established nest, not entering but diving away to continue their flight. When I saw this behaviour in nearby Waterloo Road last summer I assumed that the birds were trying to enter old nest sites but finding the entrance blocked – what Chris Mead seems to be suggesting is that these are not adults being thwarted from entering but youngsters doing the equivalent of peeping into their parent's bedroom to find out what goes on. The 'banging' in this case would be the equivalent of kids banging on the front door and then running away before they are caught. Perhaps Brian will be able to confirm this guess...

WED 16 JUNE

The SOS RECENT SIGHTINGS today gives news of three GARGANEY by the North Wall of Pagham Harbour (breeding nearby?? No sex/age given) and of three AVOCET at Sidlesham Ferry. In past years I have heard rumours of Avocet breeding in Chichester Harbour and I see that 'a pair raised one young at a site in the west of the county' in 1996, so possibly the presence of birds at this time of year indicates that process is ongoing.

Brian Fellows tells me that there is to be a national survey of SWIFTS next year (2000) and suggests that anyone who sees Swifts around known or potential breeding sites should try to track them down now – partly to get some practice in the observation of these elusive birds which leave no external signs of their nesting places and can be in and out of them in at incredible speed, and partly to have a base on which to compare next year's observations with this.

Hearing a LESSER WHITETHROAT sing on Portsdown today reminded me that two were singing strongly near Hollybank Farm in Emsworth yesterday. Today on Portsdown I also heard Yellowhammer, Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler, and in my garden I heard what I at first assumed was a Dunnock but then listened more carefully and decided it was a Garden Warbler – unfortunately it did not stay to prove the point.

TUE 15 JUNE

Brian Fellows toured the eastern half of Chichester Harbour in search of SWANS and found a flock of 112 in the Fishbourne Channel together with 17 BRENT and 2 MERGANSER. Last year 3 summering Merganser were here but the Brent are up by 5 on last year's peak. The flock of Swans here, like those at Broadmarsh and Emsworth, are settling in for their summer moult, and Brian has been able to get answers from Malcolm Ogilvie to my questions on that subject – it seems that when moulting Swans are as incapable of flight as are the Canada Geese, and the fact that we do not see piles of their feathers (as we do of Canada Geese) is because they shed them in the water where the tides disperse them. The moult lasts from six to eight weeks, most birds starting in mid July but some not starting until August, so there is still time for more birds to fly south to swell our local flocks and Brian thinks the Fishbourne flock will this year exceed last year's peak of 130 birds (I can remember in the 1970s or early 80s seeing 200 birds at Emsworth and 75 or more at Broadmarsh).

A warm evening with a clear sky and no wind invited me to Havant Thicket where I heard at least four NIGHTJAR plus a couple of Tawny Owls and several Woodcock - not to mention the New Moon, a very bright Venus and a less conspicuous coupling of Mars and Spica (I only know that from the radio) with two Glow-worms to end with. I went on my bike and entered through the carpark, then along the south of The Thicket where one Nightjar was churring at SU 721102 when I arrived around 9.30pm (still quite light). Turning north to meet the 'Yellow Brick Road' at 719104 a Woodcock went over heading south west. I then went west to Bells Copse and around the triangle of rough grass and dead trees in the Havant Borough section of The Thicket but had no joy there. Returning east I was surprised to hear a Nightjar churring in the tall Douglas Firs at 714105. Coming to the traditional 'best spot' at 717108 I found Barry and Margaret Collins with Jason Crook and Steve Hooper. Standing and chatting with them for some time we heard two more Nightjar at 717109 and 717107 and saw one flying silently at 716108. Also there two or three Woodcock went over and two male Tawny Owls called to each other (one had a strange call and we wondered if it was a youngster just learning to talk). It was now dark so I headed for the Castle Road exit, stopping to walk a little way up the rough track near the main road to find two Glow-worms shining - I did not search exhaustively as last year there were small numbers seen from June 3 onwards but the large numbers were seen between mid July and early August (counts of up to 80 then).

When I met them in Havant Thicket this evening Barry Collins spoke of very few EGRETS on Thorney but Jason Crook told me of a dozen or so in breeding plumes seen around Langstone Harbour and heading west in the evening (with a party of 14 joining them on one evening recently). Will they desert the Thorney roost in favour of the Bedenham/Frater site on Portsmouth Harbour this summer?

At Thornham Point today I could see a pair of Swans with three cygnets in the Great Deeps 'landing lights bay' and assume these were the pair which nested close to the main road just east of the guard post and of which I have heard no news of breeding success. The other pair which could have been here is the one from the Little Deeps which had five cygnets on May 26. Continuing a my cycle ride northwards I heard a TURTLE DOVE purring loudly in the orchards behind a tall thick hedge just south of the railway level crossing on Inlands Lane at Nutbourne (SU 776058), where I have heard one in previous years, and on Aldsworth Pond a pair of Swans had a single cygnet and a female TUFTED DUCK had eight new hatched ducklings. There was some difficulty in counting these youngsters as they were all actively diving and staying under for long periods (I have also been surprised in the past to see fluffy Mallard ducklings diving deep below the water). Before Aldsworth I visited Racton to see if the Spotted Flycatcher had returned to last year's nest site near the east end of Park Lane – no luck with that but I was

pleased to see House Martins going under the eaves of cottages further south in the hamlet.

MON 14 JUNE

The SOS website's recent sightings include a single BEE-EATER over Pett Pools (east of Hastings) this afternoon and single HONEY BUZZARDS over Brighton on June 12 and 9. Also on June 9 two QUAILS were on the Downs north of Shoreham where a probable BLACK KITE headed east. At Selsey on June 8 a HOOPOE flew in and was seen on a football pitch and in gardens, while on June 7 an ALPINE SWIFT flew near Beeding Hill above the River Adur north of Shoreham.

I am not a surfer of the net and I get annoyed when I visit a website and have to wait for pictures to download (especially if they are irrelevant to anything other than decoration) but occasionally you may want to see pictures of a particular bird and cannot find what you want in the books and magazines at your disposal. No doubt most of you already know this, but today Christoph Harwood gave me the address of an RSPB IMAGES website having thousands of high quality bird pictures and a very simple search mechanism (you can specify the bird, the photographer, the place and some other info, and are then offered a selection of pictures which you can download). I just entered Corncrake and was offered six pictures but did not wait to see them. There is of course an understanding that you cannot use the pictures for any commercial gain. The address is <http://www.rspb-images.com>

Each summer the hundreds of gull and tern nest on the Langstone Harbour RSPB reserve and elsewhere are washed out by the summer high tides. The highest were in mid-May when two of six successive tides were predicted as 5.0 metres, the other four as 4.9 metres. We are now in the middle of the June spring tides with 4.9 m last night and three more 4.9 m tides on Tuesday and Wednesday. No doubt John Badley will give us a damage report in due course. By chance a message from Pete Potts today told me of 9 Lesser Blackbacks flying north west over Martin Down – they were probably heading for Bristol where they sensibly nest high on buildings that are rarely submerged (though Radio Solent was today interviewing joint authors of a new book telling us how Stonehenge and similar ancient astronomical 'calculators' were in fact built to enable ancient comet watchers to predict if the comets would hit the Earth causing the Biblical type flooding of all ground below several thousand feet above normal sealevel) John Goodspeed this afternoon dropped in at Budds Farm and saw a single DUCKLING with TUFTED DUCK parents – these are usually the very last duck species to produce their offspring and no doubt more will appear there and elsewhere.

Brian Fellows' news of the Emsworth scene today includes the arrival of a SEDGE WARBLER at the Slipper Mill Pond where Brian has not recorded it in previous years, and he couples that with news of developments along the Bridgefoot Path (east) side of the Town Mill Pond, where Havant Borough are making various substantial improvements to the look of the place plus amenities such as seats and an information board. Not to be outdone a new board will also soon appear by the Slipper Pond and Brian (who has contributed to, and seen drafts, of both boards) tells us that they will be good.

The Emsworth Swan count has gone up by perhaps 10% this week and now stands at 65 birds (plus the Black Swan), and I believe that much of the increase in the herds here and at Broadmarsh is the result of birds flying south from inland waters while they still have their flight feathers to spend the summer moult period in a place where they feel safe from foxes on a large open stretch of water with good visibility around the margins. I understand that this movement is technically called a 'MOULT MIGRATION', but while moult is very visible in the case of Canada Geese (which shed flight quills in large numbers on the ground) the Swans leave much less visible sign of becoming flightless – does anyone know if they are as incapable of flight as the Canada Geese (and of course the Shelduck which make equivalent migrations to Heligoland and Bridgewater Bay a little later in the summer), and when and for how long they are at risk? Last night I mentioned the mid-June assemblage of SWIFTS had started with 10 circling over Havant at dusk – this evening there were 25 of them above me as I walked the dog around the block.

PLANTS:

SUN 20 JUNE

Stephen Harwood, who acts as reserve manager for Catherington Down, tells me that the small patch of DROPWORT which usually appears on the reserve each year is now flowering. If you have not found it before start from the entrance from Lovedean Lane and turn half left when you reach the lower area of open grassland beyond the trees and search diligently around SU 691144 between the beaten tracks. I wish I had had time to find it in all its glory on Martin Down which I drove past today, just seeing the pink and blue tinges in the roadside grass where Sainfoin and Meadow Cranesbill flower. One other thing that I saw on that journey, much nearer home, was a great mass of BROAD LEAVED EVERLASTING PEA flowering on the north bank of the M27 immediately west of the Hill Road bridge

coming up from Portchester to become Skew Road above it.

Today I drove to Shillingstone, near Blandford Forum in Dorset, to visit friends with whom I walked by the River Stour and found a plant which I had no difficulty in identifying as WATER CHICKWEED and which I have not come across in the Havant area (nor is it recorded by the Hants Flora in South East Hants). Also near the river was a tall 'yellow cress' standing a good 2 metres tall and forming bright yellow patches along the river banks. The flowers were fairly small (petals not longer than 5mm) and in tight heads reminding me of Yellow Rocket, and the incipient seeds retained the stile at their end and were held up fairly close to the stem but not adpressed. I could not find hairs anywhere and the plant should have been one of the Rorippa Yellow Cresses but the basal leaves were large and broadly lobed while the upper ones were thin and 'triangular' (very like those of Fig Leaved Goosefoot) – both leaves had long petioles. So far I am entirely puzzled by it, though not by the Dames Violet flowering in the layby where we parked the car.

SAT 19 JUNE

The Evening Class visited the South Moors this morning and counted the SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHIDS. From one source I heard the count was 333, from another 433, but in both cases it was less than 10% of the number expected based on annual counts over several recent years. It may just be that the plants are having a 'rest year', and will be back in huge numbers next year – it may be that weather conditions have not favoured this species this year (there are also remarkably few at the Warblington sites) – but we have feared that the building of the Autoliv factory adjacent to them, on land that would normally soak up winter rain and release it gradually to the orchids, has caused the land to dry out too much for the orchids. To back this theory George Hedley, whose cattle graze the land, has this year seen the stumps of an old fence line (which he removed years ago) standing two inches above the current land surface to indicate that the land has dried and shrunk by that much despite the channels dug around the factory to carry as much water as possible to the orchid field..

MUSK MALLOW was flowering at the A27/A3M interchange area in a spot that is always good for plants – if heading from the A27 at Havant for the A3M you take the sliproad near the Hermitage Stream, turn north at one roundabout, cross above the A27 and come to another small roundabout – stop here and explore the land just to the west of the road between the A27 and the railway. This evening, in addition to the Musk Mallow there were Bee and Pyramidal Orchids, Ribbed Melilot, Perforate St John's Wort, Common Centaury and masses of Ox Eye Daisies to name but a few. In the small carpark at Broadmarsh LARGE FLOWERED EVENING PRIMROSE was in flower, and along the South Moors shore I saw PERENNIAL SOWTHISTLE (*Sonchus arvensis*) flowering and ROCK SAMPHIRE well formed umbels that was probably flowering.

FRI 18 JUNE

Geoff Butland has recently found both FROG and MUSK ORCHIDS out at Noar Hill and found DRAGON'S TEETH flowering in three different pits there – the Hants Flora records it as being present at Noar Hill since 1970 (not appearing every year) and lists three separate pits in which it has appeared but so far as I know this is the first year in which it has appeared in three together. Puzzling over one orchid there he was told that it was a cross between Common Spotted and Frog – a rare occurrence though this cross has occurred at Noar Hill very intermittently since 1968. Worrying news from Geoff is of the overnight 'disappearance' of not only a Fly Orchid but of "3 stands of Broomrape" – I have heard of similar thefts of plants from this reserve this year and it sounds as if it is not just orchid fanatics at work but, even worse, ignorant 'cowboy gardeners' acquiring unusual plants about which they know nothing for sale to equally ignorant gardeners at exorbitant prices. ADDERS TONGUE FERN was also to be seen at Noar Hill where I remember a large patch in past years near the 'Fairy Shrimp' track. Geoff also tells me of his pleasure in seeing BEE ORCHIDS, DYER'S GREENWEED and GRASS VETCHLING flowering 'by the A3M roundabout in Waterlooville'. I guess he is referring to the Hurstwood site (SU 693091) north of the Hulbert Road and east of the A3M and I agree with him that this site is a treasurehouse for those living nearby and at a distance.

This afternoon I took a walk in Stansted Forest where good work is proceeding to broaden the grassy 'Broad Avenue' that runs north/south through SU 745110. Water frunning down this avenue collects in a number of clay bowls here and in them I found not only Marsh Cudweed but also WATER PURSLANE on which I could find fruits but not flowers. At the top of the Broad Avenue I turned left along the 'Rough Avenue' which runs northwest from the house towards Finchdean, and at the west end of this I found HAIRY ST JOHNS WORT in flower.

THU 17 JUNE

In Havant Thicket this morning I found two newly flowering plants which I could name, SLENDER ST JOHN'S WORT (always showing cordate bases to its leaves even when it refused to stand upright as it

should) and GREATER BIRDS FOOT TREFOIL (knowing how variable in appearance the common Birds' Foot Trefoil can be I did check this fairly small specimen for a hollow stem which it had). Also flowering in good numbers was a HIERACIUM species which I will call *H. umbellatum* as it bears some resemblance to that 'species' and it is recorded for the area in the Hampshire Flora. This is the second Hieracium I have seen flowering this year – the first was seen on Sinah Common at Gunner Point during last Saturday's HWT AGM walk, that one being (with the same degree of probability and proof) *H. trichocaulon*. Coming back to the recognisable world I was pleased to find ALDER BUCKTHORN in flower. Not yet in flower where the Tufted Hair Grass and Molinia that are both now growing fast and showing inflorescences, and also not flowering was a small patch of what is almost certainly Lesser Skullcap by a small stream. On the damp edge of this stream Toad Rush was showing itself in an unusual form – long (20cm or more) prostrate green plants following the bank downward into the drying stream bottom – and nearby some tiny leaves of what I am sure must be Black Spleenwort which I must re-check later.

WED 16 JUNE

A cycle ride up Portsdown in this afternoon's hot sunshine in the hope of lots of butterflies turned into an exciting plant hunt with few butterflies. My first stop was at the hill top meadow just west of Farlington Avenue which is part of Theo Roberts' butterfly transect but all I saw of insects was one Large Skipper, but turning off the main mown path around the grassy meadow by a Sweetbriar bush to follow the bank of Farlington Avenue I found pure white flowered Black Knapweed, many Pyramidal orchids and Broad Leaved Everlasting Pea with strangely pale flowers (white to rose pink rather than the expected startling magenta). From here I headed west across the meadow to the close mown hill slopes below the carpark, heading for the unmown triangle of grass by the A3, but I was stopped dead in my tracks to find a small unmown section here with BASTARD TOADFLAX, SQUINANCYWORT, SAINFOIN, SMALL TIMOTHY and a chalk downland grass than I have never seen before – CRESTED HAIRGRASS (*Koeleria macrantha*). In case the people who marked off this section did not know that it contained BASTARD TOADFLAX they can check its presence by walking south west from the carpark entrance (just west of Farlington Avenue), across the parking area and past the first Hawthorns when the longer grass will come in sight along a track going southwest. Go to the nearest post on the right (uphill side) of it, turn left to face the post on the other side, walk 3 paces towards that post to cross the first semi-bare part of the track, then turn left and go two paces uphill and you should then see the Bastard Toadflax nestling on the bareish ground to your left - the plant has yellowish green rigid stems running parallel to the ground but just above it, and has flowers that look identical to those of Fairy Flax, well separated on these stems (not in clusters like the Squinancywort whose stems can appear similar). There is a second area marked out with posts to the west of this one but that seemed to contain nothing special other than a couple of Bee orchids. Across the A3 slip road the unmown 'Wild Thyme bank' is now a marvellous example of the richness of downland turf but again contained nothing new. Going west from the Viewpoint carpark along the track below the road I found nothing special until beyond Fort Widley and opposite the Mill Lane turning – here was more Sainfoin, and in the west end of the grazing compartments I found my first BURNET SAXIFRAGE (one flowering plant) Coming back to Havant I took the track through the bushes south of Fort Purbrook, finding a mass of ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB in flower, and at the Farlington Redoubt entrance I saw my first flowering Hieracium. Down in Bedhampton the stream along Brookside Road had a pretty display of MONKEY FLOWER which presumably came from a garden or where planted there, and on the left wall of Mill Lane leading up to the bridge a strange plant growing from the wall may have been a big Field Pepperwort but was not yet in flower.

TUE 15 JUNE

This morning I cycled to Thornham Point and found COMMON CENTAURY, SEA LAVENDER and GREATER SEA-SPURREY newly flowering as well as having the pleasure of fresh flowering DYER'S GREENWEED and finding my first YELLOW OAT GRASS of the season (I was also pleased with myself when checking a specimen of Wall Barley to see if it was Sea Barley to find that I now understand these Barley grasses to recognize their glumes – in all other grasses the glumes enclose the base of each spikelet, in Barleys they stand alone 'in front of' the spikelet, the glumes and most other parts seemingly a forest of barbed wire). Continuing through Prinsted I checked one market garden plot for Gallant Soldier (not seen) and found a good show of seeds on FIELD PENNY-CRESS plus the expected Small Nettle, then in the ditch beside Priors Leaze Lane, opposite Loveders Farm at Nutbourne/Hambrook I found just one plant of SKUNK CABBAGE where there have been several in past years – the huge leaves were already showing signs of wear but the spathe was as yet a tiny spike. My next check was on the roadside outside 156 Stein Road, Southbourne where I found the first flowers already open on the mass of

CROWN VETCH that has become established outside the garden – to find this go to the north end of Stein Road and find the last house before the bridge over the A27 on the west side of the road (it is called Gingerbread Cottage) and you will find 156 opposite it on the east side on which the houses continue northwards further than on the west. North of Gingerbread Cottage SALSIFY was flowering at the roadside before I reached the A27, and later in my ride I came on my first flower of FIELD SCABIOUS on the minor road from Racton to Aldsworth. On the hill coming up from Racton I was puzzled to see Bush Vetch in fresh flower as I think of it as an early spring flower but on checking the books I see this is its proper flowering season and we only see it in the spring because it is a perennial and we have mild winters.

A chance meeting with Barry Collins this evening gave me news of 501 BEE ORCHIDS which he has found in two main colonies on the south of Thonrey Island this summer. One colony is near the southern tip of the island, the other near its south west corner at Marker Point.

SUN 13 JUNE

IVY BROOMRAPE is uncommon at the best of times but Nigel Johnson has just discovered a colony of 29 spikes looking well established by the side of Titchfield Lane at SU 556109 a little north of Tapnage and south of the junction with Biddenfield Lane – what's more the plants were of the all yellow variety Monochroma which has been found in a number of places in the Winchester/Alresford area but never before here in the Botley/Wickham area. The Flora of Hampshire indicates that this plant may be sold for ornamental purposes and escape from gardens or garden centres but not many gardeners cultivate cannabilistic plants (though it does sound a good way to keep down the ivy in your garden).

INSECTS:

SUN 20 JUNE

A message from Mark Litjens this evening tells me that he has just returned from a holiday in the French Pyrenees typified by one field in which he found 12 different species of orchid, not to mention 65 butterfly species recorded over two weeks there. Back in Whiteley Pastures near Fareham he found most of the butterfly species Hampshire currently has to offer – no Blues, but Large Skipper, Meadow Brown, Marbled White, Silver Washed Fritillary, Red Admiral and Speckled Wood. He also found four GOLD RINGED DRAGONFLIES and Black Tailed Skimmers plus Blue-Tailed, Azure and Large Red Damselflies and the first COMMON DARTER which I have heard of.

FRI 18 JUNE

The only 'new entry' to my lists today was a tiny grey moth, prettily marked with black dots and a dark leading edge to its forewing, which I found displaying itself on my kitchen window while I looked it up and came to the conclusion it was a SMALL DUSTY WAVE (perhaps preparing for the low key celebration of tomorrow's Royal wedding with an appropriate 'wave from the dusty wayside'). In Stansted Forest in the afternoon Meadow Browns were plentiful and I saw a couple of Large Whites but only one Speckled Wood and nothing more.

THU 17 JUNE

The extensive 'old fashioned' meadows of the Gipsies Plain at Rowlands Castle which are managed as part of the Staunton Country Park were full of MEADOW BROWN butterflies in this morning's sunshine. I only looked at a tiny corner of the fields but 8 to 10 butterflies could be seen wherever I looked, with the occasional Small Heath among them. In the Havant Thicket woods the puddles in the rides were all covered with a mass of tiny flies which I believe to be called POECILOBOTHRUS NOBILITATUS, one of the Dolichopid species of 'LONG LEGGED FLIES'. If you look this up in Michael Chinery's Collins Guide you will see that it comes after an apparently commoner species called Dolichopus popularis about which Chinery remarks 'male genitalia very large' and the illustration will show you what he means. I wonder if this species is one of the flies attracted to the Dog Stinkhorn fungi that will soon appear in the Thicket.

WED 16 JUNE

Jim Berry was in the Stoughton/East Marden area of Sussex today and saw one SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY and one SMALL COPPER in what I think was Wildhams Wood (over the phone I thought Jim said 'Wilbrahams Wood' so I may be wrong with the place). This sounds like an early emergence of the Fritillary and of the summer brood of Small Copper.

Brian Fellows and John Gowen also saw a single SILVER WASHED FRITILLARY this morning in Hampshire at The Holt near Rowlands Castle. In the same wood were 23 Speckled Wood and 1 stray Meadow Brown. I think the Fritillary was in a different part of the wood from the majority of last year's sightings, possibly promising increased numbers this year.

Probably the best insect of the very few seen on Portsdown today despite hot sunshine was a newly emerged

EMPEROR DRAGONFLY which had not yet acquired its colours – this was below Fort Purbrook. Of butterflies I saw one Marbled White, two Meadow Brown, two Large Skipper, two SMALL BLUE (in Farlington Redoubt) and one Common Blue.

TUE 15 JUNE

Near Thornham Point this morning the sun brought out three Meadow Brown and three Small Heath, and later I saw one Large White and one that might have been Small or Green Veined White plus one Large Skipper – not a great show for a sunny day, but at Aldworth Pond two EMPEROR DRAGONFLIES vigorously patrolling the pond were my first. In past years I have seen the Emerald Damselfly *Lestes sponsa* here but today the only damsels were the COMMON BLUE (*Enallagma cyathigerum*) which have their preferred habitat of a large expanse of water with much marginal vegetation here, and I noticed that they were a paler shade of blue than the commoner Azure Damselfly that frequents smaller ponds. One other insect that I saw was a small moth that resembled a BARRED YELLOW though it was not in the bushy woodland habitat described – however I see that the foodplant is Wild Rose which can be found on the Thornham marshes area. Arriving home a message on my phone spoke of another emergence of several STAG BEETLES here in Havant.

At Havant Thicket in the evening I came on my first two GLOW WORMS at SU 722106 in the damp rough track going north from the main entrance opposite Castle Road. Jason Crook told me had seen one or two earlier this month and last year the first was seen on June 3 but it was not until July 17 that big numbers were seen (counts of up to 80) and this show continued into early August. The best place to see them is around the Castle Road entrance but they can be found scattered all around the Thicket.

MON 14 JUNE

Andrew Brookes was in woodland near Wickham yesterday and saw ‘an immaculate COMMA’ which was almost certainly the first of this year’s brood to emerge. Andrew does not commit himself on this and it is always a difficult decision to make as to whether a fresh looking butterfly is newly emerged or just well preserved, but the one of the main purposes of these notes is to help the uninitiated to know when and where to look for wildlife species (another is to help the initiated to form their own opinions about the current status of species as they respond to weather and other factors which differ each year) and I find the sort of chart of flight times in Jeremy Thomas’s RSNC Guide to Butterflies very helpful for the first purpose – that shows last winter’s hibernating Commas vanishing in mid-May and the first summer brood emerging very gradually from mid June. Since it is difficult to give dates that apply to the UK as a whole I find the Hampshire Butterfly report excellent value in giving local dates for first and last sightings, but not helpful with the waxing and waning of numbers for those species with multiple broods – I appreciate there are difficulties, but I’m sure that a little of the expert’s professional pride could be sacrificed to giving ‘informed guesses’ on these matters – perhaps the contributors to and editors of that report will take note. Andrew also saw a tatty Red Admiral (I also saw one speed past me on Sunday) and the ‘inevitable Speckled Woods’ which probably are of the summer brood by now – incidentally someone gave me a press cutting recently about research into the northward spread of Speckled Wood over the past century: I always thought it was widespread but I see that it is now well established in the north of Scotland around Inverness. At least one of our species is not declining.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 17 JUNE

Those who wait till the autumn before looking for fungi are missing some of the interest of summer woodland, especially after thunderstorms in hot weather when the combination of heat and water can bring up a great display within hours. At the moment the ground is too dry to find much but today in Havant Thicket I came on a good example of PLUTEUS CERVINUS and a tiny example of THE BLUSHER (*Amanita rubescens*), and on several recent visits to woodland I have thought that I could smell STINKHORNS which are probably on the go.

WED 16 JUNE

Reports of ROE DEER reached me this morning from John Goodspeed and Jim Berry, and I saw one myself in Havant Thicket last night. John saw a buck and doe pair running over fields in the Southwick Woods area west of Waterlooville yesterday and Jim saw a buck and fawn in The Holt at Rowlands Caastle on June 10 – by now they should all have dropped their dull winter woollies and acquired their glorious shining chestnut red summer coats. Yesterday in The Holt Jim had a fleeting glimpse of a Snake which he thinks was an ADDER.

An unexpected sight on Portsdown was a dried but still white and recognizable COPRINUS NIVEUS

toadstool on an old cowpat.

MON 14 JUNE

Brian Fellows noted 'many fish jumping' in the Emsworth Slipper Mill pond today (where a Cormorant sat on one of the rafts being strafed by a Black Headed Gull – what was all that about?). I see that last night's tide (exactly at mid-night) was one of the highest of the summer at 4.9 metres and I wonder if the fish swam in 'over the dam' and were unable to get out. Both tides on Tuesday and the early tide on Wednesday are equally high, so we may see more comings and goings in the Slipper Pond. (Are these the summer Grey Mullet?)

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 23

JUNE 7 - 13

BIRDS:

SUN 13 JUNE

From Budds Mound this afternoon I could not only count 60 Swans off Broadmarsh but also saw a lone SHELDUCK swimming towards Broadmarsh from Long Island with 11 (maybe 12) tiny ducklings which had almost certainly been hatched on the RSPB Reserve islands. The Shelduck pair on the Budds Farm pools still had their two well grown ducklings and the Swan pair was still there with the female patiently sitting on her nest. The Bedhampton Mill pair had their four cygnets on the Hermitage Stream above the A27 and the pair that I assume were from the harbour islands had their four in the Brockhampton stream (while the Langstone family were back in the Langsbrook stream). A pair of GREY WAGTAIL were flying up the Brockhampton stream (over the old corn wharf) and a single bird was on the Hermitage Stream above Bedhampton Mill (and both yesterday and the day before one from a third local pair was collecting insect food on our lawn)

Two pieces of background info today come from Pete Hall in Cheshire and from Tony Gutteridge who has just made a short visit to Northumberland. Pete describes a 'meteoric increase' in the Cheshire BUZZARD population over the past ten years, with at least 50 pairs now in the county. Tony mentions several contrasts between the Northumberland and Hampshire birding scenes, not only the presence of breeding Golden Plover, Ring Ouzel and Common Sandpiper which you would expect but also the difficulty in finding Magpies (only one seen in seven days). He also visited the Farne Islands where the warden pointed out three pairs of breeding ROSEATE TERN among hundreds of Common, Arctic and Sandwich – the warden also told him that the Roseate take on the role of Skuas here, harrying other Terns to steal their hard won fish.

A party of 10 SWIFTS over my garden this evening reminded me of what Chris Mead had told Brian Fellows (see June 4) about the parties of screaming Swifts that take place over nest sites in mid June – Chris says these are young non-breeding Swifts (two or three year olds) going through an 'adolescent phase' and trying to learn about sex by barging in on the activities of the breeding birds (and if they think the game is worth it trying to find their own nest sites). Until this evening the evening parties I have seen have been of three or four birds only, and I have been puzzled about the sudden apparent change in numbers of what I thought were the local breeding population at this time of year (numbers change again in July as youngsters from the nests join their parents).

SAT 12 JUNE

Brian Fellows joined the walk around Langstone South Moors led by John Gowen and Andrew Powling as part of the HWT AGM programme this afternoon and found the Tufted Duck at the Budds Farm pools up to 44 but with no ducklings, unlike the Shelduck pair that have two well grown youngsters. Skylark and Meadow Pipit were singing over the South Moors, the Langstone Mill Swan family were still in the Langbrook stream, and a sight of the local Sparrowhawk heading for a favourite hunting ground at Budds Farm was a bonus. I was also interested to hear that a Little Egret was still present in the area although seen flying to fish off Broadmarsh rather than heading for a possible nest site inland.

My monthly visit to the IBM Lake for the WeBS count gave me my first view of the KESTREL on or near its nest to confirm that it is on a level of the window ledges of the top floor (fourth if you count the ground as first, and higher than most fourth floors as the ground is already some ten feet above ground level to provide safe haven should the seawall burst and all the highest tide to reach its natural level). If you look west from the big Portsbridge roundabout to the east end of the building the nest is on a ledge immediately left of the central spine (housing emergency exit stairs) which sticks out from the centre of the wall. Less interesting was the sight of the annual assembly of CANADA GEESE which are starting to moult and will soon be flightless for a month, at the end of which this year's young will be ready to fly off with their parents to the welcoming haven of Titchfield. Today there were 160 adult birds in total, with just two sets of 8 and 4 'guzzlings'. The IBM Lake provides ideal safety for the flightless birds from

foxes and land based predators – at a hint of danger they can desist from tearing up the grass and polluting the ground with their droppings and glide safely to the centre of the lake where unfortunately we have no pike or seals capable of harming them. (Incidentally I noticed today that the brief summary sheet given to Portsmouth Harbour WeBS counters, from which Dennis Bill fills in the tedious BTO Forms, has consecutive entries for “Observers” followed by “Other Predators” to confirm my feeling that the greatest disturbance to the birds is usually caused by the counters, and that humans are the main predators on wildlife with birds of prey and foxes, etc, causing no real harm to bird populations). No Tufted Duck were seen by me but one GREAT CRESTED GREBE was present with two juveniles that now have beautifully zebra striped necks (can anyone tell me why one of them was almost as large as its parent while the other was less than half its size? – both were hatched together). One of three Little Grebe seen had two chicks in tow and the Coot and Moorhen had a good number of young though the 39 Mallard all seemed to be adult – none of the many ducklings hatched here ever seem to reach maturity. Of the land birds I was pleased to hear Skylarks at both ends of the site (two pairs) and to hear to different Reed Buntings singing as well as perhaps 15 singing Reed Warbler. I only saw one SWAN with its six cygnets but am assured the other parent is present (the canals could hide a dozen Swans under rushes at the moment). One Heron was seen with a damaged wing – another job for Ian Pearson and his net, and maybe another customer for Brent Lodge if Ian can capture it.

FRI 11 JUNE

A HONEY BUZZARD was seen last Sunday (June 6) by Pete Potts over Dibden (near Hythe on Southampton Water) drifting west towards the New Forest – hopefully no one will try to follow it and prejudice any breeding success the birds may have. Birds of Hampshire indicates that we can expect there to be only a couple of pairs in the Forest each summer and that they are more likely to fail to rear young than to be successful. On a more encouraging note Pete tells me that Trevor Codlin has been colour ringing NIGHTINGALES in the Botley Woods (northern Tapnag area) and reckons there are 13 established territories there this year – I don’t know if this includes birds in the south of the woods near the Flagpond Copse entrance.

Brian Fellows cycled from Emsworth to Thornham Point on Thorney Island in the late morning today. Before leaving his home area in Emsworth he spotted a SWIFT entering the eaves of a house and in the Palmer’s Road copse heard a Willow Warbler singing (first time for this site – possibly a wandering failed breeder elsewhere). At Thornham Point he admired a new Chichester Harbour Conservancy info board and heard both Skylark and Meadow Pipit sing before his attention was diverted to a HOBBY flying in from the east and heading over the marshes towards the Little Deeps – he says it was “the best view I had ever had of a Hobby, with its pointed wings and black head and moustache against the pale chin and collar showing well.”

Brian has also copied me on the following info about HOBBY NESTING HABITS from his BWP CD-Rom which should help to answer the question raised by Pete Hall (see June 9). “SITE: In old nest of another bird species. Of 208 nests, England, 90% in nests of Crow *Corvus corone*, remainder in those of Rook *C. frugilegus*, Magpie *Pica pica*, red squirrel *Sciurus vulgaris*, Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus*, Jay *Garrulus glandarius*, and Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*. Several other species also reported from other European countries including Raven *Corvus corax*, Buzzard *Buteo buteo*, and Black Kite *Milvus migrans*. Height above ground ranges from under 6 m to 32 m; 140 nests, England, averaged 13.7 m (4.2-28.3). Rarely nests on cliff tops (Dementiev and Gladkov 1951a). Solitary. Nests reused in successive years, but many pairs have alternative sites which they use in turn, from 100 m to 3 km apart. Nest: old nest of another bird species; existing lining often removed but not pine-needles or cones accidentally fallen in (Nethersole-Thompson 1931a). Building: none.” (Taken from the BWP on CD-ROM: copyright Oxford University Press.). Brian’s own comments are “Although largely insectivorous for much of the year, Hobbies switch to bird prey during breeding – notably inexperienced hirundines, Swifts, Skylarks and Sparrows. The Hobby breeds from Iberia to Japan and winters mainly in Southern Africa and India. Although we think of it as being on the northern fringe of its range in Britain, where breeding is largely confined to south of the Mersey-Humber axis, over much of Eurasia it reaches the Arctic Circle. I wonder why this is? Ref: BTO Breeding Atlas. In Sussex Hobby is a scarce breeding summer visitor and regular passage migrant and Birds of Sussex estimates the current population at 50 pairs or more. The Hobby is an unobtrusive species that can be easily overlooked. The Sussex Bird Report for 1997 believe there were 46 territories in the west of the county and 18 in the east, but there was little confirmation of breeding.”

A visit to Warblington CBC plot this morning produced no notable birds, but almost every regular species there had young. I was pleased to find one male YELLOWHAMMER still present (hopefully with a mate nesting) and to see three male SWALLOWS perched together on wires above the farmyard,

hopefully indicating that they had three females sitting on nests within the barn. There were three REED WARBLERS singing where we have only had two so far this year, and the Reed Bunting was also back on duty singing at the shore reedbed. Offshore two GREAT CRESTED GREBES floated by with just one Shelduck on the water and a Sandwich Tern flying over. Tony Gutteridge saw a single Egret despite the tide being high. Back at home I was pleased to see a GREY WAGTAIL on the lawn making mad dashes at tiny insects presumably to take to a nest somewhere close at hand.

THU 10 JUNE

BEARDED TITS at the Thorney Little Deeps site were a bonus when I took a visitor from Scotland to Thorney and Stansted today. The Bearded Tits allowed us close views in the section of reeds close to the track and south of the open water but I guess the two we saw had young elsewhere as I saw one of them heading off on a lengthy flight with a small caterpillar or grub in its bill, soon to return without it. The presence of a number of SHELDUCK on the Budds Farm pools this summer has I think been a new development and today Brian Fellows saw 9 Shelduck there with 2 DUCKLINGS. There were still 31 Tufted Duck but only one Swan (have they failed to hatch young?). No shortage of Swans on the Hermitage Stream off Broadmarsh – Brian recorded this year's top score for this site of 53 SWANS, plus a pair with four Cygnets on the Brockhampton Stream (probably the Bedhampton Mill Pond pair were still on the Hermitage Stream above the A27 and these were the mystery family that I think comes from North Binness)

Brian Fellows also visited the Hayling Oysterbeds and saw two RINGED PLOVER sitting on the lagoon island over which four (possibly six) LITTLE TERN were flying – possibly the Little Tern were off their nests because their eggs have hatched. Not breeding but just passing were 2 Great Crested Grebe seen in 'Texaco Bay' near Langstone Bridge, but three Shelduck here and 26 Oystercatcher in Stoke Bay could have been breeding birds.

WED 9 JUNE

A message from Pete Hall in Cheshire received late on Monday night after that evening's update told me that HOBBIES have nested in Cheshire for the first time in 100 years (another sign of global warning as they move their limit northwards?) and asked a question which I cannot answer but maybe you can (I will pass on answers to Pete). The question is "Do Hobbies re-use the same nest in successive years?". All I know comes from my few books which tell me that Hobbies never make their own nests but use old nests (usually of Crows, Magpies or Buzzards in isolated or woodland edge trees) and rather than build them up I gather they flatten them before use. I see no reason why they should not re-use the same nest if it is still there (they are clearly opportunists) but they may find an old nest has parasites in it – I have heard that Kestrels which do tend to reuse the same nest or site will move every few years when the nest gets too itchy.

At the Hayling Oysterbeds today the two Little Terns were still apparently sitting (each is at the south end of a tall clump of vegetation but can be clearly seen from the nearest bank to the east of them) and responded to the chatter of a male bird that arrived on the scene while I was there. I could not see any Ringed Plover but watched one Oystercatcher which was behaving strangely (it had an object in its bill but did not seem to be trying to break it open or eat it) and saw that the bird had a single Chick at its feet.

John Shillitoe tells me that the KESTREL'S NEST on the IBM HQ building now has three chicks with a chance of survival. His previous report indicated that only three eggs had hatched, and that the third chick appeared lifeless. He now tells me that the fourth egg hatched between Monday evening and Tuesday morning, and that the lifeless chick has disappeared, and that a small mammal corpse can be seen on the window ledge to show that the parents are bringing food (there should be no shortage of that with the large areas of rough grass around the site).

A message this evening from Liz Attril brings more good news of CORN BUNTINGS in the area north east of Hambleton towards Chidden as well as news of frequent Buzzard sightings in the area. Liz says "There is a corn bunting constantly singing in a tree on the edge of our garden. There are also many more singing in the area between where we live and the hamlet of Chidden which is about a mile to the north west. This is an area of intensive agriculture with arable fields but with some hedges and small woods in between, and I would certainly describe them as common in this particular area." What puzzles me is why they should have disappeared from many of our intensively farmed fields and yet survived here. The Corn Bunting has been called the 'fat bird of the Barley' and I think one theory to account for its decline was the reduction in the amount of barley grown in the fields, but my observations show little connection between the presence of the birds of barley crops. Do you have a theory? I suspect that part of the problem has been a shortage of creepy crawlies to feed the young before they are big enough to feed on grain, as was the case with Grey Partridge, and I hope that the reduction of spraying around field edges

(creation of conservation headlands) may be enabling the birds to turn the corner and start increasing. Brian Fellows made his second and final visit to the Southleigh Forest 1km square in which he has undertaken a Breeding Bird Survey for the BTO. Unfortunately the Wood Warblers which were there last year did not return (nor had they been seen in previous years) but in addition to a good list of common birds Brian was pleased to find Swallows and Pied Wagtail probably nesting at Holme Farm where he also saw a single Linnet

Brian has also sent me two corrections to observations that I attributed to him – one concerns Sand Martins in Kent (although he was surprised to see none at Stodmarsh he did see plenty at Grove Ferry), the other is his own retraction of the theory that one pair of Coot at Emsworth Peter Pond had ‘adopted’ chicks from another pair which had vanished – it seems the missing parents have re-appeared with their own chicks and that the extra mouths to be fed by the Peter Pond pair are their own offspring (seven in one brood)

TUE 8 JUNE

A phone call today from Mervyn Southam (better known to botanists than to birders as a world authority on umbellifers) gave me news of QUAIL calling from the southern slope of Cheesefoot Head leading down to Longwood Warren – he heard two from the bridleway track at around SU 530274. Also in that area at least four CORN BUNTING were singing.

Families of both GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER and MARSH TIT were out in the trees between Burton and Petersfield on Sunday to cheer on the party of walkers led by Kevin Stouse last Sunday – the young Woodpeckers were out of the nest. A male Bullfinch posed for the party and a couple of Garden Warblers sang to them but Kevin tells me that “the most disturbing thing was the vast areas of farmland with monoculture fields and no birds!! Just 1 Lapwing and 1 Skylark on the entire walk.”

Brian Fellows made his routine check of birds on Baffins Pond today and reports that the number of Canada Geese has increased to 95 (plus six goslings), while one of the two regular Snow Geese has vanished. Another of the regulars at the pond is what he refers to as the ‘white hybrid goose’, and he is now suspicious that this hybrid has been corrupting the pure stock of the Barnacle Geese there and could be parent to at least one of the Barnacle goslings.. There are still 102 Mallard on the pond with 12 ducklings and 20 Tufted Duck while the 14 Coot have 8 chicks and the 8 Moorhen have none. At the Southsea Canoe Lake the Swans are down to 23.

NIGHTINGALES are coming to the end of their song for this year, and all our local known Nightingale sites are in the SU 70 ten km square with none known in SU71, making it all the more frustrating that a report should only now reach Brian Fellows of 3 Nightingales singing at Lyecommon on the western edge of Haslett Copse (around SU 789126 south of Up Marden and north of Walderton). Brian has been to the area and waited for a couple of hours at dusk today, but heard nothing.

MON 7 JUNE

John Shillitoe has sent an update on the KESTREL nest at the IBM HQ at North Harbour, Portsmouth. He says “Some time over the weekend, three of the eggs have hatched, but there is still a fourth egg unhatched. The female still spends most of her time sat tight, so it is a little difficult to determine what has happened. Two of the chicks seem healthy, but the third does not seem to be moving much (at all?). I will let you know how things go over the next few days.” John goes on to tell me that he knows of seven, possibly ten, CORN BUNTING territories along a regular cycle route of his in the Soberton/Hambledon area – he’s hoping to extend his route to see if he can take in a few more.

I wonder if anyone who is familiar with the area around Longparish to the east of Andover can answer the question which reached me today in an email from Australia where a one time resident of Barton Stacey army camp, feeling homesick for our Hampshire birds, is wondering if STONE CURLEW can still be found in that area. He says “many years ago a local farmer told me that he regularly saw Curlews behind his 'tractor', when I quizzed him about their long bills he shocked me by informing me that they had short beaks and big yellow eyes, sure enough before embarking to the 'Cricketers Inn' I stopped off near the field in question and saw my second sighting of Stone Curlew in the UK.(and celebrated at the 'pub)”. I realise that this is not a species for which we want to publish exact locations but I wonder if anyone can give him a yes or no. All I can do is to quote the Hampshire Bird Reports which tell me that there are now thought to be perhaps 25 breeding pairs in the whole county, and that this small number is increasing by one or two pairs a year as a result of a special effort by the RSPB to encourage farmers to give them a chance to survive. In direct answer to the question the Birds of Hampshire book shows that there was confirmed breeding in the 10 km square in which Barton Stacey lies during the 1986-91 period of collecting data for that book (and if they were there then it seems likely one or two pairs are still present) If anyone wants to bring a little colour into their birding lives have a look at Tom Tarrant’s Australian

Birding website at <http://ats.com.au/~aviceda/> Tom is the author of the request for info on Stone Curlews above, but I can't imagine how he can feel homesick for Hampshire with all those exotic species. Brian Fellows has just spent a few days in Kent and tells me that while he did see KITTIWAKE and FULMAR nesting on the cliffs at St Margarets Bay' where a PEREGRINE flew out over the sea, and watched MARSH HARRIER and HOBBY over the reeds at Stodmarsh, the list of birds he did not see is much more impressive – there were recent reports of LONG-BILLED DOWITCHER, GOLDEN ORIOLE, PURPLE HERON, SLENDER-BILLED GULL, SAVI'S WARBLER and LITTLE BITTERN. (Mention of the Little Bittern reminds me that I have had no replies to the query posed by Christoph Harwood who was fishing on the River Kennet at Hungerford on May 23 when he saw a strange bird that could have been a Little Bittern – does anyone know of one reported in that area?) And from Brian's list I wonder whether the Slender-Billed Gull was confirmed? – if so it was a good tick for someone. There are few birds on which we in Hampshire do better than birders in Kent, but LITTLE EGRET has until now been one of them – however Brian saw a 'pair' of them at Stodmarsh "breeding on the far bank" (he did include a query with this claim). One bird that is in short supply in Kent, it seemed to Brian, is SAND MARTIN.

Back in Emsworth Swan numbers remain constant at around 60 with the Black Swan still present, and the real news is that one of the Coot pairs has disappeared from the Slipper Mill Pond and it would seem that its Cootlets have been adopted by the Peter Pond pair – at any rate their family has gone up from four to seven overnight.

The SWAN HERD at Broadmarsh today numbered 44 with two more pairs of adults each with four cygnets. One family was almost certainly from Bedhampton Mill Pool and they were seen upstream of the A27, the other family was at the slipway and may have come from a nest on the RSPB islands as the pair on Budds Farm Pools are still sitting. Also on the pools were 5 Shelduck and 36 Tufted Duck with the usual Mallard and Coot (did not see any Little Grebe). At the Langbrook mouth with the tide fully up the Langstone Swan family were present with their seven cygnets but the lone Brent was not to be seen and other than gulls there was just one Oystercatcher and one Lapwing – the latter could be the first to return to the shore but may have come from Farlington Marshes.

PLANTS:

SUN 13 JUNE

IVY BROOMRAPE is uncommon at the best of times but Nigel Johnson has just discovered a colony of 29 spikes looking well established by the side of Titchfield Lane at SU 556109 a little north of Tapnag and south of the junction with Biddenfield Lane – what's more the plants were of the all yellow variety Monochroma which has been found in a number of places in the Winchester/Alresford area but never before here in the Botley/Wickham area. The Flora of Hampshire indicates that this plant may be sold for ornamental purposes and escape from gardens or garden centres but not many gardeners cultivate cannabistic plants (though it does sound a good way to keep down the ivy in your garden).

Last Friday Rosemary Webb took a look at the orchids and other plants by the M27 above Portschester over which I have been enthusing recently in my notes, and she adds further interest with the discovery that there is a group of BEE ORCHIDS of the variety called BELGARUM to be found there (between Skew Road and the motorway a little uphill from the road bridge). It seems these plants look fairly drab from a distance (a yellowish tinge to them) and they lack the tufts of hair which stick out from the sides of the labellum of the normal form and also show differences in the 'speculum' (the shiny central part of the labellum)

I put on my wellies this afternoon to walk down the Hermitage Stream from the overflow sluice of the Bedhampton Waterworks to the bend where the stream turns south to go past Bedhampton Mill, the object being to check out the BUTTONWEED (*Cotula coronopifolia*), which has its only established Hampshire site here, and I can report that it is flourishing and has spread to the north bank below the corner of the waterworks fence so that you can see it without getting into or crossing the stream. At the bend in the stream my first MARSH RAGWORT was in flower, and further down Brookweed was flourishing wherever there was muddy soil at the high watermark level in which the plants could grow (it grows on that east bank from a point about halfway along the Mill Pool to the A27 bridge). Climbing back out of the stream I found one plant of RED BARTSIA flowering (someone else reported this earlier in the week

but I cannot give them credit as I have forgotten who it was) and continuing along the path towards Bedhampton Mill I saw the first flowers on VERVAIN in the field beside the Mill Pool where it is the dominant plant in some years. Along Solent Road flowers were well out on some BUDDLEIA bushes.

SAT 12 JUNE

A full day of plant hunting for me with my monthly visit to IBM North Harbour in the morning and a walk around Sinah Common in the afternoon with HWT members there for the county AGM. At North Harbour the highspots were to find a dozen flowering plants of ALTHAEA HIRSUTA (Rough Marsh Mallow) still surviving at least 20 years after its unknown arrival on site and to find a few flowers left on the LATHYRUS APHACA (Yellow Vetchling – not to be confused with the common Yellow Meadow Vetchling now flowering) which still inhabits the flower beds separating the carpark bays at the extreme east end of the main carpark. I must have seen at least a hundred good Bee orchids around the site without searching, but these are as nothing compared to the thousands of PYRAMIDAL ORCHIDS that are abundant here and everywhere this year – many Common Spotted orchids were still putting up a good show on the motorway banks, and just inside the IBM fence on the south side of the lake (perhaps 30 yards east of a red lifebuoy holder) were two excellent specimens of hybrids between Southern Marsh and Common Spotted orchids. Other items worth mention were first flowering GREAT WILLOWHERB ('Codlins & Cream'), ROSEBAY WILLOWHERB (one spike), GREAT MULLEIN (several spikes on the motorway bank spur west of the site), EVERLASTING PEA (the lovely red wild sweet pea below the Mullein), SULPHUR CINQUEFOIL (half a dozen bushes) and one clump of HEMP AGRIMONY with rose red flower heads of buds (not open). On the recent mound of 'arisings' after the latest building at the east end of the buildings, which was sown with trees and wild flower mix about three years ago, one CORNFLOWER and more than half a dozen CORN COCKLE flowers still surviving. Three more first flowerings of common plants noted here were REDSHANK, HEDGE and LADIES BEDSTRAW and (less common) WATER DOCK. In the afternoon at Sinah all the plants promised (see June 9) were on show though there was not time for everyone to see them all. We also found a couple of examples of FERN GRASS (Catapodium rigidum) which I did not examine to see if they were Sea Fern Grass (the only visible distinction seems to be the length of the glumes – greater or less than 2mm), a new to me colony of Lyme Grass, and some SPRING BEAUTY still flowering

FRI 11 JUNE

MEADOW SWEET was in full flower at Warblington this morning and the Round Leaved Fluellen in the cemetery had flower buds which should have been open had the sun been shining. The less exciting MARSH CUDWEED was also in flower but the main source of interest was the wealth of grass species now flowering – possibly the best which I found today was MEADOW BARLEY while the most impressive were large plants of ITALIAN RYE GRASS on which the huge inflorescences looked like saws with the two rows of stalkless spikelets sticking out rigidly in two ranks on either side of the main stems. CANARY REED GRASS was another impressive species currently flowering. COMMON SALTMARSH GRASS was plentiful in places dampened by the salt water and the SALTMARSH RUSH was flowering in the same places. The many Brookweed plants which had not been eaten by cattle were also in full flower.

On Friday last week (June 4) Rosemary Webb was in Head Down plantation south of Buriton and found YELLOW BIRDS NEST flowering in a new site near the railway in Ludgersham Copse among some 200 to 300 plants of BIRDS NEST ORCHID.

THU 10 JUNE

ENCHANTER'S NIGHTSHADE was flowering at Stansted Forest this morning, timing its appearance to co-incide with many other members of the Willowherb family to which it belongs – unlike most of them it is instantly recognisable. Very soon now flowers will open on Great Willowherb which we all recognise but it will be a little time before the third easily identifiable species – Rosebay – starts to flower. I also visited the Langstone South Moors in the evening and found very few Southern Marsh orchids on show (seemingly less than the 300 which I counted on May 28), and the only newcomer there was SEA RUSH whose cylindrical leaves, large size and straw coloured inflorescence make it easy to pick out. In the nearby ex-IBM Clubhouse site (now 'waste ground') I felt more confident about the identity of the forest of Slender Thistles and also found patches of PARSLEY PIERT and masses of Lesser Trefoil plus one plant of SUBTERRANEAN CLOVER newly flowering.

WED 9 JUNE

Next Saturday I am scheduled to lead a walk around the Sinah area of South Hayling for members of Hampshire Wildlife Trust coming to the county AGM in the Hayling Community Centre and the following list of plants I found on a recce today might persuade a few people who do not know the area that it is worth coming along (walk starts from the Community Centre in West Town at 1.30pm, back by

4.0pm for tea before the AGM at 4.45 and talk by Dr Sarah Ball of Wisley on “Plant Defence Mechanisms against Insects” at 5.30pm). Non-members can come (but not vote) and there are other walks at Sandy Point and Langstone South Moors – see imminent events section of What’s New page. The list is roughly in the order in which I expect to find the species and copies will be available as tick lists on the day (only species that seem to me to deserve comment are listed)

Tansy	Evening Primrose (Large Flowered)	Childing Pink	Sheep’s Bit
	Hedgerow Cranesbill		
Duke of Argyll’s Teaplant	Sticky Groundsel	English Stonecrop	Biting
Stonecrop	Hare’s Foot Clover		
Sea Bindweed	Restharrow	Sand Catstail grass	Marram grass
	Sea Sandwort		
Smith’s Pepperwort	Shepherd’s Cress (seeds only)	Sea Pink (Thrift)	Birdsfoot
	Little Robin		
Vipers Bugloss	Nottingham Catchfly	Rose Campion (Lychinis coronaria)	Tree Lupin
	Green Winged orchid (seeds)		
Hare’s Tail grass	Dune Fescue	Rough Clover	Sea Holly (buds)
	Tamarisk		
Lyme grass	Guernsey Fleabane (leaves)	Bell Heather	Bladder Senna
	Garden Asparagus		
Dodder	Tartarian Honeysuckle	Slender Thistle	Spreading Oleaster

This is a very arbitrary list (not mentioning Yellow Horned Poppy or Sea Kale, etc, etc) and I’m sure people will find things I have never noticed. Also on today’s trip around Hayling I found Short Fruited Willowherb (*E. obscurum*) close to the Community Centre and a beautiful plant of SULPHUR CINQUEFOIL flowering in the open space between Saltmarsh Lane/Denhill Close and the Hayling Coastal Path. At the Stoke Bay carpark behind the Esso Garage half a dozen plants of SLENDER THISTLE were flowering (others seen by Sinah Lake). My own prize finds today were the HARE’S TAIL grass and DUNE FESCUE at Gunner Point and the first BELL HEATHER on the Golf Course, plus a count of 131 spikes of NOTTINGHAM CATCHFLY against some 80 last year.

TUE 8 JUNE

Today’s newcomer on the scene was CROSS LEAVED HEATH with one cluster of plants in flower in a sunny part of Havant Thicket. I was also pleased to discover that I now have the ‘jizz’ of WAVY HAIR-GRASS and saw it flowering in two places – previously I had misled myself into expecting it to be much closer in size and looks to the TUFTED HAIR-GRASS and overlooked the very different real thing (I find the way the brain works in matters of recognition is fascinating – it allows us to overlook the commonest of things for half our lives and then leaves us wondering why we never ‘saw’ those things before when they are so obvious now).

A phone call this morning from George Hedley who among other things farms the Langstone South Moors told me that it seemed that numbers of the Marsh Orchids were very low this year – my response was to repeat the comments I have made here recently on what I believe to be the excellent management of the grazing which he has now established and to suggest that we wait another week or so and see what happens ... I have often found that the first plants to appear are suddenly joined by a great mass of others when conditions come right (and those conditions may include the sunshine promised for the coming week or so). The worrying part of what George had to say was that he had noticed the stumps of a line of old fence posts sticking up a couple of inches above the ground in which they have been hidden for years, and he attributes this to the drying up of the soil as a result of the new Autoliv factory which now covers half the land surface which once received and held the winter rainfall – despite the ditches and pools around the new buildings which are intended to carry water around the site (together with rain water running off the roofs and tarmac) and feed it to the marshy meadow ‘as before’.

MON 7 JUNE

BROOKWEED was flowering for the first time beside the Hermitage Stream just above the A27 and both LUCERNE and LARGE BINDWEED were in flower on the Broadmarsh shore. Continuing along to Chalk Dock I found lots of TUFTED VETCH out on the A27 bank and was reminded that I had not recorded YELLOW-WORT as out yesterday by seeing more of it (and Self Heal) here. Very close to the Farlington Marshes entrance there is a good clump of BEE ORCHIDS in flower beside the seawall path and the SWEETBRIAR bushes that were cut down with the trimming of the motorway banks a couple of years back are now back in flower. The best place to see Sweetbriar and to contrast it with Dog Rose is where the Hermitage Stream footpath passes under Harts Farm Way downstream of the A27 – as you approach from the north there is an overgrown set of steps going up to the road, and between these steps

and the concrete path going under the road a mixed line of both roses has been planted and you can pick out the Sweetbriar by its deeper pink flowers and then prove the point by sniffing its apple scented leaves. Both Nigel Johnson and Garry Stevens rang me today to tell of specially good displays of orchids they had just seen. Nigel had been on Portsdown on the south side of Crookhorn Lane/College Road where it meets Portsdown Hill Road below Fort Purbrook and he had been impressed by the number of PYRAMIDAL ORCHIDS and Kidney Vetch here though the passing motorist is not greeted by the solid bank of these orchids as in some past years (I remember Pete Potts telling me he had counted 7,000 Pyramidal Orchids there, but that must be over ten years back). Garry had been impressed by the display of COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS beside the unmade approach road to the new Garden Centre and public carpark for Stansted House – I have not seen these this year but remember the best place for them was within the area now enclosed to the north of the approach road, but there are plenty south of the road around the northern edge of the Groves in most years and there may be Marsh Orchids among these.

INSECTS:

SAT 12 JUNE

An overcast and relatively cool day was not good for butterflies but at the IBM North Harbour site I saw half a dozen Common Blue and a couple of Meadow Brown around the lake and then, right at the end of my visit around midday, I made an extra foray to check out the presence of the Swan family and was rewarded by two MARBLED WHITE which I disturbed from the rough grass (I later heard that Betty Goodspeed had also seen one by Fort Purbrook on Portsdown today). The Blue Tailed Damselflies (*Ischnura elegans*) were mating all round the lake and I had a couple of sightings of a fast flying dragonfly which I guess was a female BLACK TAILED SKIMMER by its size, though in the only brief clear view I had of it I saw a black 'spine' down the brown body suggesting an Emperor (though it was too small and the females are I think always green).

FRI 11 JUNE

A note from Sonia Bolton tells me that the first HORNET has been circling her home at Stansted today. Unlike the one found dead at Warblington Station on May 31 and the one found by Martin Baggs in March hibernating in a bird nest box this one was presumably the first of this year's brood produced by a queen which has emerged from hibernation and made a nest – or would it still be a queen? Pete Potts reminds me that my observation of the Cream Spot Tiger moth (and any other observations of uncommon species) should be reported to Barry Goater at 27 Hiltingbury Road, Chandlers Ford SO53 5SR together with its date and grid reference for inclusion in the project for mapping the distribution of moths in Hampshire (and for inclusion in the data for the annual Butterfly and Moth Report produced by the Hampshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation). Consider my wrist slapped and the message passed on to others.

In the marshy eastern field of Warblington Farm this morning I spotted a bright white moth on a Marsh Thistle head. The moth was one of the largest specimens of the great Pyralid family of 'Grass Moths' which hold their wings in a long thin tube shape – this one was about 15mm long, and the white wings were covered with tiny black dots which made me think it was a species called *Yponomeuta padella* whose caterpillars live in bright white 'tents' which sometimes occur in large numbers covering whole trees of Hawthorn and similar trees. This one was bigger than that species and was almost certainly MYELOIS CRIBRELLA whose caterpillars feed on thistles (not living in tents). Mention of tents reminds me that last year's experiment by Southampton University in dealing with the 'Brown Tail Moth menace' seems to have been a success and we will be seeing more of the white 'paper tents' hanging in the trees in places where the moths are found. The tents contain a chemical which imitates the scent (pheromone) given off by female Brown Tail moths to attract males, and I believe the scheme greatly reduces the number of genuine females that are fertilised by confusing and exhausting the energies of the males. Fewer fertilised females means fewer of the dreaded caterpillars and a smaller population in each successive year.

THU 10 JUNE

Despite sunshine and light winds the only butterflies I saw today in a morning split between Thorney Little Deeps and Stansted Lyels Wood the only butterflies seen were one Small Heath, one Common Blue and one Meadow Brown but at Stansted I did come on my first CINNABAR MOTH – so fast asleep even at

midday that I could move one of its forewings to show my companion the scarlet colour of the hind wing without waking it up. Maybe this was not laziness on the moth's part as I see that, unlike the strictly day flying Burnet Moths, the Cinnabar is mainly a night flier.

WED 9 JUNE

A cool shower as I cycled to Hayling today meant that butterflies were reluctant to fly – I only saw a couple each of Small Heath and Common Blue – but while I was in the Gunner Point sand dunes I had the delightful experience of watching a very good specimen of CREAM SPOT TIGER moth flying low over the rough grass in a haphazard way which I soon saw was in the cause of egg-laying, and standing to watch her she came and laid a couple of eggs within inches of my boots so I could enjoy the beautiful rose pink colour of her body (very similar to an Elephant Hawk Moth) as well as the cream spots on the black forewings and the orange hind wings.

While writing this a phone call from Pat Lea, who lives on South Hayling and happens to be the daughter of the one time (long ago) headmaster at my old school when I was there, told me she had had to duck as a STAG BEETLE flew across her garden today.

TUE 8 JUNE

Despite a cool morning I came on half a dozen SPECKLED WOOD butterflies in Havant Thicket, all looking bright and fresh unlike one which I saw on Portsdown on Sunday which had so much of its wings missing that when it took off from the path in front of me it crash landed back on the ground and I had to swerve to avoid treading on it, so I guess the summer brood is now out in strength. The only other butterflies seen in the Thicket this morning were one GREEN VEINED WHITE and one LARGE SKIPPER.

MON 7 JUNE

Butterfly walks on Portsdown led by Theo Roberts are among the summer highspots in my calendar but other commitments prevented my joining him yesterday morning, though you will see that it did encourage me to visit the hill in the afternoon sunshine when conditions were a lot better than they were in the morning. I was hoping to hear what they found and am grateful to Andrew Brookes for supplying the following summary - "Members of the Portsmouth Area Group, Butterfly Conservation, and others braved the cool breeze and showers on Sunday morning to look for butterflies near Fort Widley. The sunny spells revealed good numbers of Small and Common Blues, with the occasional Speckled Wood, Large Skipper and Large White. The numerous buckthorns were searched for Brimstone ova and larva, but none were found."

Another message today is from Christoph Harwood asking for help in identifying a beetle of which he has just seen numerous examples on water mint near a pond looking "like a large ladybird of a golden, almost metallic colour". While I can hazard a guess these were of the CHRYSOMELIDAE family of Leaf Beetles, and may have been *Chrysolina polita* (which Chinery says are common on herbage of river banks and other damp places all summer, especially on mints) I must also point out that this family has over 25,000 species so my guess has as much chance of being right as I do of winning the lottery. This is of course only one family among the beetle tribe whose numbers are so staggering that they led one eminent scientist some hundred years ago to answer the question "Do you really think man is made in the image of God?" with "I do not know what God looks like but I do know that he has a great fancy for creating beetles and that may give us a clue as to his preferred design for life". Does anyone out there know of a good book to help us name some of these god-like creatures?

In Emsworth Brian Fellows saw another RED ADMIRAL today.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 13 JUNE

John Goodspeed tells me that he is still seeing one of the ALBINO GREY SQUIRRELS in his garden, and neither he nor I have been told of any more of these creatures in addition to that one and the one he knows of in Waterlooville. In my own garden I was pleased to find three adult FROGS lurking in the long grass today where I do not normally find them.

THU 10 JUNE

The SHINY SNAIL (*Zonitoides nitidus*) was on parade at the Langstone South Moors today. A wetland snail, you will find it on the leaves of Yellow Flag and other water plants, and its shell is unlike those of

all the other common snails in that it has one large final whorl with the other whorls making a tiny appendage to the main 'shell' – they look like the bun of hair on the back of a Victorian lady's head. The snail is dark bodied in a brown shell making it appear almost black.

WED 9 JUNE

While admiring the Nottingham Catchfly plants on Hayling's Gunner Point beach area what seemed to be a larger than usual LIZARD scuttled into cover before I could focus on it – I remember Dennis Johnson finding Lizard's in the Sinah area which could have been confused with a Sand Lizard (but was not).

TUE 8 JUNE

A healthy female ADDER is always a delight to see from a close but safe distance and this morning I was able to watch one sunning itself by one of the main rides through Havant Thicket from a distance of a couple of yards and enjoy the pattern of rich browns on its body both at rest and as it slowly made off after it raised its head to taste the air, smelt my socks, and decided that it was wise to leave its deck chair in the sun and move under cover.

MON 7 JUNE

GRASS SNAKES are becoming more numerous each year in many damp areas north of Havant but I cannot recall seeing or hearing of any in the built up areas near the shore so I was very interested to hear that Gill Knight had found one lying very sluggishly in her garden near Wade Court at Langstone before the sun had warmed it this morning and she was able to measure it as being over a metre long. It was almost certainly a female but if so its thin body indicated that it had already laid its eggs, so maybe young snakes will appear before the summer is out. One thing that surprised me was that Gill told me that a snake of this size was probably ten years old.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999
WEEK 22 MAY 31 – JUNE 6

BIRDS:

SUN 6 JUNE

Barry Collins told me this evening that there was excitement on Thorney Island a week ago when a single MONTAGU'S HARRIER spent the Sunday and Bank Holiday Monday (May 30/31) on the island but it left no message as to its next destination nor news of any breeding pair. Among the birds staying on the island are 6 singing CORN BUNTING, and the daytime Egret count there has been up to nine birds this past week. Barry also told me that he had checked out the report of Nightingale heard south of the Emsworth Common Road and west of Marlpit Lane by Kevin Stouse's evening walk on May 19. Barry heard two birds singing in scrub around a gravel pit at approx SU 776082 (not quite the same place that Kevin heard them, but probably the same two birds)

The view from Portsdown above Portchester in this afternoon's sunlight was great, both ends of the Isle of Wight clearly visible as was Hurst Castle, and a male STONECHAT in the foreground made it all the better. The bird was close to the M27 fence (north side) of the area now named Portchester Common which I had entered from Skew Road, and was west of the footbridge over the motorway. A second bird flew off before I could be sure if it was a female or juvenile, so I can't claim breeding success for these birds.

SAT 5 JUNE

Walking though Hammond's Lands Coppice (the wood north of Leigh Park Gardens and south of the Gypsies Plain) I not only disturbed a young Roe fawn but also a TAWNY OWL which gave me an exciting view as it flew off when I was within 20 yards of it.

FRI 4 JUNE

Mike Collins, who works at Goodwood House and lives in Havant, tells me this evening that a BARN OWL was seen in daylight yesterday at Goodwood House where last week a HOBBY was drifting overhead causing panic among the House Martins. This evening Mike saw another HOBBY much more actively hunting in and out the houses of East Lavant at rooftop height in the hope of hirundine supper. At the Broadmarsh Slipway last Sunday (May 30), while watching around 300 SWIFTS over Budds Farm, Mike spoke to John Badley and learnt that a BLACK TERN had been over the RSPB Reserve Islands that morning and that the SAKER FALCON, which had caused much disturbance to birds arriving at the islands early in the nesting season, had not been seen lately and the nesting Terns were now doing well. Finally, for those who wish to emulate Dr Doolittle and talk to any passing Iberian Chiffchaff, Mike tells me that the important phrase to remember is "DJEP DJEP DJEP DJEP SWEE

TRETTTRETTRTRETTRTRET” (though the English equivalent of this phrase was missing from his copy of Birding World).

A quick visit to the SOS website Recent Reports page tells me that a possible WHITE BILLED DIVER was off Ovingdean yesterday and that 48 MANX SHEARWATER were seen passing Beach Head with 28 at Ovingdean with 2 Arctic Skua and 3 Bonxies.

A message from Brian Fellows today passes on Chris Mead's thoughts on the 'screaming of Swifts' around their nest sites. Chris says "The function of screaming parties is not wholly understood but the social need for doing it seems paramount. The birds going to breeding sites are clearly sussing out who is doing what and whether there are any spare holes or spare mates. The calls from within the holes are sexable (see BB paper May 1997). Erich Kaiser discovered that the duetting pairs. The SWEE and the REE - the former is higher pitched than the latter. In essence the SWEE is the female and the REE is the male. Each will fight an intruder of the opposite sex if they try to enter the occupied hole. Later there are banging parties of young birds (two and three years old) trying out colonies to see whether they should try to settle. This happens for about six weeks from mid June. This is the BEST time to watch them."

THU 3 JUNE

Cycling to Hayling in the afternoon sunshine with the tide high I was intrigued to see a lone EGRET in the Wade Court trees, and later to see another single Egret at Stoke Bay, both of them in places where until recently the Egrets had been seen in pairs – it is probably wishful thinking but both birds could have mates sitting on nests in those two areas. Less conjectural were sightings of the Langstone pond Swan family, still with 7 cygnets, on the sea off the Langstone Pond seawall, and of at least four LITTLE TERN and two RINGED PLOVER with one OYSTERCATCHER, all on the island in the Oysterbeds lagoon where they are almost certainly nesting

WED 2 JUNE

If like me you recently had trouble getting through to the SOS (Sussex Ornithological Soc) website then try again as I did today and found not only that I could get through without trouble but found a magnificent new page of RECENT SIGHTINGS which started with news of a RED BACKED SHRIKE seen this morning at Beachy Head. Among a long list of rarities seen in May was a party of 5 BEE-EATERS seen flying over the Wildfowl Trust reserve at Arundel on Sat 29 May. Although some sightings are from Kent many are from our end of Sussex and I thoroughly recommend regular visits to this site (and of course membership of SOS) – there is a link on my WHAT'S NEW page which will give you the address of the site and take you there.

At Emsworth the missing Peter Pond Swans are still unaccounted for, but the Black Swan remains on the Town Mill Pond with around 60 Mute Swans (64 on Monday, 58 today). On the Slipper Mill pond the number of Coot chicks has been diminished by two – possibly taken by the ever-present Herring Gulls. The Coot family on Peter Pond still has its brood of four chicks unharmed.

TUE 1 JUNE

A lengthy message from Paul Boulton today gave me great pleasure as he described how he and his two youngest sons drove down to Sidlesham on Sunday and spent the night under canvas in between a round of visits to Selsey, Church Norton, Sidlesham Ferry and other parts of Pagham Harbour. Through Dad's scope they saw a FULMAR and watched 3 dozen GANNET fishing off Selsey; in Pagham Harbour they saw a pair of WIGEON and Red Legged Partridge on the shore; at Church Norton there was a single BAR TAILED GODWIT; and at Sidlesham Ferry Pool there was male TEAL, three AVOCET, 26 BLACK TAILED GODWIT and 35 SHELDUCK with nine ducklings. I don't know the ages of the two lads Callum and Christopher but I can just imagine and share in their excitement as Paul describes how by 2pm on Monday they had run out of food and had to head for home to tell Mum all their adventures, including stroking a baby wild rabbit which Dad caught for them (and then released unharmed). I guess even Dad enjoyed this first outing in his new tent and the peaceful hooting of a Tawny Owl through the canvas when the boys eventually fell asleep by 11pm.

Brian Fellows also reveals his enthusiasm – which I share - for the screaming of SWIFTS in their evening display around their nest sites at this time of year. He asks why they do it, and my understanding is that the screaming is in fact a long and complicated warbling song delivered at an easy natural pace for creatures whose heart rate, temperature and 'speed of living' are all much higher/faster than our own. In the same way that the songs of Whales are delivered at a slower tempo than that to which our brains are accustomed to, so the Swifts songs are that much faster and our brains cannot interpret them properly. Brian also tells me that there are still 38 Swans on the Southsea Canoe Lake, and that there are fewer young birds than usual at Baffins Pond – in particular the flock of BARNACLE GEESE produced 12 young in 1997, 8 in 1998, but only 3 this year. The Dabchick pair seem to have lost their youngster and there are fewer than usual Mallard ducklings – all these reductions possibly attributable to the 6

TERRAPINS which sit sunning themselves on the islands, looking harmless, but there are stories of groups of them killing and eating birds as large as Little Egrets.

Kevin Stouse tells me that last Sunday his viewing of the Spanish Grand Prix on TV was interrupted by the sight of a very large bird over his garden – big enough to dwarf Herring Gulls circling with it. The slightly forked tail and long thin angled wings could only be those of a RED KITE, so they are still in our area. If you are interested in the rapid growth in Kite numbers in Britain have a look at the ‘Internet Snippets’ section of Brian Fellows’ own website where you can read “On my local patch here in the bird desert of Oxfordshire I don't bother with Red Kite unless there are more than ten in the air together. They are tiddlers and get thrown back!” from one contributor, and from another “Up to 30 Kites have been roosting in this general area around Peterborough and I have seen 18 on a couple of occasions. However they are now dispersing for the summer and exploring woods far and wide as prospective nest sites so sightings tend to be more hit or miss” I wonder how soon we too will get bored with Kite sightings? Brian’s site also has a fascinating observation of two BUZZARDS locking talons in mid-air in what seems to be a form of aerial arm-wrestling between a dominant male bird and a contender for the top-bird position.

John Shillitoe also gives me news of raptors – this time of the non-appearance of the MONTAGU’S HARRIERS at Black Gutter in the New Forest. I suspect they are not too many miles from that site and I wonder how long it will be before the birders track them down and viewing queues again develop. The only clue I will give you is that one of these birds was seen at Beachy Head on May 24th. John Shillitoe also visited Martin Down on Saturday (May 29) and saw one of the STONE CURLEWS. As their incubation period is around 25 days and the pair were seen together on April 3 I would think there should be a youngster or two roaming the Martin Down area by now.

Starting from New Barn Farm at Blendworth I climbed Blendworth Down to the Windmill in hot sunshine, hearing at least two CORN BUNTINGS near the top and seeing one of them around SU 715159 to prove that this favoured site has not been abandoned by the birds. Away to the east I heard another Corn Bunting singing close to the electricity pylon at around SU 740146 (there may be more in that area or nearer St Hubert’s Chapel as I did not walk the field path, only the main road). While the Corn Buntings were one of my target species for the walk, and it was good to hear them, the highspot of the day was undoubtedly the prolonged views of HOBBY which I had from Windmill Down as I started down from the Windmill towards Chalton. The Hobby was enjoying the air to the east and north of the down (over squares SU 7215 and 7216) and from my position near the top of the hill it was often flying below me to give views of its dark back and sometimes above the horizon where it showed silhouettes from every angle. Before it moved out of sight to the north it was buzzed by three Swallows, one of them almost hitting it and making it swerve and dive away. The only disappointment was that it did not come close enough for me to see its facial pattern and under-plumage but it was in view for almost five minutes.

MON 31 MAY

Both Brian Fellows and I came on unusually bold Cuckoos today – Brian’s was in the Lower Ems valley, defying the roar of the new A27 for the first time since the new road cut through the Ems water meadows, and mine was by the Northney marina where I saw it perched on some scrub until I was within 100 yards of it in full view at which point it took off and seemed to fly straight towards me though it did veer aside when about 20 yards away and once more perched openly on a wild rose within a stone’s throw. A little further east on the Northney shore where the new houses have been built on the old holiday camp site I was pleased to see a good dozen, maybe 20, HOUSE MARTINS circling in the air, presumably nesting near by. At Langstone Pond I saw a Moorhen apparently caught in some tangled dead ivy. From a distance the bird seemed to be standing on its head and unable to move but as I watched a second Moorhen swam over to it and the ‘suspended bird’ came to life and began to ‘fondle’ the bill and head of the newcomer. All the while a very young Moorhen chick was on the water being ignored by these two which I assume were its parents. To cut the story short the two consenting adults then moved onto the water and copulated in front of their youngster. I know that Moorhen chicks are ‘kept at home’ by their parents to help with raising subsequent broods during the summer, but this was the first time that I had seen how rapid a turnover of egg-clutches they must achieve.

Brian Fellows has also passed me some comments on the Sanderling which he saw at Gunner Point last Saturday – he confirms that all four of these birds were in non-breeding plumage and so unlikely to be on their way to the Arctic with serious breeding intentions, but he tells me that in Dublin Bay a flock of 140 Sanderling have been seen recently (no date) in variety of plumage states, some of them probably still intending to head north but knowing that their chosen destination is still under snow and ice. When the time comes it will only take three or four days flying at most to reach the nesting area from the British

Isles so it is still not too late to leave.

PLANTS:

SUN 6 JUNE

Afternoon sunshine beckoned me to Portsdown today to check out the STRAW FOXGLOVE (*Digitalis lutea*), which Francis Rose calls the Small Yellow Foxglove, and I found 109 spikes at their best with about half the flowers open on most spikes. These grow on the steep embankment on the north side of Nelson Lane where it turns north from the section which connects it to the bridge over the M27 leading down into Portchester. On the north side of that bridge there was a good display of Bee Orchids that are easy to find – 22 were clustered in the grass behind the Nelson Lane road name board on the north side of that road and 15, some of them very big specimens, could be found with a little more searching behind the equivalent name board on the south side – these were nearer the motorway fence. On the east side of this road junction, beside the Skew Road name board, was a good cluster of 15 Common Spotted orchids, and following the motorway fence up from its corner above this sign (counting the double post at the corner as 0) to the 19th post I looked over and not only saw the magnificent display of FIELD COW-WHEAT (around 100 plants in full purple and gold finery) but also my first RIBBED MELILOT flowers (though I could not name it for certain until I had taken a specimen home and checked the size of the flowers, length of keel and wings, and the hairlessness of the incipient seed pods). I did not have any trouble in naming the first flowering plant of SELF HEAL also seen here. A little to the east, on the excellent piece of open grass downland now named as Portchester Common on signs erected by Fareham Borough (is this or is this not part of Portsdown as far as Ruchard Jones is concerned? – I am continually amused by the number of people who refer to Portsdown as if they were referring to a single place when in fact ‘their Portsdown’ is different from everyone else’s, and that is a great tribute to the size and variety of this wonderful hill), I not only saw my first flowers on Agrimony and Hogweed to catch up with John Goodspeed, but I refound after a gap of many years what I believe to be the only FRAGRANT ORCHID anywhere on Portsdown. If you want to find it walk the path leading most directly from the footbridge over the M27 to the path connecting with Fort Southwick over the fields. This takes you between scrub with some more open sections, and in one of these broader places perhaps a little over half way up there is a lone Hawthorn (about 15 feet high) on the left of the path as you go up. Going up the orchid is on the bank to the left of the path immediately before the Hawthorn, and I jammed a piece of old wooden board with some flaking pale blue paint on it at the foot of the hawthorn to mark the spot without indicating the orchid (though that is in clear view to all who look) Continuing to the top of this path I found Fern Grass at my feet and returning to where I had left the car on Skew Road I saw my first GREATER KNAPWEED flower close to the road in the meadow adjacent to the common. Stopping at the field entrance pull in just before reaching Fort Southwick I managed to tick my first SAINFOIN flower, but only one as the grass verge here (which used to contain a mass of it) has been close mown as it was by the equestrian entrance to Fort Widley a couple of years ago, eliminating another lovely patch of this flower. The mowers had failed to eliminate the FIELD BINDWEED which was flowering here to give me one more tick. One final remark on Portsdown concerns the mass of Pyramidal Orchids flowering along the southern face in numbers and in places that surprised me.

WEASEL’S SNOUT – the small wild snapdragon which Francis Rose calls *Antirrhinum orontium* but which Stace calls *Misopates orontium* (another good argument for sticking to English Names) – is flowering on schedule in the New Lane allotments at Havant where it continues to flourish year by year because the members of the Trust which work the allotments do not poison their land with chemicals and allow weeds to benefit from their effort at turning the soil.

SAT 5 JUNE

In the Leigh Park Gardens carpark area a LOCUST TREE was in flower and the WHITE HOREHOUND plants of dubious origin were flowering as in previous years. Out on the glorious grassland of Thicket Lawn south west of the lake my first surprise was to find YELLOW MEADOW VETCHLING in flower, less surprising were Yorkshire Fog grass and both normal and rayed form flowers of Black Knapweed. CORKY FRUITED WATER DROPWORT is abundant in this meadow, as is Hairy Sedge, and on the Leigh Park Gardens lake the WHITE WATER LILIES were in flower and much of the water surface was covered with a million reddish flower spikes (each perhaps 10cm high) of some submerged plant that I think can only have been SPIKED WATER MILFOIL (other suggestions welcome). In Hammond’s Lands Coppice the WILD SERVICE tree had finished flowering, and emerging from the wood there was as usual a lovely clump of flowering Yellow Loosestrife which in past years I had thought to be the true species rather than the more usual DOTTED LOOSESTRIFE but checking a specimen against Stace’s key there is no doubt it is the Dotted species (calyx segments all green with no hint of brown, and petal

lobes with many glandular hairs). Instead of keeping to the path to the Staunton Arms I climbed the gate to the left and walked up the track between the two flower rich ditches which had been the target of the Evening Class outing this morning. The COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS were at their best (I counted 439 spikes – a slight increase on the 400 counted there on 8 June 1998) and Gwynne Johnson checked out the mass of what I took to be Lesser Stitchwort and found it to be Bog Stitchwort, and I spent some time puzzling over a flowering umbellifer which turned out to be a very strange and small example of WILD ANGELICA – part of the difficulty was that the umbel had both bracts and bracteoles but Francis Rose bluntly states that this species has no bracts whereas Keble Martin's illustration shows both and Stace is not specific.

DAMES VIOLET is flowering in some profusion at Catherington Lith according to John Vigay, and the display of TWAYBLADE orchids there has been even more spectacular than it was last year.

FRI 4 JUNE

John Goodspeed has just sent me a complete list of the flowers he has recorded on Portsdown and the valley to the north this year, and in it I found three plants now in flower on the hill which I have not yet seen myself. First is the beautiful SAINFOIN which he has found near Fort Purbrook (May 27) but which can also be found (hopefully) to the west of Fort Widley, to the west of Fort Southwick and on the hill slopes above Portchester. Less surprising to me (since I found it nearly out on Hayling yesterday) is AGRIMONY and also about to burst out generally is HOGWEED. The best item in John's list for me was MARSH LOUSEWORT which he had found flowering in the boggy field at Lyeheath to the north of the hill when he took Richard Jones with him to look at the EARLY MARSH ORCHIDS flowering there on May 28.

THU 3 JUNE

A cycle trip all round Hayling today produced a good list of interesting newly flowering plants. Crossing Langstone Bridge I saw my first YARROW of the summer and then the first WILD PRIVET flowers by the top of the Hayling Coastal Path. Near the weir of the Oysterbeds lagoon one spray of WHITE MELILOT flowers could be seen, and south of Stoke Bay in the 'Hoopoe Field' DYER'S GREENWEED had its first yellows flowers open. At West Town Station I found something which I would not, until last month, have recognized as unusual – this was the very large subspecies of COMMON VETCH called *Vicia sativa sativa* which is said to be a relict of an ancient fodder crop – this specimen was at least up to the given height of 1.5 metres as its flowers (which were a good 3cm long) stared me in the eye from the bush it had climbed. Also in the old station area one of the many shrubs planted there was covered in grape like hanging clusters of white pea family flowers and must have been a young LOCUST TREE. Going on to the Kench and up the track on its eastern side I found, when two thirds of the way from the road to the harbour shore, and bush covered with pea family flowers, though this time bright yellow in colour – this is the bush of BLADDER SENNA that will later be covered with huge translucent pods. Reaching Gunner Point I enjoyed the mass of Sheep's Bit and the smaller number of flowers of Sea Bindweed and Rest Harrow which had been first found by the evening class group last week. Out since then were HARE'S FOOT CLOVER, ROSE CAMPION and the thing I have been seeking in vain for about a month – three flowering plants of NOTTINGHAM CATCHFLY. Still at Sinah the Childing Pink plants have mainly ceased to flower but on the shore east of Sandy Point reserve the rare SEA KNOTGRASS is in flower and flourishing with my first sight of flowering SEA SPURGE and STICKY GROUNDSEL nearby. Going onto the Black Point Causeway one of the first things I saw on the west bank (just after the road bends north and before the section which has been mown) was what some might claim as a WILD GLADIOLUS but which I suspect to have come either from a local garden or some sailor's Mediterranean holiday. None of the Sea Holly was out but the sand bank south of the clubhouse along the beach leading to the western point there was SEA ROCKET, HARE'S TAIL grass, BUGLOSS (not Vipers Bugloss) and (at the west end, hidden by a Broom bush) just one surviving plant of COTTON THISTLE (not in flower).

TUE 1 JUNE

BLACK BRYONY may have been flowering for some time but I recorded it for the first time this morning when I walked a circuit of Blendworth, Chalton, and Idworth Downs plus Wick Hanger. SPINDLE BUSHES were in full flower and WELTED THISTLES were newly open but the highspot of this outing was the sight of ROCK ROSE flowering en masse on the slopes of Windmill Down facing Chalton village. To see it you should follow the northern edge of the field at SU 720161 rather than the official path line across the centre of the field and you will find the plants lining the fence line and covering the anthills on the far side of the fence as you look down the slope to the ancient farm site. Chalton village church had its usual display of BLACK SPLEENWORT fern on the south facing side of the tower but much of the Pellitory of the wall has been cleared from around the base (it could be seen better between

the entrances to the church and Manor Farm opposite the Red Lion). In the long grass of the churchyard were a few clumps of SPIKED SEDGE (of which I found more growing with Grey Sedge on the roadside just north of St Huberts Chapel, just south of and opposite the road to Compton). Climbing up through Heberdens Farm the fields of Rape on the lower slopes now have a magnificent edging of Common Poppies while the higher fields are just turning blue with opening Flax flowers. On the broad bridleway going between the Flax near the top of the slope at least 10 plants of SMALL TOADFLAX were flowering, and on the last stage of my trip I found plants of Agrimony with flower spikes already visible and soon to flower.

The first BEE ORCHID was flowering in Bill Addison's garden at the foot of Portsdown last Sunday (May 30) but this news slipped my memory when making the Monday night update. It seems the orchid was in the middle of Bill's lawn and only spotted as the mower bore down on it – it escaped mowing but may not have escaped entirely as instead of mowing round it Bill dug it up and put it in a pot. I'll have to remember to ask him about its health next year.

MON 31 MAY

A short trip to the Northney Marina area this morning showed me the yellow of COMMON TOADFLAX in flower at the southern end of the Langstone Bridge and on the North Common area I found both FIELD ROSE and SWEET BRIAR in flower plus one delicate plant of escaped GARDEN ASPARAGUS with its tiny yellow bell-shaped flowers dangling among the thread like leaves. Leaving the common by its carpark I found the first COMMON POPPIES of the summer in flower with VIPERS BUGLOSS and HEDGEROW CRANESBILL already in full flower and FEVERFEW showing its disk florets but still waiting for the expansion of its ray florets.

John Goodspeed's poster today brings news of the first COMMON BROOMRAPE seen on Portsdown last Wednesday (May 26). There are only two species of Broomrape that you are likely to see in this area – the big yellow/brown coloured one is the Knapweed Broomrape (*Orobanche elatior*) and the much smaller mauve tinged one is the Common Broomrape (*O. minor*). By the chapel in the grounds of Stansted House there is a lone colony of Ivy Broomrape (*O. hederæ*) but you have to travel to Southampton or Winchester to find another colony of it, while the only other two species recorded in Hampshire (Greater and Yarrow Broomrape, *O. rapum-genistæ* and *O. purpurea*) are even rarer with no colonies known locally.

INSECTS:

SUN 6 JUNE

Further evidence has reached me which seems to make it very likely that Sonia Bolton and Jim Berry did see an exceptionally early GATEKEEPER in Leigh Park Gardens main avenue yesterday. Sonia Bolton has now told me that she had a clear view of the butterfly at rest on bramble only a couple of feet away and she did see the eyespot on the hind wing upper side as well as extensive orange on all wings, and that the insect was seen in a woodland edge location with dappled sunshine where the Main Avenue is crossed by the stream which runs across the Gipsies Plain fields (SU 717097).

This evening Barry Collins dropped in to tell me he had seen his first MEADOW BROWN and LARGE SKIPPER on Thorney Island today, and a PAINTED LADY there on Tuesday (June 1) when he had been specially pleased by a visit from a BANDED DEMOISELLE dragonfly

On Portsdown today I had a close view of a LARGE SKIPPER whose fresh colour in flight was the same as that of the Skippers which I saw yesterday, convincing me that they were also Large as expected. The wind was probably responsible for keeping the butterflies out of sight today (the only Common Blue I saw was grasping a grass stem tightly and ignoring the call of the warm sunshine) but I did spot a SMALL BLUE close to the road running by the old DRA east site (around SU 639067) above the newly fenced section with Mother Shipton moth and Speckled Wood not far away, and near the Skew Road bridge over the M27 above Portschester I saw one Grizzled Skipper.

SAT 5 JUNE

While I was exploring the wonderful meadow called Thicket Lawn south west of the lake at Leigh Park Gardens the evening class group were walking the Gipsies Plain about 500 metres to the north both parties saw their first MEADOW BROWN and a couple of members of the evening class are sure they also saw a GATEKEEPER but those like myself who did not see it remain sceptical (***) see entry for June 6) on the grounds that some Meadow Browns show a lot of orange, and looking back over the first dates for Gatekeeper in Hampshire this would be the earliest sighting since 1992 (and in that year the first seen on June 2nd was not followed by a second until June 6th and a third on June 17th) In all years the Gatekeeper is not seen by the majority of observers until July and the extreme first Hampshire dates for 1992 to 1998 are , all in June, 2, 11, 9, 9, 14, 10, 16. In the Thicket Lawn I also saw three orange

SKIPPERS which, while their colour at a distance looked like Small, were almost certainly Large on the grounds that these are normally seen for up to a month before the Small Skippers emerge – unfortunately these were only seen on the wing. Also seen here were one SMALL HEATH, two GRIZZLED SKIPPER and three BURNET COMPANION moths and one example of what may have been a Yellow Shell moth – my note at the time described its wings as looking like yellow sandy shore on which the tide had just gone out leaving multiple ripple marks with the lowest (the current water's edge) having a much stronger wavy line than the others. Both I and the class saw Speckled Wood (I saw one pair coupled in mating) and the class saw half a dozen Common Blue and one Green Veined White.

TUE 1 JUNE

Starting on Blendworth Down and walking up to the Chalton Windmill I counted at least 24 SMALL HEATH in the open grassland near the top, and at the foot of Idsworth Down away to the east I saw my first BROWN ARGUS and (very late) DINGY SKIPPER. Coming back to Blendworth along the road a fresh RED ADMIRAL came over the hedge and landed on a bramble leaf beside a cluster of flowering Honeysuckle as if advertising better butterflies to come in the summer. All three White species were seen together with several Brimstones and there were good numbers of Common Blue and the inevitable Speckled Wood. I saw my first LIBELLULA (a female, presumably *L. depressa*) and my first beautiful fluttering LACEWING. More frustratingly I had close views of two insects which I think must have been Sawflies but which do not quite match anything Chinery has to show – the first one was sitting on a Meadow Buttercup flower and was the length of one petal, with black thorax and pink/yellow abdomen. It may well have been *Arge cyanocrocea* as illustrated by Chinery on page 222 of my Collins Guide though the markings on the translucent wing were much more definite than the vague smudging shown in the book. The other insect was a more active hunter seen on Idsworth Down where it would land on grass then walk down the stems as if seeking prey or an egg laying site, to emerge again quite quickly before flying to another spot. This one had bright green head and thorax with a prominent pattern of black bars (in line with its body) on both but it did not stay still long enough for me to see much – it was probably just under 1cm in overall length.

The dull weather yesterday persuaded Andrew Brookes to search for butterfly eggs and caterpillars rather than flying insects and he found good numbers of Brimstone and Orange-tip larvae in the trees at Cams Bay but still could find no caterpillars of Peacock or Tortoiseshell on the nettles. I have not seen any this spring and have not heard of any being seen by others so there is still a question mark over the emergence of the summer broods of these two species. Mark Litjens did remark on seeing a fresh SMALL TORTOISESHELL last Friday (May 28) which could have been the first of a summer brood, but one butterfly does not make much of a summer. Do you have any news? I think we would all agree that this spring has produced a magnificent showing of Brimstone and Orange-tip and it may be of interest that Orange-tip did not get on my list of butterflies seen yesterday – all good things come to an end sometime, but I would have expected to see both species right through June.

MON 31 MAY

Speaking to Dennis Bohea today I was told that the first LARGE SKIPPER had been seen at the Gosport Wildgrounds last Tuesday (May 25). Dennis also passed on a rumour that someone (not known to him) claims to have seen two rare migrant dragonflies on the west bank of the River Alver on Saturday (May 29) – one was said to be the YELLOW DARTER (*Sympetrum flavoleum*) and the other the RED-VEINED DARTER (*S. fonscolombei*). Both would be much earlier than usual sightings. As either migrant insects are arriving it's worth keeping eyes open for rarities such as these.

It is possible that the variety of colours in which the different railway companies paint their trains is confusing some insects. This thought was put to me by Eric Castle who has just found a dead HORNET on the platform at Warblington station and he thinks it may have met its fate when it saw a bright yellow Connex train and thought it was either a rival or the biggest queen it had ever seen. On a more serious note it makes me wonder when the first of this year's Hornets appear on the scene – I would assume that the only ones flying at this time are Queens which have survived the winter.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 5 JUNE

It was nearly 10am before I arrived at the Thicket Lawn meadow south west of the lake at Leigh Park Gardens this morning, but I must have been on of the first arrivals as two adult ROE does came bounding across the meadow, pausing to give me good views before they made off in different directions – earlier in the morning they must have been by the stream running along the back of the northernmost houses of Leigh Park. Later I was walking off path through Hammond's Lands Coppice on the other side of the lake and thought I had put up a Hare until the small brown animal stopped and I could see it was a ROE

FAWN without a mother in sight. Back on the Thicket Lawn I almost trod on a sizeable GRASS SNAKE in the long damp grass, and at the 'orchid ditch' on the Gipsies Plain another much smaller creature wriggled down the bank and disappeared in the ditch bottom vegetation – it can only have been another younger Grass Snake.

THU 3 JUNE

Continuing the TV focus on the work of Hampshire's 'Wildlife Police' (particularly on PC Geoff Culbertson who until recently was based at Havant as the local wildlife specialist officer but now promoted to Hampshire County Wildlife Policeman) a reporter from the BBC South Today programme joined Geoff on the Portsmouth Harbour based Police Launch and headed for Chichester Harbour where they filmed the group of 6 COMMON SEALS on the Pilsey Sands (where we, thanks to Kevin Stouse and Barry Collins, first reported their presence on April 4). The report gave me two interesting pieces of news – firstly that there are only 12 Common Seals in total along the whole coast of Southern England, these six being the biggest group, and secondly that one of the six has just given birth to a PUP. This is almost certainly the first time any Seal has given birth in the south of England (though I do remember in the early 1980s hearing from a lady whose gardener claimed to know a secret place on Hayling Island where a pup had been born)

MON 31 MAY

John Goodspeed tells me that, despite the death of one ALBINO SQUIRREL in Cosham recently (see May 20) there are at least two still alive in our area. One was in his garden in the last few days and the other was reported from the small copse near Newlease Road between Shaftesbury Avenue and Elizabeth Road in the Stakes area of Waterlooville.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999 **WEEK 21 MAY 24 – 30**

BIRDS:

SUN 30 MAY

Brian Fellows was in the Fishbourne area at 6am to make his second Breeding Bird Survey visit to the SU8404 square where Yellowhammer can still be heard with other common birds. After treading his BBS beat Brian went to have a look at the Fishbourne Channel and found 15 BRENT enjoying the summer there but there was no sign of the expected large flock of Swans (no doubt just out of sight down stream). A few Shelduck and Oystercatcher were present.

SAT 29 MAY

4 SANDERLING were feeding on the sands at Gunner Point this morning, much to the surprise of the Evening Class group there with Brian Fellows. Brian does not comment on the plumage of these birds but I suspect they would not have the bright colour which makes the first returning breeding birds look more like russet summer Turnstone than white winter Sanderling, and I guess the reports of summer coastal movements which he quotes from 'Birds of Hampshire' refer to non-breeding birds that never make it to the Arctic. A very interesting sighting.

Another message today was from John Taylor whose house faces Havant Thicket across the main road to Horndean. A painful knee has kept him from sleep and given him time to compare the calls heard outside his window after midnight with those of LITTLE OWL on the BWP CD-Rom and decide they were the same. He heard two Little Owls calling at 1am on May 25 and one at midnight on May 28. With less traffic on the road he could also hear NIGHTJAR churring and wing-clapping.

FRI 28 MAY

I still remember the excitement of hearing that an OSPREY had settled in the Meon valley at Mislingford (just north of Wickham) for a whole five day working week back in April 1972, and that excitement may be stirring again this year in view of a message from Roy and Carol Munday who at 830 this morning saw from their garden an OSPREY carrying a large fish as it flew west over Woodend (the north end of the West Walk woods) to the River Meon at Mislingford, then turning north up the river. The bird was low enough to see the fish clearly, held in line with the body like a torpedo under one of the old Swordfish biplanes. They suggest that it may have come from the Southwick area (possibly having caught the fish in the lake at HMS Dryad), but I guess that is a guess as that lake is about six kilometres south and four west of Mislingford, and it is equally possible that the fish came from the pools further south on the Meon and that the Osprey had taken a detour over the woods (it's not easy to fly straight when you are struggling to hold on to a large live fish and still shaking the water out of your feathers – and maybe trying to avoid the wrath of the water bailiff at the same time). Wherever it came from it must have been

a magnificent sight and well worth keeping an eye out for along the Meon north from Wickham to Droxford in the next few days.

Overshadowed by the news of the Osprey was a message today from an old friend and IBM colleague who learnt of my website through Brian Fellows advertisement for it on Radio Solent this week. Rod Ward tells me that he too is watching the Kestrel's nest on the IBM office window ledge, and that a webcam may soon be trained on the nest (you won't see the pictures on my site, but I hope to pass on the address if it happens). Rod also tells me that a GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER has been seen on the IBM North Harbour site – we'll see if it stays.

Today's news from Brian Fellows is of a very pleasant walk around the Hollybank woods with plenty of bird song (including Willow Warbler and Goldcrest – in all 16 species were singing) with no startling news items, and his news of yesterday's visit to Peter Pond gives no further clue to the disappearance of the Swans and their cygnets (neither the owner of that pond nor the warden of the adjacent Slipper Mill Pond could add to the story). All I know is that the tragedy (or abduction by aliens?) has not deterred the pond's only Reed Warbler from singing.

I made a quick visit to the South Moors today and found the lone summering BRENT still in the mouth of the Langbrook stream with a male KESTREL hovering overhead. At the Budds Farm pools the Swans were still sitting and the Tufted Duck count was down to 19 with only 9 Shelduck present. I thought I heard a Reed Warbler somewhere around the pools but could not be certain. Offshore I could only see 25 Swans

THU 27 MAY

My comments on the increasing scarcity of CORN BUNTINGS has prompted Mark Litjens to say that he agrees that the decline is still continuing – the only places he has come on them this year are along the eastern foot of Old Winchester Hill and in the Martin Down area where he heard one this year for the first time in the northern section of the reserve. Nearby he thinks they have declined in the Sixpenny Handley area where the Montagu's Harriers once nested.

Tony Gutteridge persuaded me to turn out for an early morning visit to the Warblington CBC plot this morning but failed to provide any unusual bird interest – to make up for this he told me that he had joined the evening walk at East Meon last night and had seen a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER in the village looking as if it were in residence there. He tells me that you might see it if you enter the village on the road from Clanfield and follow it until it turns north towards the church, but instead of turning north you keep straight on west and look at the houses on the north side of the road shortly after the junction. Tony has also heard Grasshopper Warbler at an undisclosed spot in the SU93 square in which he has been asked to search for Nightingales, and commented on a JAY seen passing through his garden this week – surely they are not starting their westward movement in search of food yet?.

WED 26 MAY

Today I cycled to Gunner Point and back without too much bird interest but there was a pair of TUFTED DUCK on Langstone Pond (where I have not seen them for several weeks). At the Oysterbeds I saw five LITTLE TERN flying over and landing on the island in the lagoon where they hopefully have three nests this year. Two RINGED PLOVER standing spaced out on the same island could have indicated two of their nests and a sitting Oystercatcher could have been on a nest. I counted a total of 8 Shelduck around the Oysterbeds with no indication of nesting and there were two more in Stokes Bay where singles of both Grey Heron and Little Egret were waiting for events to stir them into action. Down at Sinah Lake the Swan pair are sitting despite the various attempts by the anglers to discourage them over the years, and although I heard at least one pair of Canada Geese the Swans have apparently driven them from the eastern island. Round on the shore two late female WHEATEAR were perched on the new fence of the golf course. I met Maureen Coleman and Bill Green sitting on the bench overlooking Langstone Harbour where the footpath from West Lane joins the coastal path and watching a flock of COMMON TERN fishing close to the shore and after I had left them they were lucky enough to hear and see one TURTLE DOVE by the stables near Stoke Bay, and Maureen tells me they went on to hear on Nightingale singing strongly at Marlpit Lane at midday.

In the afternoon Brian Fellows went to the Thorney Little Deeps and found the Swan family there had five cygnets safely on the water and he also enjoyed the sight of a HOBBY heading north low overhead, but at Peter Pond the sole remaining Swan was still sitting desolate on the nest island (see May 25)

TUE 25 MAY

John Shillitoe today told me that a pair of KESTRELS are nesting on a window ledge on the original IBM HQ building at North Harbour, and that you can look straight into the nest from the offices and see four

eggs when the bird is not sitting. The eggs should hatch in about a fortnight and I hope viewing their progress continues to be good. John has also been on a round of West Walk sites in the last few days and has found four churring NIGHTJAR – one in the main Hundred Acres carpark area and one in the clearing opposite it (across the road?), the other two being at Lodge Hill and the Liberty Road clearing. The Lodge Hill area continues to be the most rewarding – the Nightjar there has been heard churring several times in the middle of the day, and Tree Pipit, Garden Warbler and Whitethroat can all be heard singing here and on Sunday John was surprised to find a Wheatear here – presumably just passing. CORN BUNTINGS continue to decline and I have not heard one myself anywhere though I believe there are still some on Thorney Island and maybe on the West Stoke/Lavant area south of Kingley Vale. John Shillitoe asks if there are still any one Portsdown west and I think the answer is no. He says there are still a few in the fields east of Soberton (this would probably include the bird at Hoe Cross, west of Hambleton, heard by Theo Roberts earlier this year when he came on the wintering Quail) and John has found at least three in fields SW of Chidden (north of Hambleton). Does anyone know of other birds remaining in our area?

While neither slings nor arrows were found at the scene Brian Fellows today came on a bad case of ‘outrageous fortune’ at Emsworth Peter Pond. Last year the Swan pair which had nested here for years suffered tragedy when one was killed in a road accident with a vehicle on the busy road which runs within feet of their nest (and over which is their only clear take off line if they get airborne). I am told that the remaining bird of that pair was also injured in a fight of some sort and the birds nesting this year are a new pair which had some difficulty in settling down but had only just yesterday hatched their first two cygnets, and today Brian found just one Swan (he thinks the Pen) alone and desolate at the nest site. While a Fox might easily have taken the cygnets it is unlikely to have taken the male Swan so we await further news. Hardly making up for this loss the Coot pair nesting on the same pond had today hatched their young.

Brian Fellows went on to tour the Portsmouth bird sites this morning, finding just nine Swans left at the Southsea Canoe Lake. At Baffins Pond two families of young BARNACLE GEESE and two of Canada Geese were to be seen as well as a young Little Grebe (he had seen a Little Grebe chick here before on Apr 27 this year). The Swan pair at Baffins have produced no young so far but the pair at Milton Lakes have hatched just three cygnets in contrast to last year’s record brood of nine. 8 Sedge Warbler and 5 Reed Warbler were found around the lakes as well as the 2 CETTI’S WARBLERS that are now regular here – having heard them Brian went quickly to the Great Salterns lake where he found two more Cetti’s that seem certain to be different from those at Milton.

At dusk Brian checked out the local Nightingale sites and found one singing very strongly at Ractonpark Wood and one still singing at Marlpit Lane, but none elsewhere. Last night he had taken the evening class members to Havant Thicket to listen for Nightjar and heard just one but found no roding Woodcock. While assisting with a Wildlife Trust display in the Havant Meridian Centre today I was told by a local birder that there were now at least two NIGHTJAR churring in Stansted Forest and another two in Havant Thicket, and walking home in the afternoon sunshine I saw a HOBBY fly low over my house to make a welcome addition to this year’s garden list (and it was not carrying one of our local House Martins).

Last Sunday (May 23) Christoph Harwood asked if I could suggest an identity for a mystery bird he saw briefly while fishing on the River Kennet near Hungerford that day. He told me “It was a wader which flew with its legs hanging down and had prominent white wing markings running down its wings. Robin (a friend fishing with him) felt it was some type of heron and on my return I have searched the bird books. Could it be a LITTLE BITTERN? It fits the description to some extent.” Not much to go on and Little Bittern are not common so I suggested a few more likely birds such as Redshank and Common Sandpiper, but Christoph came back with more info that made the Little Bittern idea more credible, saying “1. It was larger than a Moorhen 2. I don't think it was a redshank as the white was in the centre of the wings not trailing edge. 3. No noise when it flew, but it went straight into the bushes”. So, good people, have there been any reports of Little Bittern on Birdline or other rumours? And can anyone come up with another suggestion to fit the description?

MON 24 MAY

The Emsworth Peter Pond SWANS HAVE HATCHED THEIR BROOD is today’s news from Brian Fellows – he glimpsed two newly hatched cygnets beside the mother who remained on the nest making it impossible to see if there were more young. Sensing the special occasion the male bird was on the islands close to mum and chicks ready to defend them from all comers. The late arriving Reed Warbler at this pond was still singing to the baby swans, no doubt permanently prejudicing their musical taste (a good thing they are not very vocal birds). The Coots on this pond, who they had to rebuild their nest high enough to be above the high tides which overtop this pond and flood Lumley Road, have not hatched their

young yet, but on the Slipper Mill Pond there are still eight young Coots in three families with a pair of hungry Herring Gulls waiting for any opportunity to have them for dinner. (I have been surprised that Brian has not often mentioned these brutal scavengers as they have been present on Raft 1 (nearest the north end) in very smart breeding plumage for a couple of months on most of my visits and I had the impression they might well nest there.) The Black Swan is still on the Mill Pond with 47 Mute Swans and 25 Mallard for today's count.

Brian made a brief sortie for half an hour late this afternoon down the bridle path from Ractonpark Wood south towards Woodmancote but heard nothing of the Nightingales heard from that path by Kevin Stouse's walk party last Wednesday at dusk. Soon the Nightingales will stop singing (end of May) so please keep your ears open for any new locations to be recorded in this year's national survey of their distribution and status.

PLANTS:

SAT 29 MAY

7,800 plants of LITTLE ROBIN were counted on the shingle south of Hayling Golf Course this morning by keen eyed and methodical members of the Evening Class making their third annual survey of the Gunner Point beach flora. In round figures there were some 6,000 of these plants found in 1997, dropping to nearer 4,000 in 1998 and rising to nearly 8,000 this year. The variation in figures over such a short period is much more a factor of the weather than indicative of a long term trend, though the apparent total absence of Nottingham Catchfly plants in that area this year may be much more significant as no plants produce no offspring. One other plant which the group did not comment on, but which has impressed me as by its rapid and continued growth over the past five years or so, is the ROSE CAMPION (*Lychnis coronaria*) which is now to be found in significant numbers over the whole Gunner Point area (not yet flowering). It is classed by the Flora of Hampshire as a rare garden escape which was established at Gunner Point in 1985 and has spread ever since.

SEA BINDWEED and REST HARROW both showed their first flowers at Gunner Point this morning, while in a Havant carpark later in the day I saw flowers on both CREEPING THISTLE and BRISTLY OXTONGUE.

FRI 28 MAY

A quick walk around the 'orchid meadow' part of the Langstone South Moors showed me that there were well over 300 SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHIDS already in flower, giving good hopes for at least ten times that number to appear eventually. I am not sure who is responsible for thinking out the grazing regime for this meadow – I suspect the credit must go to the farmer George Hedley and his son Colin (who owns the cattle concerned and happens to be the Farming and Wildlife Adviser for Sussex) – but the number of cattle (I think 32 young beasts) together with their freedom for most of the time roam the whole South Moors areas coupled to fencing which can at other times control which of three major subdivisions of the moors they can access, seems to have got the intensity of grazing, trampling and manuring just about right for the orchid meadow and its 'crop'. Before reaching the orchids I had another look at the SLENDER THISTLES growing where the IBM Clubhouse used to stand – they are far more numerous than I imagined, and some of them are huge as individuals of this species, so they make a sight well worth the eyes of any passing botanist (I'm pretty sure it is a one year wonder). Among them just one or two SPEAR THISTLES had their very first flowers open.

THU 27 MAY

GLAUX MARITIMA, the SEA MILKWORT, is a very pretty plant which many people overlook as it nestles low in the damp grass of seaside meadows. I found it in flower for the first time at Warblington marsh this morning and it is well worth looking out for in similar locations. Less exciting was my first WATER FIGWORT also flowering at Warblington by the eastern stream – other than its strongly four winged stem and predilection for water there is little to pick it out from the Common Figwort that turns up everywhere. Much more disheartening was my failure to see more than one single Southern Marsh Orchid on the whole of the Warblington Castle Farm – I can remember finding up to a thousand in the main marsh and a good hundred by the eastern stream but lack of appropriate management (to my eyes lack of sufficient grazing – possibly well intentioned to prevent the cattle damaging the orchids) has allowed other vegetation to grow so tall and lush in both sites that there is no room for an orchid to see

sun or moon. No doubt they would return if given more light and air, but in the main marsh there is also a threat from spreading alder carr.

WED 26 MAY

SILYBUM MARIANUM, the Milk Thistle which grows in profusion at the Hayling Oysterbeds and which I also found at the Bedenham Naval Munitions Depot near Gosport on Sunday, is now starting to flower at the Oysterbeds site, and as I crossed the bridge to Hayling the first thing to greet me on the island was a patch of BLACK KNAPWEED in full flower. At West Town Station I saw my first fully flowering FOXGLOVE spire and reaching the Ferry Road at the end of St Catherine's Road I met a grand display of VIPER'S BUGLOSS in full flower. On the Golf Course seen from the Kench the LUPINS were at their magnificent best as was the Sea Kale on the shingle where the first YELLOW HORNED POPPIES and ENGLISH STONECROP were in flower. The beautiful blue of Sheep's Bit was much in evidence and the CHILDRING PINK flowers were in excellent condition - I reckoned that there were some 70 plants of which nearly 50 had flowers open. The HOLM OAKS on the shore had their tassel like flowers out and the gorse north of the gravel pit had its first patch of parasitic DODDER showing (not yet in flower)

TUE 25 MAY

Rosemary Webb rang me today with the news that the BEE/FLY ORCHID HYBRID is flowering again at the Fairmile Bottom site in Sussex and in the course of a general conversation about orchids she told me that she thought this was a good year for FLY ORCHIDS of which she had seen an excellent show at the Burghlere Lime Pits recently, and that I should find plenty of WHITE HELLEBORINE still surviving in Head Down Plantation (where I could see very few in one site last week) if I search near the railway line where I should find some of an unusual variety that have no yellow lip and should also find Fly orchids. John Goodspeed told me that he had been back to the copse abutting on the Golf Course on Portsdown and had found ten FLY ORCHIDS in flower

INSECTS:

SAT 29 MAY

The first PAINTED LADY of this summer to come to my attention was seen by the evening class members on the Hayling shore at Gunner Point this morning. The group also saw another beauty which was certainly a TIGER MOTH but I have two reports of its identity - one saying it was a CREAM SPOT TIGER (which should now be on the wing and which might turn up anywhere) the other insisting that the colour of the hindwings and pattern on the fore-wings combined to make it a SCARLET TIGER (though I see that this moth is rarer, normally prefers damp areas, and does not normally appear on the wing until the end of June). I wonder if any moth experts are prepared to comment? A less controversial moth was a MOTHER SHIPTON with the Yorkshire witch's face clearly stamped on the forewing.

Mark Litjens avoided the thunderstorms and had a "a splendid butterfly day. We started early at Bentley Wood Cowley's copse and saw 7 SMALL PEARL-BORDERED Fritillary, 9 MARSH Fritillary, 1 Grizzled Skipper and only 2 aged PEARL-BORDERED Fritillary. Looks as though the PBFs are at the end of their season. After this we visited Martin Down where we recorded a further 16 species. SMALL BLUE were out in number, we recorded some 45. Smaller numbers of ADONIS Blue and Common Blue were also recorded along with good numbers of Brimstone, Brown Argus, Small Heath, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, Speckled Wood. Other butterflies recorded were RED ADMIRAL (my first this year), Large White, Peacock, Small White, Small Copper." During the day I was speaking to another butterfly enthusiast who had also just seen a Red Admiral in Havant, which with the Painted Lady and many Large and Small Whites does seem to show the continental insects are arriving. Two butterflies that seem to be missing are the LARGE SKIPPER and MEADOW BROWN - has anyone seen them or must we put out a search party?

FRI 28 MAY

Mark Litjens drove down to Hordle Cliffs this afternoon and despite the fresh wind saw 7 GLANVILLE FRITILLARIES in this new mainland stronghold of the species. With 4 Common Blue and 1 Dingy Skipper he also notes a 'Fresh SMALL TORTOISESHELL' which I hope means that the spring Tortoiseshells have managed to produce one offspring with more to come. Returning to his home area of Whiteley Pastures near Fareham Mark found the abundance of damselflies which others have observed this year - he saw at least 100 of the AZURE DAMSELFLIES and slightly smaller numbers of LARGE RED and BLUE TAILED DAMSELS plus 4 BEAUTIFUL DEMOISELLE. Even better in my book was the sight of a GOLD RINGED DRAGONFLY - scarce at the best of times and not normally out until the second week of June. A Broad-bodied chaser was a much more expected sight.

THU 27 MAY

Today Mark Litjens was at the Yew Hill butterfly reserve near Winchester and saw more than 30 SMALL WHITE (admittedly over a cabbage field near the reserve) which, with my own recently increased sightings of this species, makes me wonder if we have just had the start of an invasion of white butterflies from the continent – all comments welcome. There also seems to be an increase in Large Whites. Brimstone, Peacock, Speckled Wood and Common Blue were on Mark's list with one female Orange Tip – possibly these are at last diminishing in frequency after a great spring season.

Another butterfly that is being reported more frequently in the last week or so is RED ADMIRAL, possibly coming in with the Whites, and this morning Brian Fellows had one in his garden with the first Speckled Wood to have found its way there.

WED 26 MAY

At Gunner Point on Hayling this morning I saw my first three SMALL HEATH and a similar number of Common Blue with a few Green Veined White elsewhere on Hayling. Maureen Coleman told me that she had recently seen WALL BROWN on the shore of Mill Rythe (around SU 728008) so there may be a small colony there which other people do not know of. Mark Litjens spent his lunch break at the Yew Hill butterfly reserve where 13 Small White and 4 Large White possibly indicate the start of a summer influx. He also saw 4 Common Blue and 3 each of Brimstone, Speckled Wood and Green Veined White.

TUE 25 MAY

With his notes of birds seen in The Holt at Rowlands Castle for the HOS survey of those woods Jim Berry always gives me news of other wildlife he encounters, but a note on his account of today's visit which reads "White fly with very weak flight. Unidentified – any suggestions?" at first made me suggest a call to Radio Solent's Topsoil Team for advice on White Fly and Black Fly but on second thoughts I suspect that what he saw was a WHITE PLUME MOTH as this is the time of year for them to appear. I have not been able to contact Jim but whether I am right or not it is worth keeping an eye open for these strange moths.

MON 24 MAY

An unusual source of information about the emergence of STAG BEETLES today was the lady behind the bread counter at Waitrose who told me, as a bonus with the bread, that she had seen one on Hayling within the last few days. Last year I had just 12 records of Stag Beetles, the earliest being on May 29 and the last on July 2, so this is the right time to expect the summer emergence. Unlike some creatures whose biological clocks cause them all to do the same thing on the same day, Stag Beetles are erratic in the time of their emergence and this year the first (a female) was in our garden on Apr 3 and 4, but I have not seen or heard of any since until today.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

TUE 25 MAY

Jim Berry was in The Holt wood near Rowlands Castle last Thursday (May 20) and suddenly found he was looking at a ROE DOE with its tiny fawn from only 8 yards range without the deer being aware of his presence – but not for long. He was in the wood again today and saw a less welcome newcomer to this world – a baby GREY SQUIRREL, and also today a call from Rosemary Webb on Hayling Island included a mention of a lactating mother Squirrel in her garden

MON 24 MAY

There are no doubt many ROE DOES dropping their FAWNS at this time but the first direct evidence of this to reach me comes from someone living in Emsworth whose garden abuts both a wood and a meadow. Over the week-end a Roe could be seen clearly in the corner of the field with a very young fawn at its feet.

Another piece of random information reaching me today cast a new light on the dying King's last words "B***** BOGNOR". If we are polite and turn the B word into 'Bloody' it may well be that the king was predicting the event I heard of today, namely "Cat brings dead DORMOUSE into Bognor house". If you share the opinion that Dormice are very rare and only found in woodland with overhead walkways between the trees, plenty of Hazel, and little nocturnal disturbance then you may be way out. On March 4th I wrote in this page "In the issue of BRITISH WILDLIFE which arrived today (March 4) there is a most interesting article by Sue and Roy Eden who have been studying DORMICE in Dorset and conclude that these creatures are not nearly as dependent on woodland and Hazel as we are accustomed to think. They have found Dormice in coastal scrub and along the hedgerows lining old railtracks far from true woodland and they say "Our survey work has shown that Dormice can manage on diets that do not include nuts and can manage in areas where there are few trees. Bramble may be the key species in many

areas as it has such a long flowering and fruiting season." Today's news seems to bear this out. On May 1 I wrote of concern for 'mangy foxes' and advised the person concerned to contact Pete West at Fareham for advice, and his advice to those who feed foxes and see them in poor condition to add a little sulphur to the food. Unfortunately Pete has now left the area and we have no regular local source of advice on Fox problems (if you have copied Pete's phone number from my Wildlife Rescue contacts section in the Wildlife Organisations page please delete it) but I guess any pet shop would be able to supply a similar sulphur medicament for use with dogs.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999 WEEK 20 MAY 17 - 23

BIRDS:

SUN 23 MAY

Kevin Stouse led a walk around Cobnor today and was relieved to have only 13 people with him after the 44 on Wednesday evening. Not much in the way of birds seen - 20+ Shelduck which were probably non-breeders and a pair of GREY PARTRIDGE (always a nice sight, but I remember tracking down their calls to a cage beside Cobner Farm on one walk around this route a good few years ago). The more interesting news came in the form of second hand reports - one from a sailor they met on the way round who said that he had seen 2 immature EIDER off Pilsey yesterday, and one from the Hilary (female) who lives in Portsmouth and is a regular on our walks (when not sailing her Laser in the Great Britain 'Grannies Team' as she puts it). Hilary says that she has been watching SAND MARTINS over Milton Common and has seen them entering tunnels in a sand bank (where on earth is there such a bank at Milton?). More of this anon I think.

While at the Naval Munitions depot at Bedenham (Gosport) this morning (see plant and insect pages for the most exciting finds) I not only came close to the huge Heronry where the Little Egrets are nesting but also heard from Ian Calderwood that a WOODCHAT SHRIKE has turned up at Thursley this week end - I have no more detail but I'm sure you can get it all from the phone lines. Other than several Herons flying over, and one Egret seen fishing in Frater Lake, plus some of the Rooks from the site Rookery and a nice small flock of Linnet the only bird interest of the visit was to see a pair of Swans fly into their largest pond as if surveying it as a potential nest site for some future year.. Despite 500 acres of relatively undisturbed land, much of it grass, not a single Skylark was heard, though we did hear the rattle of Lesser Whitethroat and the ramblings of a remarkably tuneful Reed Bunting. We also saw a Kestrel making its final descent onto prey and did not see it take off (hopefully it stayed to eat).

Mark Litjens tells me that the KENTISH PLOVER is still at Titchfield Haven today and has been making flights to the beach where it can be seen for free - with the increased emphasis on making the reserve pay for its upkeep I wonder if we will see strings attached to the bird to ensure the punters have to pay their admission .

Brian Fellows took a walk through Stansted Forest west this afternoon to enjoy more of the wealth of bird song to be heard in our woods, in contrast to the almost silent woods of the area which he has been visiting in Canada. Blackcap and Chiffchaff were abundant but Garden Warbler eluded him. His best news was of HOUSE MARTINS which he saw distantly around Stansted House, some entering nests. Brian saw around 15 birds but closer inspection is called for to get an accurate status report.

SAT 22 MAY

The Evening Class took their morning walk from Emsworth to Westbourne and back along the banks of the River Ems. At Lumley Mill three GREY WAGTAIL provided colour (was one a juvenile?) and Stock Dove provided soothing song, at nearby Lumley Farm a Swallow chattered its song from a high wire, and near Westbourne a pair of LESSER WHITETHROAT were seen. Altogether they logged 31 bird species with Blackcap being the prominent songsters and they saw juveniles of both Chaffinch and Blue Tit. This report from Brian Fellows indicates his pleasure in being back from Canada to a homeland rich with birds and other wildlife (and not a lumberjack in sight). Last night Brian resumed his Nightingale survey with a visit to the Stansted Park Slip site - last year there were definitely four birds singing there (and John Gowen has once recorded 4 there this spring) but Brian could only be sure of three on this visit - plus a ten minute close view of foraging Badger. The Nightingales were about halfway from Park Lane to the wooden gate at SU 770100. (When at the Naval Munitions site on Sunday 23rd I was told that a Nightingale had been singing there for two or three weeks but has now gone silent which reminds me that they will all be going quiet very soon at the end of May.)

One other message this evening is from Mike Collins who called at the restaurant on the Burrfields Road in

Portsmouth this evening and heard a CETTI'S WARBLER singing from the Great Salterns reeds – he asks if this is a different bird to the two which have been heard regularly at the Milton Lakes this spring and I cannot answer positively but would guess that it is.

FRI 21 MAY

Ian Calderwood tells me that he was at Titchfield Haven today and saw not only one ROSEATE TERN but also a KENTISH PLOVER. His son saw another unusual visitor to the Haven last Wednesday – that was an OSPREY. Barry Collins saw his Pilsey Sands Osprey this morning and also told me that his mid-month roost count of LITTLE EGRETS was down to just one bird (though he has seen up to four on Thorney during recent days). It sounds as if the pairs which seem to be based at Stoke Bay on Hayling and the Langstone South Moors may have other better places to go at night rather than returning to Thorney, and I wonder where the three which I saw south of Warblington last Monday are based.

Brian Fellows has made it back from Canada and has resumed sending me his news for which I am grateful. He says that the Swan nest on Emsworth Peter Pond still has unhatched eggs and I hear from Barry Collins that the two nests on Thorney (Little Deeps and by the main road guard post) are still sitting as was the Bedhampton Mill Pool bird when I passed it this afternoon. At Peter Pond a Reed Warbler is back in the reeds and the Coot is still sitting but on the Slipper Pond all three Coot families have hatched. At the Town Mill Pond the Black Swan remains but the Mute Swans come and go – on Wednesday there were 49 of them but by Friday there were only 37 to be seen. Brian has also been re-checking the Nightingale sites and confirms that there now seems to be just one bird singing at Marlpit Lane – he did not detect the two at the new site (SU 776080) where Kevin Stouse's party heard two on Wednesday night but did have three in Ractonpark Wood where previously only two have been heard, and Brian is probably checking out the Stansted Park Slip site as I write this on Friday evening. While in Canada Brian added 43 bird species to his life list, and he also comments on the IBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF, saying that he has heard these birds in Spain and that they neither Chiff nor Chaff but have 'a proper song' – which reminds me that none of the books seem to mention the 'telephone ringing' (Brr brr) which our normal Chiffchaffs intersperse between their Chiffs and Chaffs.

THU 20 MAY

Barry Collins tells me that an OSPREY has been in Chichester Harbour since last Monday (May 17) and can be seen sitting on the mud off Pilsey Sands when the tide is low – at high tide it moves around the harbour and may have ventured into Langstone Harbour where there is a rumour of one being seen this week.

Alistair Martin tells me that he was at Sandy Point at high tide yesterday afternoon and saw some good birds over the sea. The first two were GANNET and FULMAR, and the other two were even better – one was Alistair's first POMARINE SKUA for this year and the other was a RAZORBILL apparently fishing in the area and making figure of eight pattern flights as it hunted for fish. I wonder if this means that Razorbill have returned to nest on the Isle of Wight?

Last night's walk around the Racton/Hambrook area attracted 44 people but Kevin Stouse tells me they all went home happy after hearing 5 NIGHTINGALES and seeing a NIGHTJAR. The Nightjar rose from the rough ground to the east of Marlpit Lane where they could only hear one Nightingale. Two more were singing in Ractonpark Wood and two were in a new site close to the bridle way leading south from Ractonpark Wood to Woodmancote (almost 1 km west of Marlpit Lane)

WED 19 MAY

Today Kevin Stouse was at Pagham Harbour where he found one AVOCET and one COMMON SANDPIPER at the Ferry Pool with TURTLE DOVE purring nearby. In the harbour he was surprised to see 9 KNOT (2 in summer red) and in Church Norton churchyard there was a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER. There were at least seven singing Reed Warbler around the Severals pool (each clinging to dead reed stems in full view to aid identification) and three Tufted Duck on the pool. Kevin only saw four Great Crested Grebe but only one Whimbrel and just one pair of Sandwich Terns and he asks if any Little Tern still nest on the shingle with the Ringed Plovers. Having sent this message and perhaps had a cup of tea Kevin is off to lead this evenings Nightingale walk at Ractonpark Wood of which he will tell us later.

This morning I climbed Chalton Down from the road near the rail bridge east of Chalton and found a REED WARBLER churring away in a thicket on the dry downland. GARDEN WARBLER was also singing there, but no Turtle Dove was heard (there has been a pair here in all the previous years I can remember). Going on to Head Down plantation above Buriton I heard a loud song from trees above my head and saw what I am sure was a WILLOW TIT by the extent of white going back along its cheeks and neck, and by the very large and diffuse bib. Although it was close I could not spot a pale patch on the wing, but on the other hand I heard no note suggesting Marsh Tit. The song was unlike the high, fast "Chip, chip, chip" of

Marsh Tit being slower, lower and more melodious but the rendering which I wrote down at the time (“yep, yup, yup, yup”) is probable misleading as written. The location was SU 736192 where the broad track coming up from the road meets the official footpath which leaves the road a little further west at a stile near the chalk pit entrance.

In the afternoon I went via Bedhampton to Broadmarsh and back along the South Moors. At the Bedhampton Water Works I could see no sign of recent use of the Hermitage Stream Kingfisher nest tunnel, and found the Bedhampton Mill Pool Swan still sitting. At the mouth of the stream there were only 24 Swans but there were at least 22 SHELDUCK on the Budds Farm pools (and another two on the moors Tamarisk Pool). Along the South Moors shore a COMMON SANDPIPER called and flew off over the sea as 16 WHIMBREL flew high east from Farlington Marshes. The lone Brent and the Langstone Swan family were at the mouth of the Langbrook. Earlier in my trip I met Garry Stevens who had been to Farlington Marshes and told me he had seen a SNIPE near the Deeps (Do they ever breed on the Marshes?)

TUE 18 MAY

An email this evening from Chris Wyeth adds to the story of the ‘SPANISH CHIFFCHAFF’. Chris says “with regards to the Iberian ChiffChaff, it was still in residence next to the Naval Cemetery on Portland. Unfortunately there was a megatwitch under way at the weekend with much disturbance and damage to the area.” If it was true that one was reported at Titchfield Haven and the news of it suppressed then I support the suppression if it helps to control this form of hooliganism. What about starting a campaign to release rare birds at football matches (like the doves that are sometimes released to start Olympic games) – it would be interesting to see the football thugs confronting the birders, and ever so good for business in the optical replacement trade ... maybe the London Camera Exchange will sponsor the campaign.

John Goodspeed went round Farlington Marshes this afternoon and tells me ... “there were 9 whimbrel - the total shown on the board for the harbour was more than that 40 I think I recall. I saw a female WHINCHAT, a HOBBY fly over the point field, and a BLACK NECKED GREBE on Chalkdock. I gathered from Bob that YELLOW WAGTAILS are not looking too good with a shortage of females but that there is one BLUE-HEADED holding territory south of the scrape i.e. virtually out of sight. Lapwing hatching has not been good but those that have hatched are doing well.”

John Gowen made a dutiful tour of The Holt to record the birds today and his meagre reward (not counting many Wrens, Robins and the like) was to have a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming and to hear Nuthatch (which never seem to cross the road into Havant Thicket). Blackcap was singing and a male Roebuck was seen.

MON 17 MAY

This morning Tony Gutteridge and I made a further visit to the Warblington CBC plot where we found noisy STARLINGS everywhere with their young just out of the nest and Tony not only found a Great Spotted Woodpecker now taking food to the nest (in Havant Thicket yesterday one family were making the usual din from their hole) but had the first sighting of LITTLE OWL for the season. To balance out this good news neither of us heard or saw a single YELLOWHAMMER – can it be that even this bird has become ‘extinct’ on the farmland? Offshore three Egrets were fishing at low tide and in the afternoon I saw another flying inland over the South Moors – maybe to do a spot of fishing on the Langbrook stream to avoid the strong wind on the shore but equally possibly heading towards some unknown nest site. There were just two Shelduck on the Warblington shore.

At the South Moors in the afternoon I found the Langstone Swan pair in the Langbrook stream with their seven cygnets and at the mouth of the stream there was a single BRENT. There were about 150 Oystercatcher along the South Moors shore but these were effectively the only waders (just one Curlew seen with them). At the Budds Farm pools the Swan was still sitting and two Canada Geese were present with no young. 34 Tufted Duck is a strong contingent for this time of year but 12 Shelduck was even more surprising (and there was another pair on the South Moors Tamarisk pool).

John Shillitoe, an old birding and IBM acquaintance of mine, has just discovered my website and sends me news of birds in his patch at West Walk. He tells me that at the Lodge Hill site (see May 11 for its location) there are this year, as well as the Nightjars, two or three TREE PIPITS and a pair of WOODLARK. Here John has also seen a good selection of raptors including two Hobbies and a vagrant Red Kite as well as Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard.

With Brian Fellows still away in Canada for another week we have been lacking news of the Emsworth Ponds but a message received from Chris Fairhead this evening tells me that .. “Down in the Slipper Mill Pond on Saturday there were two broods of Coot chicks. One was more advanced and numbered only three. The other brood consisted of seven very small chicks. With their bald heads and golden ruffs they looked a bit like tiny vultures.” I see that Coots lay up to 9 (exceptionally 10) eggs, but they are not my

favourite birds and I think vultures is almost right except that vultures are timid where Coot are excessively aggressive to each other and to all other waterfowl smaller than Swans. At the IBM Lake on Saturday I must admit to feeling some pleasure at seeing one dead in the water (but also puzzlement as it looked fit and well and there was no sign of injury that I could see – it just seemed to have keeled over to imitate the traditional dead parrot)

PLANTS:

SUN 23 MAY

Thanks to an invitation from Ian Calderwood and the Frater Conservation Group I was able to join their morning tour of the Naval Munitions depot at the Bedenham Frater site on the shore of Portsmouth Harbour this morning. First stop on the tour was at a lovely flower rich patch of grassland surrounded by yellow stakes to deter the grass mowers, and here we saw the first of at least four main patches of GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS (now going over). There must be at least 2000 of these orchids on the site and we found two pure albinos side by side as well as the common rose pink variant colour. Common Spotted Orchids were starting to open in good numbers and we saw a few Bee Orchids in bud, but the best orchid find was of a small colony of Southern Marsh that the Conservation Group had not previously got on their list – among these was one with ‘spotted leaves’ that I would have called ‘pardalina’ but I see that now we have to follow Stace and call it ‘var Junialis’. Possibly my best personal find was of a bank of EARLY FORGET-ME-NOT (*M. ramossissima*) with its tiny flowers all blue and its flower pedicels all very short – to me these plants had a more erect stance with their topmost flowers facing straight up to heaven whereas the much commoner Changing Forget-me-not (*M. discolor*) – which was also present on the site never quite seems to uncurl so that its flowers are pointing sideways or downwards. On one dry bank BORAGE was flowering (almost over, like the plant at the Oysterbeds) but further down the slope VIPERS BUGLOSS was already in flower. Around these was a mass of COTTON THISTLE with its pale green, white veined, crinkly leaves and fierce ‘crown of thorns’ at the base of the involucre of flowers – the plants of this sort which I found at Black Point on Hayling were listed by me as *Onopordum acanthium*, but I see that Stace has two species and that the garden escape (which these probably are) is *O. nervosum*, and that I should have checked for the strongly raised white veins under the leaves, and the lack of hairiness on the upper leaves which together distinguish this species which Stace calls RETICULATE THISTLE. My first MARSH THISTLES of the year were flowering here, both purple and white flowered forms, and I also ticked first flowers on STINKING IRIS, WELD and CREEPING CINQUEFOIL. One piece of botanic amusement came from the sowing of a long broad strip of land (which had been a site railway) with a grass mixture designed to encourage Brent Geese – along this strip could be seen a cross section of arable crops and garden flowers such as Wheat, Barley, Peas (these plants had the pretty mauve flowers and none of the basic white ones) and Rape plus a full house of garden Poppies (Opium, Oriental and Californian) plus a few of the delightful VIOLA TRICOLOR. Three other plants not in flower deserve a mention – Musk Mallow was well advanced, Dyer’s Greenweed was abundant in places, and on the edge of a harbour creek in a much wetter situation than normal was a medium tall, bright green plant that I could not recognise at first but its situation and leaf tips (having ‘shoulders’ either side of the tip of the otherwise almost linear leaves that were held up and almost pressed to the stem) could only have belonged to over watered GOLDEN SAMPHIRE.

On my way to Gosport this morning I stopped off on Portsdown where Skew Road overlooks the M27 and found at least 50 plants of FIELD COW-WHEAT holding up their glorious purple plumes – I am told these plants are a dastardly introduction by that fiend, the Portchester Postman, but they look none the less beautiful for that and seem to be flourishing where he planted them. On the other side of the Y junction above the road bridge over the motorway I stopped where Nelson Lane turns back onto its pre-motorway track, and on the south facing bank above Nelson Lane I could see the plants of STRAW FOXGLOVE (*Digitalis lutea*) but I guess it will be a good week before they open their small yellow flowers. Coming back from Gosport I stopped in the Fort Nelson carpark where the Common Spotted orchids are just starting to flower among a great mass of Yellow Rattle. There is a good show of Chalk Milkwort here and I noticed my first flowering ROUGH HAWKBIT plant.

SAT 22 MAY

The Hampshire Wildlife Trust Flora Group sensibly conduct their AGM during the lunch break of one of their field trips and they did so today on the Wiltshire border at Rushmore and Conholt Downs (a privately owned SSSI). No doubt there were other good things seen but the one of which news has reached me was the first flowering of GREATER BUTTERFLY ORCHID.

FRI 21 MAY

This morning I cycled up Portsdown and found the climb well worth the effort. I did not stop on the way up

but noted the Narrow Leaved Pepperwort was about to flower in one of its regular sites on bare patches of chalk by the southern side of Portsdown Hill Road opposite Fort Purbrook. Coming to the bridge over the old A3 road I did stop to admire the wonderful patch of downland turf that is marked with posts to keep the regular grass mowers off it, and here I found TOTTER GRASS (*Briza minor*) shivering in the wind above the WILD THYME and KIDNEY VETCH which, with HOARY PLANTAIN and the Totter Grass, were all first flowerings for me. I saw another 18 species of downland plant here with FAIRY FLAX dominant among them, and I happened on a single Bee Orchid spike with flower buds already swelling on its stem. Going on past Fort Widley I went onto the southern slope of the hill opposite the end of Mill Lane, and here I spotted my first flowers on COMMON GROMWELL and BLADDER CAMPION (plus my first summer flowering of WILD PARSNIP, though that was seen in flower at Milton Common by the Evening Class group on Apr 17). There was also of course a mass of Wild Mignonette which I first noticed flowering last Saturday and up to 100 flowering plants of HAIRY ROCK CRESS (*Arabis hirsuta*) which I had found for the first time near Buriton last Wednesday. Also here some Horseshoe Vetch was flowering. On the way home I called in at Fort Purbrook and saw the flowering COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS which John Goodspeed found starting to flower last Saturday (May 15) – he found around 50 and today, less than a week later, I counted 157 (including spikes with buds not yet open). With them a single PYRAMIDAL ORCHID with its lowest flowers open, and three of the large yellow/brown KNAPWEED BROOMRAPE (*Orobanche elatior*) spikes, one of which was flowering.

In the afternoon I walked through Old Bedhampton to Broadmarsh and back, finding more first flowerings: PURPLE TOADFLAX, HEDGE WOUNDWORT and PELLITORY OF THE WALL around Bidbury Mead, and at the Broadmarsh playing fields (where work to add topsoil is underway) CUT-LEAVED CRANESBILL and CORKY-FRUITED WATER DROPWORT were in flower.

THU 20 MAY

The first two SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHIDS were flowering on the Langstone South Moors when John Goodspeed was there yesterday and Radio Solent today reported a ‘new colony of EARLY SPIDER ORCHIDS in a field near Durlleston Country Park’

WED 19 MAY

This morning’s visit to Chalton Down added FAIRY FLAX, HORSESHOE VETCH, EYEBRIGHT and MUSK THISTLE to my list of first flowerings and I also found my first plants of DEADLY NIGHTSHADE there though not yet flowering. I went on to Head Down plantation above Buriton to look for WHITE HELLEBORINE (in the past they have flowered here in hundreds) but today I could only find 16 plants, none with more than a hint of flower buds. No doubt there will be a few more to come but it seems that we will have to wait for tree felling to let in more light before we get back to the good old days. On the edge of the chalk pit here some 15 Early Purple Orchids were flowering, and I found one first flowering HAIRY ROCK-CRESS (*Arabis hirsuta*). In the afternoon I cycled round Broadmarsh and the South Moors finding the first flower on HEMLOCK (now standing six feet tall) by the Hermitage Stream and on KNOTTED HEDGE PARSLEY at the South Moors. On the same round I found the roadside COCKSPUR GRASS had been close mown leaving only one or two plants with flower panicles (but I am sure nature will soon rectify the situation as with other grasses), and going down South Moor Lane I found a big surprise when passing what used to be the entrance into the IBM Clubhouse (now with a metal bar and a deep ditch to prevent vehicles entering). A thistle growing up from this ditch caught my eye as it seemed to have a flower, and when I got off my bike and found it had flowers I also saw a large colony of the same Thistles inside and to the left of the entrance. Superficially these looked like Welshed Thistles (with spiny welts all up the stems) but the flowers were pale pink (not purple) and the plants had a pale grey-green look to them and in my opinion they were over luxuriant examples of the SLENDER THISTLE that normally grows as a smaller plant on shingle (I have found them on the South Moors seawall and over at the Oysterbeds).

TUE 18 MAY

An email from Pete Selby summarised the success of Sunday’s visit to Havant Thicket which added 18 new species for the Atlas 2000 (national plant distribution mapping project) to those recorded for two Tetrads involved. I mentioned some of the species in my entry for last Sunday but a couple more are worth a mention here, one being HEATH MILKWORT, the other being one a subspecies of Common Vetch that I was not aware of. I know that Common Vetch can have much size variation in both plant and flower but I did not realize that in Stace’s new flora has three subspecies all of which occur in Hampshire. Subspecies *nigra* is relatively small with flowers that are usually of a uniform red colour – its upper leaves are noticeably narrower than its lower leaves. The other two subspecies are larger, have leaves that are all similar but flowers that generally have a two-tone effect and you probably need to see the seeds to

separate them but the chances of finding the bigger of the two (subspecies sativa) are small and subspecies segetalis is the one you are much more likely to find. If anyone wants to join a similar day searching for un-recorded plants in other parts of the county they are scheduled for May 30 (northern part of South Hampshire), June 6 (central parts), July 4 (western) and July 31 (southern) they should email Pete.selby@cwcom.net for details.

MON 17 MAY

In the Warblington marsh SSSI this morning I found a colony of LARGE BITTERCRESS (*Cardamine amara*) plants nestling among the rushes this morning. The deep violet/purple anthers gave the centre of the pure white petalled flowers the look of an eye with too much make-up, and I noticed the same effect when I found another colony of these plants at the South Moors in the afternoon. In the Warblington marsh the BROOKWEED plants were standing tall but none had visible flowers yet. Heading east along the shore fields I was pleased to find two more Brookweed plants in a new location in the shore field abutting Nore Barn.

At the South Moors in the afternoon the Southern Marsh orchids were beginning to show distinct flower heads but I would guess it will be the end of the month before any open (last year the first flowers were open on May 20). On the way to the Moors by the Langbrook stream I found my first NIPPLEWORT in flower and saw TIMOTHY GRASS for the first time. Common Mallow was out (first seen yesterday) and so were both CURLED DOCK and CLUSTERED DOCK.

COMMON SPOTTED ORCHIDS have started to flower on Portsdown near Fort Purbrook according to John Goodspeed who found around 50 of them starting to open last Saturday. John also tells me that GREATER CELANDINE was in flower on the west of Place Wood on the track between Wanstead and Belney Farms – there is a saying that if you find this plant habitation is just round the corner but in this case the saying seems to be wrong (in other words it is a genuine casual growth, not the persistence of plants in an old garden)

INSECTS:

SUN 23 MAY

Today's tour of the Naval Munitions Depot at Bedenham (see details on Plant page) was partly for the benefit of butterfly enthusiasts as it is a rich site for these insects and proved to be so on this rather dull morning by having at least nine species on parade. The one which I have not seen so far and which I missed again this morning was SMALL HEATH but I did see both GRIZZLED SKIPPER and GREEN HAIRSTREAK. The visitors to the site split into two groups both of which saw examples of the blue form of the female COMMON BLUE which looks more like a female Holly Blue with a broad black borders to the predominantly blue fore-wings (upper side), but has a trailing fringe of orange crescents to the upper side of the hind wings. Other than Speckled Wood my group so no other species but the second party which was more interested in butterflies saw SMALL COPPER, HOLLY BLUE and both Large and Small White. On my way home I added another moth species to my year list – my first SILVER Y in the Fort Nelson carpark.

At Noar Hill this afternoon Mark Litjens recorded 3 DUKE OF BURGUNDY (this species was recorded as being on the wing on May 4th in the Martin Down log book but this is the first 'first hand sighting' I have received) along with 11 SMALL HEATH, 4 Dinky Skipper and 2 Common Blue

SAT 22 MAY

Mark Litjens was at Martin Down today and saw single ADONIS BLUE and BROWN ARGUS there with 3 Small Blue, 6 Green Hairstreak and both Dinky and Grizzled Skipper. Later he went to Bentley Wood and, in Cowley's Copse, saw 9 PEARL BORDERED and 6 MARSH FRITILLARY. Evening Class Group saw male and female Orange Tip butterflies and Large Red Damselfly by the River Ems.

FRI 21 MAY

Andrew Brookes tells me that ... "The Portsmouth Area Group committee (of Butterfly Conservation) visited private woodlands near Botley on Wednesday (19th) to search for PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARIES, but despite the excellent weather and abundant foodplants, were unsuccessful. Ten other species were found, including 5 GRIZZLED SKIPPERS. BRIMSTONES were by far the commonest butterflies, with GREEN-VEINED WHITES and ORANGE TIPS vying for second place. The mature woodlands contained much honeysuckle and willow, and it is hoped subsequent visits will reveal some of the rarer nymphalidae. A RED ADMIRAL was seen ovipositing on the copious nettle beds, but no Small Tortoiseshell or Peacock larval nests were found." I understand that the decline of the Pearl Bordered Fritillary was the spur to last year's national survey of their sites and numbers during which Barry Collins found three small colonies in Stansted Forest with a total of 46 butterflies seen – this year he only made one brief visit on May 3rd when he saw just five of the butterflies but I think this drop in numbers is more

a measure of the weather and limited search time than a true indication of status – Barry is hoping to re-visit the sites next week if the weather is kind.

Despite a fresh west wind and cloudy sky I saw a couple of male COMMON BLUE butterflies on Portsdown this morning but the highspot was my first SMALL BLUE which rose from the grass with one of the Common Blues (showing how much smaller it is) and then settled on a blade of grass to give me a good view of it pale grey/blue underwing on which the only markings are a few small black dots. After I got home Barry Collins dropped in and showed me the two moths which he told me about last night – both were in excellent fresh condition and the Eyed Hawk fluttered its wings to let me see the colourful eye on the hind wing (where it is hidden from sight when the moth is at rest), while the Coxcomb Prominent posed motionless to show me the ‘Cock’s comb’ shape of its closed wings.

THU 20 MAY

Barry Collins tells me that last night he had the first EYED HAWK MOTH at his moth trap along with a COXCOMB PROMINENT. During the day yesterday he saw the first COMMON BLUE on Thorney Island.

In Havant Thicket there were plenty of Brimstone as usual (I watched one female egg laying) and I saw one Speckled Wood but a couple of moths scored more points for interest. One pale coloured moth allowed me to inspect it and I believe it was a PURPLE THORN – in size it was a little larger than a Common Blue butterfly and it rested with its wings held up above its back like a butterfly, the underside was a wash of pale brown, yellow and off white, and it let me prize the wings apart enough to see that there was a dark brown broad border around the upper sides. The legs were white. The other moth was much tinier and more easily recognizable (thanks to help last summer) and was the little PYRAUSTA AURATA which will soon be fluttering around any mint plants. On Hawthorn I found a large woolly brown caterpillar at least 6cm long which I guess was the larva of a LAPPET MOTH.

WED 19 MAY

On Chalton Down around 11 am when the temperature was approaching 20 degrees I hoped to see some new downland butterflies (Small Heath, Dingy or Grizzled Skipper or a Common Blue) but none were spotted. There were about a dozen Brimstone of both sexes, Orange Tips and at least one Green Veined White there and Speckled Wood in Head Down Plantation but that was all – in the afternoon I added a single Peacock at the South Moors. One very pretty insect found on Chalton Down was beetle looking very like CHRYSOLINA POLITA which is illustrated by Michael Chinery in his Collins Guide to Insects – he says that species can be abundant on riverside mint plants but this was on the dry downland crawling over what I took to be leaves of Marjoram. The rounded shape, green ‘head’ and copper coloured ‘body’ were as illustrated and the size is about right.

TUE 18 MAY

John Langmaid does not support my theory (see May 17) that the ‘bat droppings’ on the underside of a Lime leaf were moth larval cases. He says none of the family concerned (Coleophoridae) are found on Lime and that the larvae are usually found alone (one to a leaf), and that he can make nothing of the white hairs protruding from the upper surface of the leaf. Further suggestions as to their identity are welcome.

A blue-bodied damselfly was among those emerging from John Goodspeed’s garden pond today – it did not survive the emergence and died before it was fully coloured but I think it unlikely to be other than COENAGRION PUELLA (the Azure Damselfly) as the other common species (Enallagma cyathigerum – the Common Blue damselfly) is said to like large expanses of water with a lot of marginal vegetation. If that is so the latter would prefer the IBM Lake to any garden pond, though once they have emerged all dragonflies and damselflies will fly miles from their birthplace before returning to it to breed.

MON 17 MAY

The newly emerged moth which we saw in Havant Thicket yesterday and which I guessed might be a Wood Carpet after searching the plates of Margaret Brooks “Complete guide to British Moths” and failing to find a match for the bright green colour we saw, was almost certainly the appropriately named GREEN CARPET. The colour we saw is illustrated in Michael Chinery’s Collins Guide to insects, and he comments that the colour fades very quickly hence the drab colour of the moth illustrated by Margaret Brooks. My reason for getting out Chinery was to try to answer another insect problem which arrived in my letter box today in the shape of a Lime tree leaf on whose underside were what looked like twenty or more brown ‘bat droppings’ stuck to the leaf and hanging down from it (they are 3 to 4mm long). On closer inspection there was a mass of white hairs coming through the leaf from the tip of the ‘bat dropping’ and looking like the cover of a Woolly Aphid on the topside of the leaf. The person who gave me the sample thought they were some sort of gall but it is possible that they were something that John Langmaid had shown me on Saturday – cases made by the larvae of some micro-moths to protect themselves while feeding (in the same way that Caddis Fly larva construct their own protective cases.

The moths put them to double use as they eventually pupate in them, and my guess is that these are pupating larvae of this type.

ORANGE TIP, GREEN VEINED WHITE and one PEACOCK were the only butterflies seen by myself today

A further report of LARGE RED DAMSELFLY came today from John Goodspeed who saw one by his garden pond on Portsdown last Saturday

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 23 MAY

At this time of year I guess FOXES are more than usually active with growing cubs to feed and today one came to check out our garden but went away empty mouthed. Yesterday the Evening Class walk group spotted one near the River Ems but neither of these observations were a patch on the BADGER sighting which Brian Fellows enjoyed at the Stansted Park Slip site when he was patiently recording Nightingale song at dusk. The Badger seemed unaware of Brian's presence and allowed him to watch it closely through binoculars for a good ten minutes as it foraged in the woodland. Eventually it came out on the bare path within five yards of Brian and it did then spot/smell him and beat a retreat.

THU 20 MAY

Roughly half an hour after the sun came out in mid-morning I was walking up one of the broad rides in Havant Thicket when something made me stop dead in my tracks and I realized that if I had gone two paces further I would have trodden on a large dark female ADDER which was lying on bare earth in the centre of the ride. It was a beautiful sight in its glossy dark brown and black colours but I am surprised that it had not felt the vibration of my heavy boots coming to within a couple of yards of it. After perhaps 30 seconds it raised its head slightly, sniffed the air with its tongue and then slowly slithered away. A little later, walking along another sunny dry ride, I glimpsed a small COMMON LIZARD scuttling off into cover from where it had been sunning itself – this is the first I have seen this summer.

John Goodspeed has forwarded to me the following message which he received from Andrew Powling. "It is with great sadness that we report that Snowy, the albino grey squirrel from North Cosham, is dead, killed by a cat. RIP." John comments that it is not the last of the albinos – he knew of two and I suspect there may be more. Please tell us if you know of one that is still alive and the area in which you see it so that we can try to assess how many there are.

TUE 18 MAY

A neighbour of mine here in Havant whose garden also backs onto the old Hayling Billy line tells me that a family of FIVE FOX CUBS and their parents appeared in his garden yesterday and are using it as a nursery playground. He enjoys the sight but not the damage to his garden. John Goodspeed saw another three cubs playing by the seawall ditch at Farlington Marshes.

MON 17 MAY

HARES have been seen by Sonia Bolton recently in the fields around Broadreed Farm at Stansted which back onto her country cottage. She saw three there yesterday around 5.30pm.

A message from Chris Fairhead includes the following which refers to yesterday evening in north Emsworth near the Southleigh Forest.. "This evening I saw a female fox with three cubs in the field next to Redlands Lane, just south of Long Copse Lane. The adult, presumably the mother, kept watch while her three cubs ran about, skipping and jumping."

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 19 MAY 10 - 16

BIRDS:

SUN 16 MAY

Barry Collins led an SOS walk around Thorney Island today, seeing two HOBBIES (probably the same bird in two different places), a ROSEATE TERN and a second summer MED GULL. Surprisingly they did not see a single Egret (the roost count at the beginning of May was down to 14 birds). The Swans at the Little Deeps are still sitting, as are the pair with a nest in the Great Deeps right beside the road (east side of the road just beyond the guard post as you enter the MoD site). Last Friday night (May 14) Barry had two churring male NIGHTJAR, plus one female, in Havant Thicket, and in Stansted Forest earlier in the month (May 3?) he came on a singing TREE PIPIT in one of the cleared blocks of the west Forest a little north of the main avenue.

In Havant Thicket one family of Great Spotted Woodpeckers were screaming for food from their nest hole

and the adult could be heard calling in the area, but the best bird item of a day devoted to plant hunting was the brief sound of TREE CREEPER SONG which I would have overlooked had it not been for the keen ears of John Norton. John also taught me to recognise the scolding note of GARDEN WARBLER (almost certainly the same bird which I had heard singing last Thursday) – the softer note is more like a ‘Tush’ than a ‘Tucc’.

Mid May is often a good time to see SWIFTS as large flocks of them appear over coastal sites – in past years flocks of a hundred or more have been seen over places like Budds Farm or the Paulsgrove rubbish tip to enjoy the flies in the air. Yesterday John Gowen commented on a flock over Langstone and this evening I have a message from John Taylor in Rowlands Castle describing a flock of 50+ which he says were “wheeling and dealing in the fly and insect market” over Havant Thicket around 7pm last night. I wonder if anyone knows whether such flocks are non-breeding birds? I understand that nestling Swifts are able to go into a state of suspended animation and survive for a couple of days without food when weather conditions prevent the adults from bringing food to the nest, and I assume that adult breeding Swifts that are not sitting on the nest have no reason to stay in the immediate area, nor to defend territories, so they may well join up in large flocks to feed at the places where most food is available even if that is a hundred miles or so from their nest.

SAT 15 MAY

John Gowen has made a round of the local Nightingale sights in the past couple of days and tells me that they are doing well at the Stansted Park Slip site with at least four singing (plus a Turtle Dove), at Pitts Copse south of The Groves where one is singing, and in Racton Park Wood where he heard two on Thursday. The news is not so good from the Marlpit Lane site where he only heard one bird, but perhaps the windy weather has been to blame. John also told me about this morning’s ‘Evening Class’ walk from Langstone to Emsworth Nore Barn and back during which they saw the Langstone Pond Swan family on the sea to be safe from foxes. There were very few waders other than Oystercatcher (just one Black Tailed Godwit and two Curlew), and only a couple of Shelduck, but inland they had an interesting sighting of what seemed to be a female Kestrel carry a vole and attempting to feed another ‘female Kestrel’ with it. It seems far too early for a juvenile to be out of the nest (and the other bird did not appear to be a juvenile) and John was fairly certain that the other bird was not a male undergoing some ‘reverse courtship’ so perhaps we have to conclude that Warblington has a Lesbian Kestrel problem – only a week ago Tony Gutteridge reported three male Kestrels together down there so perhaps there is a ‘Gay and Lesbian’ colony (and of course if it is a colony then they must be Lesser Kestrels).

My birding was limited to a walk round the IBM Lake where the highspot was the sight of at least two baby GREAT CRESTED GREBES popping their heads out of their mother’s wing coverts to be fed by their father – this is the second year that these birds have bred on the IBM Lake. The Swan pair there were still sitting, and two lone male Tufted Duck were probably ‘fathers in waiting’. One pair of Canada Geese already had their family of 8 goslings on show and no doubt others will follow. Mallard ducklings vanish of predators as soon as they arrive on the lake, but this year the Foxes have become even bolder and one of the gardeners told me that a fox had climbed three flights of steps to the top balcony of one building to eat the eggs in a Mallard nest. At least one Skylark was still singing over the site and two Lesser Whitethroat were singing as if established (these birds may have arrived late but they seem to be present in good numbers this year).

FRI 14 MAY

I can hardly believe the news which Ian Calderwood has sent me today, and he admits that he has it only at second hand, but he tells me that this year’s Heronry count at the Naval Armaments Depot at Bedenham on the north west shore of Portsmouth Harbour has come up with a count of 72 HERON NESTS and 4 or 5 LITTLE EGRET NESTS. I am less surprised at the Egrets that at the number of Heron nests, as my understanding of that site was that there had been a maximum of around 64 nests there in the 1960s or early 70s, and that the number had dwindled to more like ten or a dozen in recent years. That picture was backed up in my mind by a sharp decline in Heron numbers observed on the IBM Lake – when I first worked there in the first half of the 1980s we regularly had around 20 Herons in a day roost there (maximum of 25 together) and now we are lucky to see one or two (perhaps half a dozen at most). I await further confirmation of the Bedenham Heronry count but will be delighted if it is true. Ian’s other news is undisputable – he was at Titchfield Haven this afternoon and saw a single ROSEATE TERN there for about a quarter of an hour before it flew off west (another surprise).

Paul Winter has kindly contributed some clues to identifying the language used by the IBERIAN CHIFFCHAFF (see entries for May 10 and 12). Paul says that the last part of the Chiffchaff track on the Roche CDs (“All the bird songs of Britain and Europe” CD4 Track 18) covers what it calls a SPANISH CHIFFCHAFF, and he also says that a sonagram can be found in British Birds vol 9 of 1991 (page 368).

THU 13 MAY

A couple of hours in Havant Thicket this morning included a vain search for Nightjar in places where dry bracken has been flattened and recent fire sites which are beginning to disappear under fresh bracken but I did hear distant hooting of a Tawny Owl and got much closer to my first Garden Warbler for the Thicket this year – I never saw it in the birch scrub, but based my certainty of its identity on my rule that ‘if it sounds like a Song Thrush it’s a Blackcap and if it sounds like a Dunnock it’s a Garden Warbler’ – the latter go straight into their song and keep up an even fast tempo throughout, stopping as abruptly as a Dunnock with none of the variation of tempo and pitch that you get from a Blackcap. I also had my first Swift over the woods but the best birds came when I finished my survey stint in the woods and took a walk over the Gipsies Plain - grassy fields south of the Thicket. Here on a patch of shorter grass around SU 721097 a LAPWING was calling and displaying, and I saw it land close to a second bird so I assume there is at least one breeding pair here.

WED 12 MAY

My request for information about any IBERIAN CHIFFCHAFFS in our area has drawn a response from Mike Collins who tells me that one has been at Portland for the past couple of weeks. He has spoken to someone who saw it last week and who told him it was impossible to distinguish by eye but it did have a different call/song. However all he can remember is that it never said ‘Chiff-chaff’ – what to listen for remains a mystery but I guess the Spanish accent will probably produce a ‘Hiff- haff’. Further comments welcome.

Little to report of birds from my very windy morning ride to Gunner Point. The items which I noted started with 16 SHELDUCK in a huddle by the weir of the Oysterbeds lagoon where the pair of Little Tern were still present. South of the West Lane bends path I came on a family of 7 LONG TAILED TITS with their parents (one carrying a small caterpillar to one of the young), and here (in the field west of the large bungalow near the end of Daw Lane) a single EGRET was standing patiently by the ditch under the dead oak – last week a plumed pair were fishing together in Stoke Bay nearby and there is a possible nest site in the dense copse just north of the damp meadow where the lone bird was seen today. Over Sinah Lake half a dozen Swifts were active and at the Kench there were 8 WHIMBREL (and another couple seen at the Oysterbeds). Lastly, on my way back I had a distant view of what must have been the Langstone Mill Swan pair with their cygnets on the shore west of the old rail bridge (east of the Langbrook mouth where they normally keep their young fed away from the foxes that surround their home pond).

Although we still have a few breeding LAPWING on grassland where old fashioned farming practice is still the fashion (i.e. in places like Farlington Marshes and Thorney Island where farmers do not have to earn a living or starve) it is now quite exceptional to find them in normal farmland so John Goodspeed’s sighting today of one over fields in the Lye Heath area (SU 649083), where he saw a pair displaying at the end of April, is worth noting. Last Monday (May 10) John saw a male Wheatear at the Hayling Oysterbeds.

TUE 11 MAY

An email from Lyndon Hatfield tonight brought the news I have been expecting this week – the NIGHTJARS are back in the Hundred Acres site of the West Walk woodland near Wickham. Lyndon tells me that last night (May 10) he went first to Botley Woods where he heard three NIGHTINGALES singing and a TURTLE DOVE purring just inside the entrance to the woods from Titchfield Lane which runs north from Funtley to Wickham. I have not been there for several years and I understand the woods have been opened up to the public by the Forestry Commission more than in the past so I may be wrong in thinking that he heard them just inside the old southern entrance in to Flagpond Copse at SU 552097 (there was also a northern entrance at SU 552104 by the railway at Tapnag and I suppose there could now be a new entrance and even a carpark). Lyndon went on to the Hundred Acres area of West Walk where he heard churring and wingclapping from at least two NIGHTJAR and heard Tawny Owls calling and saw a Woodcock overhead. Lyndon says the birds were at ‘last year’s Nightjar site’ which I believe to be the clearing around Lodge Hill – if it is you drive north from the Southwick-Wickham road past the big Hundred Acres carpark of West Walk and continue towards Newtown. Just past the grounds of West Lodge on your left the road starts to curve downhill and just here there is a place where you can park by the roadside and enjoy Nightjar and many bats around your car – approx SU 600123 (There could also be Woodlark on the cleared ground if you go in the daytime). Last year the first Nightjar were heard in Havant Thicket on May 8th so I guess they can also be heard there now.

A very windy morning on Butser Hill, where I was after plants rather than birds, brought a brief glimpse of 2 HOBBIES hurling themselves through the windy skies over Ramsdean Down, seen distantly from the bottom of Rake Bottom. The only birds near me in the almost treeless downland were a pair of Yellowhammer which probably had a nest in the stunted Elder bushes at the bottom of the very steep slope and a few Meadow Pipit on the hillside – these were probably the reason for the appearance on the

ground of the hillside of a Cuckoo which we had heard calling from nearby woodland.

MON 10 MAY

I am aware that birders occasionally report sightings of grey Chiffchaffs from regions to the north east of the British Isles, and that some of these are so grey, and are so unhappy at finding themselves displaced from their Siberian homeland that they are known as “Tristis or Sad Chiffchaffs”. Today I heard that a “Happy Chiffchaff” from sunny Iberia has been seen in the area but the news is cloaked in secrecy and it could just be that someone is pulling the other end of a long piece of string. Does anyone have further info? And are they allowed to share it with us?

Two messages reaching me this evening re-inforce the view that summer is here and the Swifts, Swallows and Martins have arrived in force. One is from Christoph Harwood who found the air above East Meon full of them yesterday, and the other is from Nik Knight to say that the Swifts which nest at Portsmouth Grammar School were back there today. Several other people have made similar comments in the past few days, and this morning I saw three House Martins excitedly visiting a potential nest site under the eaves of the Wheelwright’s Arms on the Emsworth Road in Havant. It seemed as if all three had chosen the same site and were fighting over who was to have it but it could be that some other bird had got there first – certainly Swifts face great competition from Starlings for roof space, and House Sparrows often block the entrance that the Swifts want to use with an excess of nest material that they have carried in.

An early morning visit to Warblington Farm for the Common Bird Census produced one very good bird just passing through – a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER – and a couple of good new arrivals which may stay – LESSER WHITETHROAT. There is still only one REED WARBLER to be heard but at least we have one pair of SWALLOWS nesting in the farm barn and we were even grateful for three baby Moorhens to prove they are still breeding. Looking out to sea over the saltings and counting the flock of Crows (only around 30 today) I heard a very nostalgic sound and saw a single LAPWING (probably from Northney fields) to remind me of the late 1970s when we had 8 or 9 breeding pairs at Warblington – since 1985 they have ceased to nest and are hardly ever seen on the fields even in March. At least the CUCKOO has not totally deserted us – one was calling at various points around the farm. An oddity during the visit was a fly over of 8 Canada Geese heading north east from Langstone (possibly originating at Baffins Pond), and shortly after three flew back south west.

On my way home from Warblington I visited Langstone Pond and found the Swan pair had six CYGNETS off the nest (I hear they were first seen yesterday) so in the afternoon I did my duty by Brian Fellows (currently in Canada) and checked the Swans at Peter Pond and the Little Deeps (both still sitting) and counted the herd on the Town Mill Pond which is down to just 45 birds plus the Black Swan.

PLANTS:

SUN 16 MAY

Pete Selby organised a ‘Swat Team’ to fill many gaps in his records of plants in the Havant Thicket area for the Atlas 2000 project and I was allowed to tag along and learn some new species and to record the first flowering of one species that I could identify – FOXGLOVE. Two plants which should be relatively common there, but which I have failed to identify, are LADY FERN and NARROW BUCKLER FERN and plenty of examples of each were found. Grasses that we found which had previously been beyond my powers to identify included FESTUCA TENUIFOLIA (Fine Leaved Sheep’s Fescue) and we found several that I should have spotted but had failed to do so such as DESCHAMPسيا FLEXUOSA (Wavy Hair Grass), ALOPECURUS GENICULATUS (Marsh Foxtail), and GLYCERIA FLUITANS (Floating Sweetgrass) which is apparently the commonest species of its genus to be found in woodland rides. Among the tiny species that are difficult to spot from my height we came on AIRA PRAECOX (Early Hair Grass) in good numbers. Among the sedges I was introduced to both CAREX OVALIS and C. PILULIFERA. As might be expected there were few large and colourful species that I had previously missed here but HEATH MILKWORT was among them and we found examples of a Milkwort in both white and blue colour forms but were not able to confirm in the field if it was the missing Heath species. On my way to the Thicket I passed my first COMMON MALLOW in flower and saw the NARROW LEAVED PEPPERWORT which lines the dual carriageway through northern Leigh Park was about to flower.

SAT 15 MAY

A number of plants were newly in flower at the IBM North Harbour site today, the most colourful being SALSIFY which is spreading over the site. Even brighter in colour, but so small that it was difficult to spot, was one flower of GRASS VETCHLING (LATHYRUS NISSOLIA) - hopefully the first of many. PALE FLAX was flowering all over the site and I also found one plant of BLUE FLEABANE in flower and one SMALL SCABIOUS just opening. The first HOP TREFOIL was also out and I came on a patch

of FERN GRASS in the carpark area (I heard that planning permission has just been given to construct the new road into the carparks from the Johnson and Johnson roundabout end so more of the 'wild ground' will soon vanish under tarmac, giving this grass even more scope to appear from between the cracks). Driving over Portsdown on my way home I noticed many plants of WILD MIGNONETTE in flower but did not stop to find more chalk downland plants.

Gwynne Johnson told me that the evening class had today listed 72 plant species in their walk from Langstone to Emsworth and back and named four of them starting with SEA PLANTAIN that is flowering on the saltings by the picnic benches at the east end of Nore Barn. In the Warblington Farm east meadow (alongside the path going north towards Selangor Avenue) they found the first HAIRY SEDGE and another sedge whose identity is still sub judice, and finally they noticed SUBTERRANEAN CLOVER growing on the tiny lawn of the Green Cottage overlooking the Langstone Wadeway. The Hairy Sedge and Sea Plantain were both 'firsts' for my records.

FRI 14 MAY

GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS are flowering at the Royal Naval Armaments Depot at Bedenham on the Portsmouth Harbour shore according to Ian Calderwood

THU 13 MAY

HEATH SPEEDWELL was flowering in Havant Thicket this morning, and in a damp ditch outside the woods much LESSER SPEARWORT was out. The fields of the Gipsies Plain were covered in buttercups and red clover amongst which I came on my first flower of WHITE CLOVER. Back in the heathy woodland I found a pretty patch of pure white Milkwort and many Foxgloves had flowers just ready to open – showing their external colour but still with their mouths closed. One patch of Common Spotted orchids had a flower spike standing tall with a hint of colour but I guess it will not be flowering until next week – I have the impression that Common Spotted are fewer than usual this year, unlike the Early Purples and Twayblades which are having an excellent season. Common Sorrel is a pretty uninteresting plant which has probably been in flower for a week or so but I only noticed flowers open on it today. Back in Havant that dreaded weed GROUND ELDER had its first flower open.

WED 12 MAY

While walking a public footpath in the Lye Heath area (SU 648087) today John Goodspeed noticed up to 100 purple and pink spikes of orchids in a wet hillside field across the stream beside his path. Subsequent enquiries produced evidence that these are EARLY MARSH ORCHIDS and that the field in which they grow is an SSSI. He also learnt that the farmer here has in the past operated a strict 'keep out' policy reinforced by the barrel of a shotgun so we do not recommend trying to investigate this site. Another orchid colony unique to our local area is that of HEATH SPOTTED ORCHIDS which occur within the Wildlife Trust Hookheath Nature Reserve close by, and there is more chance of seeing these but you will have to wait a bit as they do not flower until later than the Common Spotted which have still to show themselves. John also found RAGGED ROBIN and YELLOW IRIS flowering here.

On Sinah Common the CHILDRING PINK which I found in bud last Wednesday (May 5) is now flowering and I estimate that there are more plants to be seen this year. To find it go to the Beachlands Centre and along the tarmac road towards the Inn on the Beach, stopping when you are south of the last house on the south side of Seafront Road (before the houses cease opposite Staunton Avenue). Find a water stand pipe serving the beach huts to the south of you (supported by a white post) and walk from it towards the windows of the last house on Seafront Road which are visible between Holm Oaks and Macrocarpa trees. Where the short turf gives way to the gorse and other dense vegetation the straight line you are walking should bring you to the entrance to a minor path leading through the 'jungle' and the plants are on the left side of this path right at the point where it meets the short turf. The stems of the pinks are long but very thin and the tiny red flowers are at their tips so they appear to hang in mid-air perhaps a foot above the ground.

The first HONEYSUCKLE was flowering in a West Lane hedge as I came home from a trip to Gunner Point this morning. On the beach area SEA SANDWORT had its first tiny white flower open and SMITH'S PEPPERWORT was in flower along with STICKY GROUNDSEL, SAND CATSTAIL and SHEEP'S FESCUE grasses. On Sinah Common the SPREADING OLEANDER was flowering against the east wall of what I take to be the old ammunition store for the Anti-aircraft gun to which there is still a memorial close to the gateway into the lake area, and back on West Lane the bright red flowers on two INDIAN HORSE CHESTNUT trees were fully open. Other plants which I noted were Yellow Flags at Langstone Pond, the Borage still flowering by the weir of the Oysterbeds, Dog Rose and Dewberry flowers by the Hayling Coastal path, and a general outburst of Scarlet Pimpernel and Prickly Sowthistle. Alongside the Ferry Road by the Kench there is a great mass of LESSER TREFOIL (T. dubium) in flower and if you have difficulty in remembering the differences between this and Black Medick think of

the latter as 'Blackbeard the pirate' who has very hairy hands and face (leaves and calyx) and a sharp point of a sword at his leaf tips – Lesser Trefoil is the gentler, hairless species with no offensive weapon in its hand (no apiculus point to its leaves).

While at Gunner Point I made a fruitless search for Nottingham Catchfly which I found there last year on May 28th. This is how I then described its location. " So far as I know there is just one tiny patch of this on Hayling to be found on the Gunner Point shore at approx SZ 694990. To find it first locate the largest of the group of Holm Oaks – one that is 120 paces east of the pill box on the public open area and which is a few yards from the golf course fence (but not touching it). Stand on the path facing west with this Holm Oak immediately on your right, walk west for 17 paces then turn left and walk 9 paces south to find the plants immediately on your left in a relatively open area of short turf with a minor track passing close to them. I counted 85 plants there today (28 May 1998) which is I think more than last year."

TUE 11 MAY

Today's significant plant find was by a roadside in Havant – the first flowering WILLOWHERB of the year, definitely BROAD LEAVED.

MON 10 MAY

The marshy meadow east of Warblington cemetery was full of flowering Sedges this morning – the majority being Great Pond Sedge but there was also Common, Distant, False Fox and Brown Sedge – the latter puzzled me for some time as this is the first time I have seen it this year. With the sedges I found Common Spike Rush in flower. Other first flowers found this morning included BITTERSWEET (I believe some people call this Woody Nightshade), LESSER STITCHWORT, BROOKLIME and WATER SPEEDWELL. On Thorney Island in the afternoon the RED HOT POKER plants just north of the Little Deeps have begun to flower and the TREE MALLOW by the Slipper Mill Pond is in full flower (Brian Fellows noted the first flowers on April 12th).

INSECTS:

SUN 16 MAY

Barry Collins tells me that he saw 39 WALL BROWN in his walk around Thorney Island today, and he thinks they are having an exceptionally good year. He also saw SMALL HEATH, which he tells me have been out since Thursday (May 13), and saw one LIBELLULA DEPRESSA dragonfly earlier in the month he saw his first PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARY at Stansted on May 3 and both DINGY and GRIZZLED SKIPPER on Chalton Down on May 5.

In Havant Thicket today I saw one HOLLY BLUE, a couple of SPECKLED WOOD and several BRIMSTONE with many Speckled Yellow moths.. Large Red Damselflies were already flying in tandem around small ponds and we saw one BEEFLY and a moth the size and pattern of a Garden Carpet but with some bright green in the forewing as well as a black and white pattern – at a guess it could have been a WOOD CARPET. On the leaves of a tree (I forget the species) we found a Looper caterpillar with a rich brown body offset by some fairly bright yellow markings along the side and another wild guess this was a MOTTLED UMBER. By far the best insect sighting in my personal opinion was of a GREEN TIGER BEETLE hunting over a barepatch of ground in the Thicket.

SAT 15 MAY

My first COMMON BLUE BUTTERFLY was on the wing at the IBM North Harbour site today and BLUE TAILED DAMSELFLIES were also to be seen around the lake. One of the gardeners there described seeing what must have been an early CINNABAR moth – the first I have heard of

FRI 14 MAY

A message from Andrew Brookes, chair of the Portsmouth Group of Butterfly Conservation, tells me of some of the group's activities and includes a plea for butterfly records to help plug the gaps remaining in the distribution maps of the various species to make the 'Millenium Atlas' of butterflies in Britain a more effective conservation tool for the coming years. Here are the main points of his message ...

RUBBISH TIP TO BECOME BUTTERFLY FRIENDLY. The huge landfill site south and west of the motorway at Paulsgrove is a sad commentary on our modern life style and its impact on our natural environment. Before motorways were thought of the area between Horsea Island and the shore at Paulsgrove was intertidal mud and saltings and provided the high tide roost site for all the wading birds in Portsmouth Harbour throughout each winter, but the pressure to get more cars and lorries into and out of Portsmouth gave motorway planners a choice between knocking down thousands of houses in this densely populated area or of reclaiming the intertidal area from the sea. So in 1970 the sea was excluded, the motorway built and the reclaimed land to the north became the IBM HQ and that to the south became Hampshire's largest landfill site, accepting noxious substances that were unwelcome elsewhere. Nothing in this world is all black, and the millions of tons of chalk on which the motorway was built, plus the wish

of IBM to have their HQ looking like a country estate set in parkland, meant that an extraordinary number of chalk downland species (plants, birds and butterflies) found the new environment attractive. This initial wildlife boom has nearly run its course – Port Solent has urbanised one area, the rubbish tip has extended ever outwards and upwards, and much of the IBM land has been tarmaced for carparks while a very significant area is likely to turn into a ‘Leisure Centre’ of cinemas and restaurants at any moment. So it is encouraging to hear that the Butterfly Conservation Group have been able to exert some influence and persuade the authorities to plant hundreds of BUCKTHORN, HOLLY and OAK trees as part of their landscaping of the tip as it becomes impossible to cram in any more rubbish (we still await news of the triple towers that were recently planned as a finishing touch to this ‘temple of trash’)

The Hampshire contribution to the BUTTERFLY CONSERVATION MILLENIUM PROJECT (a distribution atlas of all the butterfly species throughout Britain) is probably greater than that of some other counties, but still at this late stage there are significant areas of the county where very common species have not been formally recorded and must therefore appear as misleading blanks in the atlas unless they are filled in this summer. The part of the Portsmouth area which is least recorded is its northern fringe running from Botley through Wickham to Waterlooville in the SU61 and 71 ten kilometre squares. If you have records for these areas, or wish to make a special effort to help this summer, e-mail Andrew Brookes at andrew.brookes@port.ac.uk The Portsmouth Group has been successful in getting permission to search for PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARIES in private woodland in the area, so they are doing their bit.

Another way in which members of the public can help to ensure the survival of butterfly species is the relatively simple one of trying to PERSUADE THEIR LOCAL COUNCILS TO CUT THE GRASS LESS FREQUENTLY, and to leave areas where mowing is not essential to a once a year late autumn rough cut. If everyone who wants to see more butterflies (and to keep down their council tax bill) were to write to their local councillor and to the appropriate Council Officer responsible for grass cutting just pointing out the savings that could be made and the wildlife benefits that could accrue there is a chance that the message would get through.

Andrew’s message ended with a reminder of two events this summer that you may wish to join in. On June 6th Theo Roberts will be leading a BUTTERFLY WALK ON PORTSDOWN and on June 26th his wonderful WILDLIFE GARDEN at East Cosham will be open to the public – details will be in the Imminent Events section of the What’s New page.

THU 13 MAY

Near one of the tiny streams in Havant Thicket I was pushing my way through Birch and Pine scrub when a couple of unusual insects landed close by and gave me the chance to see them well in the sunlight – they were SCORPION FLIES whose tails (on the males only) curve up and back over the body to form an excellent imitation of a Scorpion’s sting. Their heads are also unusual in being extended downwards in a noticeable ‘beak’ shape. Their bodies had a pretty green tinge and their wings had extensive black marking on their otherwise translucent surface. In size they were probably about the same length as the yellow dung flies that will soon be so common. Also on the wing in woodlands now are a mass of Speckled Yellow moths and I even saw a single PEACOCK butterfly along with a couple of Speckled Wood and three or four Brimstone. I also had a close view of my first LARGE RED DAMSELFLY of the year and a glimpse of a larger brownish dragonfly disappearing from view (probably a Libellula species though it did not appear to have the ‘short fat body’ of that genus)

WED 12 MAY

GREEN VEINED WHITES were the only butterfly species seen in any number during today’s trip to Gunner Point – I saw half a dozen or more of these, three Speckled Wood, two Small Copper and one Large White plus a small number of Orange Tip. The mass of spring Peacock and Tortoiseshell butterflies seems to have vanished without leaving any colonies of squirming black caterpillars on the nettles - have you seen any?

TUE 11 MAY

Today I saw the frothy ‘spittle’ made by FROGHOPPERS as a nursery for their young for the first time

MON 10 MAY

Mark Litjens tells me that he was at Martin Down yesterday morning and saw his first SMALL BLUE there. He also saw Small Copper, Dingy and Grizzled Skipper, and Green Hairstreak. He also visited Bentley Wood over the week end where the log book showed that both PEARL BORDERED FRITILLARY and DUKE OF BURGUNDY had been seen since last Tuesday (May 4) but he was unable to find either of these.

A moth chose to spend the day on my kitchen ceiling and a step ladder was needed to get a close look at it.

It turned out to be a WAVED UMBER, a species that I was not familiar with and may not recognise if I see it again as it is one of those that have a variable appearance. This one was certainly worth seeing.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 14 MAY

A phone call this evening from Jenny Trodd (who lives on Havant's Eastern Road close to where the Lavant Stream runs under the road before disappearing into the tunnel which takes it under the railway and Havant Town Centre) told me that there were lots of TADPOLES in the stream and that she had just been catching some to put in her garden pond. Tadpoles anywhere are good news but I am surprised that they in a stream rather than a pond. Admittedly any excess of water is diverted upstream through another pipe system into the Hermitage Stream, and the Lavant Stream running through the old Oak Park School site (now a housing development) has little flower and lots of vegetation, but I would be interested in any comments on Tadpoles in streams.

THU 13 MAY

Although the sun did not feel particularly warm this morning it was sufficient to bring a large female ADDER out to bask on the brushwood at the edge of a clearing in Havant Thicket and a smaller GRASS SNAKE which was curled up on damper grass on the sunny side of a watery ditch.

WED 12 MAY

The number of Grey Squirrels on Hayling Island is said to be increasing. A road casualty beside West Lane today told me that they are present in that area – with one fewer than before.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 18 MAY 3 - 9

BIRDS:

SUN 9 MAY

A message from Peter Morrison this evening reads "Sue watched 2 ROSEATE TERNS, 9 BLACK TERNS, 2 Little Terns, 1 Sandwich Tern and 200+ Common Terns (no Arctic) resting on the shingle spit opposite the South Scrape entrance during a rain shower at 12.30pm. The Roseate and Black left soon after the rain stopped - they went east." I bet he regrets not having been with her at Titchfield Haven – and so do I as I have a thing about Black Terns.

This morning I took a walk round the downs above South Harting and heard my first TURTLE DOVE purring from the side of Harting Hill as I was walking up Whitcombe Bottom. I could only see the dove in silhouette and it seemed to be sharing an ash tree with a Cuckoo while two LESSER WHITETHROAT sang from the scrub in the valley. I heard one or more Cuckoo frequently and there was song from Blackcap, Chiff Chaff, Willow Warbler and Whitethroat as well as that of the resident Skylark, Yellowhammer, and a Mistle Thrush near which I heard two separate rattle calls indicating that he had both mate and offspring nearby. In the afternoon I walked around the South Moors from Budds Mound over which 13 WHIMBREL called as they set off on their north east overland flight. The summer Swan herd off Broadmarsh is now up to 40 birds and there was an unusually large number of Shelduck present – at least 12 on the pools and another six on the sea. On the pools I could see the Canada Goose pair but no goslings (I hope they have all been eaten) and the Swans were still sitting while the Tufted Duck were down to just 11 birds. On the shore Oystercatcher were the only numerous wader (48 visible from Budds Mound) with a few Turnstone and Redshank. Along at the Langbrook mouth there was another 35 Oystercatcher with a small flock of 8 Black Tailed Godwit and just four Ringed Plover. No grebe on the sea but there was a late male WHEATEAR on the sea wall (a small one, not one of the bigger Greenland birds that should be passing now). The three BRENT and two Swans were in the stream mouth as usual an one Little and one Common Tern were offshore.. a surprising bird in the thick Blackthorn hedge along the west of the South Moors proper was a REED WARBLER, no doubt passing the time until the reeds have grown tall enough for nesting at its chosen water. In the evening the Swifts were back over Havant and should be a regular sight for some time.

SAT 8 MAY

Less wind and higher cloud in the evening after a blustery day brought five or more SWIFTS to dive screaming over their Manor Close nsst sites this evening – the first evening 'scream party' of the summer here.

FRI 7 MAY

I was invited to join a group of caravanners at the Hayling Fishery Lane campsite this evening to interest

them in the wildlife of Hayling, and while there I was told that the Swans on the campsite lake have just hatched their young (I did not see them myself) and was also told that last night there had been a Goosander on the lake – when I queried this the man who told me was insistent that it was a Goosander but again I have not seen it.

NIGHTINGALES have at last been heard at the Stansted Park Slip ('Five Oaks' site – SU 771102) by John Gowen. He heard two there and two in Racton Park Wood last night, and heard at least one in Pitts Copse (SU 759094) south of the Groves earlier in the week. John also tells me that a pair of Mistle Thrush nesting near his home have just fledged 2 juveniles and to judge from the number of young seen by myself both Mistle and Song Thrushes have had good first broods. I have had young Mistle Thrush in my garden and last Wednesday came on one with its parents at the very start of the Hayling Coastal path near the Texaco garage, while I have come on numerous juvenile Song Thrushes but so far no Blackbirds. I have also noticed that Mistle Thrush song has once more become frequent as if to celebrate the young leaving the nest (Song Thrush song has hardly abated while they have been nesting). Still on the 'garden birds' theme I commented last Monday that SWIFTS were back over their Havant nest sites but I was perhaps premature as I have not seen them again until I glimpsed three overhead this evening (probably the three seen over Langstone Pond on Wednesday were the same local group)

Michael Prior today told me that RED KITES have been seen around Stansted Forest before this year – last summer he watched one for some time flying just above the trees of the Lady's Walk

THU 6 MAY

A message from Mark Litjens tells me that a LESSER YELLOWLEGS was found at Keyhaven Marshes last night (May 5) and was still present this morning. This is a good bird for Hampshire where it seems that one has not been seen since 1986, and that was only the tenth record for the county. I also see that all the other records are what would probably be classed as autumn – between June 29 and Oct 2 and this is presumably a spring vagrant

On a more homely note I was in The Holt this morning and twice heard the tittering of WHIMBREL passing over, and by the pond just outside the northern edge of the wood I enjoyed the sight of three Swallows from nearby Pyle Farm collecting mud for nest building. Earlier I had been in Havant Thicket with John Taylor who told me that he had recently seen a Whinchat on a wire fence separating the parts of the Gipsies Plain south of the Thicket.

WED 5 MAY

Early on Tuesday morning (May 4) John Taylor saw a BARN OWL hunting over Blendworth Common from the corner of Havant Thicket nearest Bells Copse and then found a SPOTTED FLYCATCHER in the same area. He also came on both Common and Lesser Whitethroat and other warblers (probably Blackcap or Garden Warbler) as well as Bullfinches.

A message from Mark Collier received via John Goodspeed tells of 2 MED GULLS identified by their calls off Southsea beach just east of the pier (presumably the South Parade Pier) at 7.30pm on Monday (May 3).

At Farlington Marshes on May 1 Mark saw both a RING OUZEL and a BLUE HEADED WAGTAIL.

A further message from Ian Thirlwell tells me that there were still five BRENT off the Milton shore of Langstone Harbour 'up to a couple of days ago'

John Gowen tells me that today the three BRENT geese were still in the mouth of the Langsbrook stream off the South Moors and that there were three GREAT CRESTED GREBE on the harbour a little further west – two of them behaving like a pair off the western edge of the South Moors proper. John also comments on the presence of three singing Blackcap in the short section of the Langsbrook south from the Xyratex approach road to the farm bridge.

The most interesting sight on my cycle ride from Havant to Gunner Point today was of a pair of LITTLE TERNS performing high speed aerobatics over the Hayling Oysterbeds lagoon before settling to sit quietly side by side on the 'long island' where they nested last year. Also on that island were two Oystercatchers with some distance between them, and a single RINGED PLOVER looking thoughtful. Over the main pool four Shelduck flew off at my approach – seemingly three large males and one smaller female which could well mean that one or even two of the 'spare males' might have nesting females nearby. By the bar of Stoke Bay a pair of EGRETS were feeding in close company, one with prominent plumes ... Along the Hayling Coastal Path Common Whitethroats were more numerous than in recent years, and I briefly heard the rattle of a single Lesser Whitethroat in the scrub of Stoke Common. On the west Hayling shore there are still up to 100 Oystercatcher and I saw two flocks each of around 25 Black Tailed Godwit, and three pairs of Shelduck other than those at the Oysterbeds. Langstone Mill Pond had one loud Reed Warbler, and three SWIFTS shot over low going north, but the male Swan was keeping well away from the nest so no imminent news of cygnets hatching.

MON 3 MAY

My last message this evening was from Trevor Carpenter describing seawatching at Hill Head yesterday (May 2). The main news is that BAR TAILED GODWIT are now passing in much larger flocks – at 7.30 in the evening Trevor saw a flock of at least 70, and an hour later others saw a massive flock of 300 birds, most if not all being Bar Tails. Earlier in the afternoon (4.30pm) the only POM SKUA of the day went past, and intriguingly when it got to Lee on Solent it turned inland and just maybe (to quote the Lottery advert) went over Trevor's garden in Fareham when he was not there to see it.

Yesterday Kevin Stouse led a walk around Titchfield Haven in glorious weather but his report on the birds seen is perhaps more notable for the birds they did not see rather than any they did. In particular he remarks on the total absence of hirundines – not even a Swallow, let alone Martins or a Swift – and of Willow Warbler. On the island in the river mouth a dozen TURNSTONE were roosting and with them was a single DUNLIN which must be the only one now left with us. Black Tailed Godwits were still on the pools and Lapwing were displaying over nesting territories, while a single GREENSHANK on the fields to the north was a good bonus. They had good views of two Cuckoo and also six CETTI'S WARBLERS (are they getting bolder?) but could not spot a singing Garden Warbler. Also mentioned in Kevin's list are Sedge and Reed Warblers, Whitethroat and Blackcap, and both Sparrowhawk and Kestrel. Over the sea they saw both Common and Sandwich Tern.

SWIFTS have arrived back in Havant - three shot over my house around 8am and a singleton was idling high over the house around 7pm. I also glimpsed a single HOUSE MARTIN that has probably returned to a nest site somewhere east of my house. I did not spend much time looking at garden birds on this sunny day, but took a nine mile walk from Woodcroft Farm (by the railway east of Chalton) though the West Harting Down area to South Harting and back during which the only birds of interest were rather unexpected for the area and time of day – first there were my first Moorhen chicks of the season on Woodcroft Farm pond (almost the only water I saw during the day), and second came calls from Tawny Owls involving at least four birds in two places at around 11am, one of the birds giving the best display of 'OCHARINA PLAYING' that I can recall (this in Star Copse around SU 764169 where I doubt there were any lurking human players of the instrument). Later in the walk, near Foxcombe Farm, I spent some time trying to get a glimpse of a singing GARDEN WARBLER but failed to do so – however I formulated a rule for distinguishing this bird's song from that of Blackcap. My rule is that in so far that a Blackcap sounds like a Song Thrush, to the same extent a Garden Warbler sounds like a Dunnock. Any comments?

PLANTS:

SUN 9 MAY

The big yellow flowers of SILVERWEED were out on Harting Down this morning and I came on 50 EARLY PURPLE orchids strung out along the top edge of the wood running down the west side of Whitcombe Bottom (around SU 797176) before descending from the South Downs Way to check the traditional BIRDS NEST ORCHID site on the banks of Hill Lane opposite Down Place. Sure enough there were already three of these orchids in bud and as a bonus one WHITE HELLBORINE was showing two white buds on the other side of the road. The only other 'first flower' seen hereabouts this morning was SPINDLE, though there was a mass of BLACK GRASS in some fields (I mentioned the first couple of spikes last Monday)

At the South Moors in the afternoon I found the first two flowers of DOG ROSE on a bush overhanging the Langbrook just south of Mill Lane, and in the 'orchid field' FALSE FOX SEDGE was now in flower along with YELLOW FLAG. Through in the old playing fields area one plant of HORSE RADISH was in full flower and on the hedge of the old footpath I found a few open flowers on WHITE BRYONY. Perhaps the prettiest new flower of the day was the HENBIT DEADNETTLE growing on on Budds Mound above the pools.

FRI 7 MAY

Referring to my thoughts expressed last Tuesday about the origins of the TUBEROUS COMFREY in Lumley Wood Michael Prior tells me that after the fire at Stansted House in 1900 much rubble and debris, possibly including soil from flower beds around the house, was dumped in a number of low spots all around the park. He says that you can still find bits of burnt brick in Lumley Wood, and comments that the Leopardsbane which grows in that wood can also be found in a more artificial environment in the Arboretum.

THU 6 MAY

In Havant Thicket this morning I not only found HEATH SEDGE (the densiflora subspecies) but also a new plant for me – GREEN RIBBED SEDGE with its distinctive green ribs and 'mucronate' points on the lower female spikelets. Later I visited The Holt and counted 1135 EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS in this excellent site – this orchid certainly is having a good year.

WED 5 MAY

The GUNNER POINT FLORA on Hayling today was magnificent. I arrived on Sinah Common at the south end of Staunton Avenue and went first to the 'CHILDING PINK' site where I was greatly surprised to see the plants well grown but with the terminal flower buds still sealed, and seemingly more numerous than last year (obviously the 'childing' business is flourishing). Close by in the short turf was one bright blue flower of SHEEP'S BIT (the only one I saw today but giving great promise for the next week or so). Continuing west the first thing I saw as I left the carpark and entered the beachland south of the Golf Course was SEA KALE in flower and the next was the mass of flowering YELLOW RATTLE that now cover much of the short grass and shingle. I had to go half way along the golf course to make my next find which was LITTLE ROBIN in flower – only two plants but when I found them there was no need to search for tiny flowers hidden by leaves – the pale pink flowers were reaching out to greet me and waving their yellow anthers to confirm their identity (Incidentally if you go looking for this rarity don't be confused by another semi-rarity that is also abundant on the shingle and has somewhat similar flowers – this is the ROUND LEAVED CRANESBILL that has now been in flower for two or three weeks and which resembles Dove's Foot Cranesbill but has flowers which show a white centre as well as the diagnostic abundant glandular hairs on the stems and leaves). Only then did I start on the main business of this visit (counting the GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS) which came up with a total of 4402 – allowing for error and for those that I missed I am sure the real total was over 4500 but probably not over 5000. During the count I not only saw a mass of SUBTERRANEAN CLOVER but also found large patches of the tiny BIRD'S FOOT which is so small that I'm sure I would have missed it had I not been covering the ground methodically. Also prominent in the short turf was the lovely MOUSE-EAR HAWKWEED. Before reaching Sinah Common I had added BUCK'S-HORN PLANTAIN, COMMON FIGWORT and BRAMBLE to my new flowers list and before I left I was delighted to find the first yellow flowers open in the TREE LUPINS.

Speaking to John Goodspeed this evening I learnt that he had today seen a single first FLY ORCHID flower on Portsdown.

TUE 4 MAY

TUBEROUS COMFREY is listed in the Flora of Hampshire as 'very rare' and in Stace as a native inhabitant of damp woods so it is possible that the plants in Lumley Wood at Stansted are native, but being near the House and in an obviously planted wood (and having the unusual Leopard's Bane as a close neighbour in the wood) it seems more likely that both species were introduced there many years ago to give interest to the plantation. Whatever their origin both species are well established and flourishing, and this year with only some ten flowering spikes of Leopard's Bane rising from the large mat of leaves the Tuberos Comfrey is clearly the most flourishing species with an estimated 350 flowering plants forming a dense patch of plants. (I saw them myself this afternoon)

BITING STONECROP came into flower today on top of the wall around St Faith's Church Hall in Havant where its bright yellow buds have been promising to open every day since I first noticed them there on March 20th.

MON 3 MAY

RAGGED ROBIN were flowering at Soberton over the weekend – one of my favourite flowers but even so this news that I was given yesterday slipped my memory when making yesterday's entries. Today the only new item for my year list was the sight of a mass of SCALY MALE FERN that had very nearly completed unrolling their fronds but were still exposing the underside of the rachis (the 'spine' of the whole leaf) which was thickly covered ('from base to apex') with a thick mat of richly golden hairs. Seeing this I was able to confirm their identity by the black patch at the base of each rhacilla (the minor 'spine' of each segment of the whole frond). Although there was nothing else that I had not seen before this year (sorry, I forget a couple of spikes of BLACK GRASS) there was a fantastic display of spring wild flowers. RED CAMPION is now becoming a dominant player and YELLOW ARCHANGEL had already done so in the woodland edges and hedgrows. BUGLE is now standing erect and to attention like ranks of bluecoat soldiers and both BLUEBELLS and RAMSONS covered acres of woodland floor. During my walk I came on at least sixty EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS scattered in six locations (one colony of at least 45 visible from the public path was at SU 764169 in Star Copse east of Ladyholt) and must have seen more than 100 of the less impressive Twayblades along the Harris Lane track through the woodland north of Barnet Copse. Another plant that was extra prolific was COWSLIP, and if you want to see wild flowers outdoing any formal garden walk through Nightingale Bottom (SU 766170) at this time of year.

INSECTS:

SUN 9 MAY

Yesterday the only butterfly which I saw was a definite LARGE WHITE in my garden. Today on Harting Down I saw perhaps a dozen 'whites' (one big enough to be LARGE) but had to record them all as unidentified 'White species'. With them were a few Orange Tip and one Speckled Wood. On Langstone South Moors the dry bank which keeps the Langbrook from flooding the moors is ideal habitat for mining bees and any areas of bare soil are riddled with tiny holes. Around these holes today were many small bees trying their best to look like tiny wasps in flight (yellow abdomen with black patterning) but which when they land cover up their bodies with seemingly black wings and look more like miniature Ichneumons on account of their long orange-yellow legs. I think these are Cuckoo Bees called NOMADA FULVICORNIS and that their intention was to lay their eggs in the tunnels already dug by more honest mining bees (their young then devouring the rightful owner grubs and any food left for them).

THU 6 MAY

Warm, damp air is good for fungi and in Havant Thicket this morning I found my first beautiful pink and yellow 'CHICKEN OF THE WOODS' (Sulphur Polypore) growing on a favourite substrate – a dead Yew stump. Over in the Holt I came on another much commoner yellow fungus – Sulphur-tuft.

WED 5 MAY

Other than one or two Orange Tips and a couple of 'small whites' the only butterfly I saw was a smashing new SMALL COPPER. Another distantly seen small brownish butterfly put me in mind of Small Heath but I see that the earliest sighting here last year was May 10th (county earliest was May 4th) so I guess I did not miss anything.

TUE 4 MAY

The SPECKLED YELLOW moth will soon be a very common daytime sight in woodland – I saw my first today in Stansted Forest. Also today I noticed the first large CRANE FLY (a Daddy-Long-Legs) on my back door.

MON 3 MAY

Mark Litjens went butterfly hunting both yesterday and today and has sent me this news of his successes.

“Yesterday I went to Martin Down and found 8 GREEN HAIRSTREAK. 1 singleton near the crossroads and a group of 7 feeding on Apple blossom (I think). I also found 4 GRIZZLED SKIPPER (2 near the crossroads and 2 in Kitts Wood) and 1 DINGY SKIPPER in Kitts Wood. Brimstones were all over, I counted 51 but I'm sure there were quite a few more. Also there 6 Peacock, 2 Small Tortoiseshell, 2 Green-veined White, 4 Orange Tip, 8 Speckled Wood, 2 Holly Blue. Today I went to Keyhaven and found 1 WALL BROWN (though it was quite early in the morning) and another at Hordle Cliffs. Finally onto Yew Hill were I recorded 14 Orange Tip, 2 Green-veined White, 16 Brimstone, 1 Peacock, 3 Holly Blue, 1 Green Hairstreak and 2 Speckled Wood. I also tried Bentley Wood to see if an early Pearl-bordered Fritillary had emerged but nothing doing that I saw anyway. I don't know how many Brimstone you have counted this year but Brimstones seem to be having a fabulous spring. I have counted nearly as many this spring as I counted in the entire 1998. It may be partly due to the fact I am visiting more habitat suitable to them than I did in 1998 and also I am spending more time butterflying than I did in 1998. On the down side Small Tortoiseshell numbers are down, as you have mentioned on your web pages. My sightings are 50% down on the same period in 1998. I know you have seen quite a few Small and Large Whites but I've only seen 1 one each so far this year. Orange Tip and Peacock also seem to be having a good spring, both well up on last spring in my eyes.”

We all need water on a regular basis and it was this need that gave me a super view of a male HOLLY BLUE when out today in hot sunshine on top of the Downs above South Harting walking along the dry and dusty South Downs Way. Approaching the road serving Foxcombe Farm I came on the only puddle which I saw anywhere on the South Downs Way, and as I trod around it the Holly Blue appeared around my ankles – it must have been on the ground drinking but had not had all it needed as it circled and landed again on the opposite side of the puddle. During my long walk I saw one of many male ORANGE TIP meet with a female, and also ticked several Peacock, some tatty Tortoiseshells, both male and female Brimstone, only three Speckled Wood, and a series of ‘small whites’ that may have been genuine or may have been Green Veined or female Orange tips.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 9 MAY

On Harting Down this morning I found St George's Mushrooms in two places and then came on a very healthy young Dryad's Saddle. A little later I came on what must have been two more of this species of bracket fungus growing from either side of a tree stump but both slugs and snails had been feasting on them so that the tawny streaked cap was almost pure white and the underside resembled a Hedgehog fungus more than a polypore. The state of the fungus was immediately forgotten when I discovered two of the snails which had been feasting on it were DOOR SNAILS – the sort that can be mistaken for beech buds that have dropped from the trees. These are not uncommon in appropriate old woodland on chalk but this is the first time I have ever seen them – my only regret is this I did not measure them (or search around for empty shells) to get an idea of which of three species I was looking at.

FRI 7 MAY

A note from Michael Prior reports ‘still good numbers of HARES east of the Forestside Road in woods and fields’ and he goes on to say that if Foxes and Hare Coursing are not allowed to become a problem the Hare population is likely to flourish. He says “I have recently read that on some Norfolk estates hare numbers are getting back to a level where they have re-introduced Hare shoots to check the numbers”.

Michael Prior also comments on MUNTJAC Deer that he used to live in a part of the country where they were common and he saw them regularly – so far he had not seen one at Stansted and he doubts that they are present here in any numbers. This comment co-incides with news from Chris Fairhead that a photograph that he took of three ‘small deer’ in Stansted Forest recently has now been developed and shows that they were Roe after all.

THU 6 MAY

Driving to Havant Thicket this morning I saw the corpse of a tiny Fox cub lying at the side of the road outside the Leigh Park Gardens stable block – it looked hardly big enough to have changed its brown baby coat for the red of a young fox.

TUE 4 MAY

A single HARE seen in the north east section of Stansted Forest was the first I have seen this year

MON 3 MAY

Coming back from South Harting through the West Harting Down woods (at SU 763176) I joined the broad Sussex Border Path track from a ‘short cut’ route and as I stepped onto the broad rutted track I noticed a

'flopping' about 100 yards along the track – my binoculars turned this shape into a composite of very dead floppy rabbit and very live STOAT which was heaving and jerking the body across the track. The Stoat saw me and momentarily abandoned its task to run for cover, but as I stood still it was back within seconds. I gave it time to get the body into cover, but by the time I had walked to the spot the struggle to 'get the family shopping home' was still going on in tangle of brambles. Once more the Stoat momentarily fled, but I walked on to avoid adding to the difficulty of its task. I reckon the nearest place that the rabbit could have been found and killed was more than 200 metres away outside the wood, and I can't imagine how much further the Stoat had to travel to reach its lair. This the second time I have seen this dedication to family survival from a Stoat – the first time was years ago in Stansted Park Slip where I was attracted to the scene by the death screams of the rabbit (audible a quarter mile away) and watched the Stoat solve the problem of getting its burden past a tree trunk that had fallen across its chosen route. I have also seen the same dedication in a WEASEL which insisted in carrying its burden of a Bank Vole across the Southmoor Lane in front of my car with fatal consequences for the Weasel (I have the photo to prove that one).

At around 7pm last Friday (Apr 30) Chris Fairhead was in the Lady's Walk at Stansted and saw three 'small deer' together at the same time that he heard what he thought was a dog barking nearby – afterwards he realised that it could have been MUNTJAC. Chris took one or more photos from about 150yards with a zoom lens and is now waiting for the photos to be developed to help identify the deer. I am convinced that there are Muntjac in the area, and was with a group of people walking down the Lady's Walk a few years ago when we were pretty sure that a Muntjac dashed across our path, so we await further proof. Without real experience of these small deer I think the things to look for are their very small size, standing much lower than a Roe and looking more like a pig than a deer (back legs taller than the front, rather like a Hare), and I would expect that when startled they would run like a pig (where a Roe would bound away) charging through any undergrowth. The dog like barking is also said to be characteristic – not just isolated barks but a lengthy repetitive barking from dense undergrowth. If anyone is familiar with them please give us the benefit of your experience.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 17

APR 26 – MAY 2

BIRDS:

SUN 2 MAY

Alistair Martin told me this evening that he had today seen, but not heard, two TURTLE DOVE back in the small copse between the Westcroft Riding Stables and the Hayling Coastal Path just south of the Hayling Oysterbeds and Stoke Bay. He also said that a couple of hours patient dusk watch for BARN OWL over the North Hayling fields near Upper Tye Farm had been fruitless (bet the owls enjoyed his failure as they watched him and Jenni)

News from the Titchfield Haven area came via Trevor Carpenter today and began with a report of an ALPINE SWIFT seen in the Chilling/Brownwich area last Thursday (Apr 29) – no further detail, but I bet the bird was annoyed having come all this way to look in on Pete Potts at his home only to find he was away in Icleand (Pete too may have his regrets at not being there to greet it). A MARSH HARRIER seen at the Haven on Thursday stayed over until Friday and two GARGANEY were there on Friday. I was under the impression that Garganey were very early migrants and that if they hadn't been seen by the end of March they would not be seen until return passage in August (when they are unidentifiable!) but this year the first I have heard of was at Farlington Deeps on Apr 26th, followed by these two at Titchfield – looking at Birds of Hampshire I see that though they are normally expected in early to mid-March, with a peak before mid-April, "in some recent years the first have not been seen until late April or May".

Trevor goes on to say that sea-watching has not been very exciting this week with Sandwich and Common Terns as the main component, with BAR TAILED GODWIT moving west in small numbers – max flock of 15 - on Friday (when John Gowen saw his small flock of nine flying past the South Moors). New arrivals at the Haven this morning (Sunday) included 4 separate GRASSHOPPER WARBLERS (each having a singing Cuckoo to add music (?) to the brush drums of the 'Groppers' rhythm section.

A message from Mike Collins confirms that there were LESSER WHITETHROAT at the South Moors on Thursday (Apr 29) and tells of his sighting of a POM SKUA at Selsey on Friday (at 5.30 am), close enough for Mike to see 'spoons and all' in its tail. On Saturday mist precluded sea watching but in the evening he saw a male POCHARD on the Budds Farm pools (which reminds me that during the past

week since the episode of the Ferruginous Duck there a week ago I came across 'WHITE EYED POCHARD' as a name for Ferruginous Duck – it seems they do have white around their eyes and look much more like Pochard than Tufted Duck in silhouette). Also from the South Moors yesterday evening (May 1) Mike saw a lone Brent out on the mud with a lone BARNACLE GOOSE for company – maybe one of those missing from Baffins Pond – he also had two more Lesser Whitethroat in the hedge of Southmoor Lane.

A third message this evening was from John Taylor at Rowlands Castle who tells me that last Friday evening he saw a FIRECREST in Havant Thicket (by the picnic site in the area just north of the carpark) and reports the presence of a pair of Treecreeper which may have young (there are probably several pairs in the Thicket as we have sightings of them in four of the 'compartments' into which we have arbitrarily divided the Thicket, but proving breeding of these elusive birds is bound to be a problem unless we can find a nest or see young being fed). John has also seen juvenile Song Thrushes and Blackbirds carrying food for young, which reminds me that earlier this week I heard Mistle Thrush song near my garden a day before I heard a loud dispute between the Thrush and the local Magpies which I then saw was because the Thrushes has a youngster in our garden, so I assume the song was an announcement to the world that their eldest offspring had just left the nest. Getting back to the Thicket John confirms that I am not alone in not hearing owls there – he has not heard them for months.

SAT 1 MAY

Alistair Martin told me that Jason Crook had had one or more LESSER WHITETHROAT at Sandy Point in the last few days, giving me slightly more confidence that I had heard one at the South Moors on Thursday (the short snatches of 'rattle' heard distantly in the strong wind were so brief that I did not even note them for that day), but this afternoon at Fort Purbrook one was singing and showing well in the scrub by the slip road on the south side of Crookhorn Lane where I park to visit the Fort. I was close enough to it to hear the preliminary warble as well as the far carrying rattle, and I even saw it singing in an aerial song flight imitating its 'Common' cousin. In the evening I made a quick visit to Marlpit Lane to hear Nightingale song but found that the country east of Havant was clothed in dense mist (as Langstone Harbour had been when looking down from Portsdown at 4pm). Nevertheless I pressed on and found the Marlpit Lane site relatively clear (though very gloomy with the mist forming a low dark roof) with several bird species, including Cuckoo, singing but no Nightingale at first. Walking around the site I had almost given up hope when an extraordinary sound came from the field west of the road across which a footpath goes to Woodmancote – the sound was the drone of BAGPIPES, soon joined by the higher and more tuneful (?) higher notes of the skirl. This turned out to be too much for one NIGHTINGALE in the north hedge and it burst into protest song. So we now know both the cause of the mist (just 'Mull of Kintyre' special effect needed by the piper) and how to 'turn on' a reluctant Nightingale.

John Gowen rang to tell me of three of the 29 bird species seen during this morning's outing to Lowton's Copse at Clanfield – aware of the car break-ins suffered by people parking by the copse on North Lane they parked in Clanfield and walked up Little Hyden Lane where both Common Whitethroat and a GARDEN WARBLER were in the hedges. In the copse itself the finds were mainly of botanic interest but John did comment on a Bullfinch before telling me of more interesting birds seen by him yesterday at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream on the South Moors where two EGRETS continue to provoke thoughts that they may be nesting nearby. The three summering BRENT were still there with no thoughts of nesting, but a flock of 9 smartly plumaged BAR TAILED GODWIT were probably on their way to arctic breeding and a flock of 25 small waders that were almost certainly Ringed Plover flew south to the Oysterbeds where we hope several pairs will nest.

Theo Roberts today told me that a LONG TAILED TIT family had been in his garden this week and that he was not as surprised as Pete Potts had been by my claim to have heard the noise of a similar family at Stansted on April 14th but he did express doubt when I told him of Kevin Stouse's claim to have heard FEMALE BLACKCAP singing in Stansted Forest (see April 22nd). Can any of you support Kevin's claim either from your own experience or from the weighty words in those vast books in which you have sunk the family fortune? Theo also told me that his family had been in the news with an item on BBC TV South Today last night featuring the PEREGRINE NEST BOX put on the roof of a tall block of flats in Brighton last year by Graham. It seems that the box now has a TV camera set up to watch it and viewers were able to see eggs in the nest to confirm that the nest is in use, Theo had also recently been to Bath where a pair of Pergrines have set up their own urban nest unaided on a church in the city.

FRI 30 APR

I went to look for GARDEN WARBLER at Stansted and found three there this morning (seen as well as heard). The first of them was in the large triangular fenced enclosure on the north side of the Main Avenue with the 'ornamental drive' along its north side and the southern end of the grassy 'Broad

Avenue' marking its western end (I hear that Michael Prior calls the the 'Mutton Chop' enclosure) – this patch always attracts Garden Warbler and gives you a good chance of seeing them. The other two were in Lyels Wood to the south.. Further east along the ornamental drive I saw one of the many male BLACKCAPS adding a further twist to the rumour (originating in Kevin Stouse's recent account of hearing female Blackcaps singing) that it is the females who 'wear the trousers' in this species – what I saw was a male Blackcap sitting very upright with its wings held slightly away from the body (reminding me of a Penguin) and with a large tuft of straw held horizontally in its beak as if awaiting orders from the female as to how it should build a nest for her.

The first thing I saw at Stansted this morning was a large tractor coming down the Ornamental Drive towards me – I stood aside to let it pass but it stopped and the door opened to reveal that the driver was Michael Sutton to whom I had chatted about birds last time I was in the Forest, and this morning he had two pieces of news for me – the first being that earlier this morning he had been in Lyels Wood and seen a Buzzard soar up to be joined when high in the sky by a 'long tailed raptor with distinctively angled wings' which must have been one of the RED KITES. He told me that Michael Prior had also seen it, and he then gave me the other piece of news which was that the strange birds seen about a month ago by Michael were not Kites (as he had led me to believe at our last meeting) but a pair of RAVENS. This tends to confirm Alistair Martin's sighting in Stansted Forest on March 19, and fits in with John Taylor's sighting in Rowlands Castle last Wednesday.

Having to visit Ditcham Park School today I was pleased to see at least six HOUSE MARTINS circling the buildings, and later in the afternoon at Neville's Park (the rough ground by the Hermitage Stream between the A3M and Leigh Park) I found a pair of STONECHAT in residence – I was there partly because yesterday Doug Yelland had told me he thought he had heard a Nightingale there (the damp thickets should suit them). Another item from Doug Yelland was a rumour that a mystery bird of prey that had been closely seen by a farmer in the West Walk/Rookesbury area near Wickham recently had been identified by 'a man from Titchfield' as a ROUGH LEGGED BUZZARD. A Common Buzzard sounds much more likely to me, especially as one of the things the bird was said to do was to take worms from the ground close to the farmer's tractor (presumably when ploughing)

THU 29 APR

An e-mail which arrived late on Wednesday evening, when I had completed the update for that day, was from John Taylor of Rowlands Castle to tell me that a RAVEN had perched on the roof of his house at 7.30 that morning (Apr 28), had stayed for about ten minutes, then flown off but returned an hour later. John was confident of the birds identity from its gruff notes and long wedge-shaped tail (plus the size). Checking in Birds of Hampshire I see that 150 years ago Ravens were widespread breeding birds in Hampshire, but that as a result of persecution the last nested in 1887. During the 1951 – 1992 period covered in detail by the book Ravens were seen in 22 years, with a total of 39 birds – the peak months for sightings being March and April.

My own observations today were not so significant but a walk to Budds Farm discovered the CANADA GOOSE pair on the pools had six young (which I will call 'guzzlings' as more appropriate than goslings). There were still 45 Tufted Duck on the pools and 4 BRENT at the mouth of the Langbrook, and on my way home I found 4 Swallows circling Wade Court Farm

WED 28 APR

At Sandy Point this morning I was told that a PURPLE HERON had been seen to fly in from the sea at Hayling Bay last Monday (Apr 26). I heard two slightly different accounts, one naming Tim Lawman as the person who saw it, the other saying it was spotted by Tim Timlick. At a guess they both saw the bird but Tim Timlick (the windows of whose flat look out onto Hayling Bay, and who has more time for bird watching) is the more likely one to have seen it first. Pete Durnell also told me that a PURPLE SANDPIPER has been seen occasionally over the past few weeks on the introduced rocks south of the Sandy Point reserve.

On my way to Sandy Point I heard Reed Warbler chattering in the reeds at Langstone Pond and watched a female MERGANSER fly from the lagoon at the Hayling Oysterbeds when I arrived there – I assume this to be one of the birds which spent last summer there so I hope to see it again soon. On the 'island' (old bund wall) in the lagoon a single Shelduck was sitting patiently (two other pairs had been actively feeding in the main pool), making me wonder if it had a mate already in the artificial nest tunnel put there last year by the Friends of Langstone Harbour – I think they normally lay their eggs in May.

John Goodspeed today watched 4 BUZZARD over the Southwick woodland in the Lye Heath area (centred around SU 650087) to the annoyance of the local Crows. Over the fields a little south of this point (and north of Hookheath Pond) he watched what is now a greater rarity than the Buzzards – a pair of

LAPWING making their sweeping territorial flights and uttering the evocative 'pee-wit' calls

TUE 27 APR

Brian Fellows visited Portsea Island today, starting at the Southsea Canoe Lake, where there are still 37 Swans, before arriving at Baffins Pond. Here he saw three adult LITTLE GREBE with one CHICK – perhaps the presence of three parents caused its seemingly early arrival. I have always thought of Dabchick as late nesters and expect to see the young in July or even August/September on the IBM Lake, but checking my 'Bird's Nest' book I see that these birds have two or even three broods in a year so they must start reasonably early. Of the many other birds on this pond Brian could only see 26 of last years 42 BARNACLE GEESE and while he admits that he may have missed some he thinks some must have moved elsewhere.

At Budds Farm pools Brian Fellows found the Tufted Duck were down to 36 in number (with no sign of the Ferruginous Duck though he did spot a female Tufty that had been dyeing its hair - it had a creamy tuft). A male GADWALL was late in the winter visitor season but I see that these birds have been breeding in Hampshire since 1983 and the new 1997 Hampshire Bird Report details 19 breeding pairs in the county in that year, with one at Titchfield Haven being the nearest to us. While there Brian saw a couple of Common Tern and counted 27 Swans in the mouth of the Hermitage Stream, and he ends his input with news that a Swan found dead in the Emsworth Slipper Mill Pond on Monday was a juvenile and the cause of death was probably a road accident – although this is sad news I am pleased that the dead bird was not one of the Peter Pond breeding pair (now sitting on their nest)

MON 26 APR

Early this morning Chris Cockburn located a male GARGANEY at the Farlington Deeps and by midday Dave Mead had seen it and rang me with the news. While waiting for the lovely drake to show itself in the channels at the back of the Deeps he located 5 resident YELLOW WAGTAIL and he also met Jason Crook who updated him on the FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Budds Farm Pools. It seems the duck was first seen on Friday night (Apr 23) by a person or persons unknown and that Jason then saw it on Saturday evening but people looking for it on Sunday failed to find it. Dave also told me that his RSPB Group had been at Bramshott Common (near Hindhead) on Saturday and had seen a male GOSHAWK joined in its flight by a female, the two going off together – he didn't claim that the female flew off its nest but the thought occurred...

This evening more exciting news came from Barry Collins who today saw three KENTISH PLOVER together on Pilsey Sands. Yesterday he spotted on female there, but with over thirty Kentish Plover sightings at Pilsey on his life list he was not madly excited, but when he returned to the sands today and found a male with two females (bringing his tick list to 33 birds) he did feel something special was afoot (I imagine he is now writing a sign saying "Area reserved for nesting Kentish Plover", but perhaps he will wait till he can prove breeding). Also on Thorney a TURTLE DOVE which arrived on Saturday is still present today and probably will stay and breed. Other news from Thorney includes a sighting of one ARCTIC SKUA, and Barry tells me he has heard that about a week ago 11 BONXIES went past Selsey Bill (not sure if they formed a flock or were a day total).

David Parker was at the Hayling Oysterbeds yesterday and while in the area came on the first GARDEN WARBLER that I have heard. Other birds seen were a good dozen Swallows, 6 Whimbrel, 5 Common and 1 Sandwich Tern, Wheatear, Sedge Warbler and numerous Whitethroat. One bird not seen was Little Tern.

John Goodspeed was in the northern end of The Holt yesterday morning where he saw a Marsh/Willow Tit and heard notes which sounded very like the 'tchay' call of WILLOW TIT on his CD ROM, but although he heard no distinctive Marsh Tit notes he admits that as there was a Great Tit in the vicinity he cannot be certain of its identity. Another mystery for the HOS survey team to clear up. John says that, unlike Brian Fellows, he has no complaint about loud mouthed Song Thrushes but is regularly awoken in the mornings by a pair of Green Woodpecker in his garden.

A phone call from a lady in Emsworth this morning included news of a dead Swan seen at the southern end of the Slipper Mill pond – no doubt we will have fuller info from Brian Fellows but my guess would be that it was hit by a car when flying across the main road at the north end of the pond.

Mark Litjens was down at Hurst Castle early on Saturday and although there was no massive seabird passage at that time he did have a BONXIE (his first in Hampshire) with single Gannet, Shag, Wheatear and Little Tern. On Sunday morning he was at Titchfield Haven for an hour of seawatching which gave him 1 ARCTIC SKUA and 3 Little Tern. In the New Forest he eventually heard a WOOD WARBLER in the Bolderwood area after a lengthy search there and in Milkham Enclosure. In addition to the seawatching results already noted from observers at Selsey and Hill Head (see yesterday's notes) Mark passes on news from Titchfield Haven of a SURF SCOTER going east last Thursday (Apr 22 – seen at Milford as well as

Titchfield), a POM SKUA and BLACK TERN seen on Wed (Apr 21) and both GREAT and ARCTIC SKUAS on Tuesday (Apr 20)

I thought it worth checking Aldsworth Pond for Garganey this evening and listening for Grasshopper Warbler by the stream running south of the pond, but had no luck with either. I did however see a strange duck on the pond which was almost certainly one of those "Aytha hybrids". It was slightly larger than the nearby Tufted Ducks and had a rounded, tuftless head and lots of white around the base of the bill (which was broad and pale leaden colour), suggesting female Scaup. The head, neck, mantle and wing coverts were all very dark, again as female Scaup, but the flanks and breast were all of a rich reddish brown and the undertail coverts were pure white as if it had a mixture of Ferruginous duck, and when it was rear on for a couple of minutes it was holding its tail pointing up to form a prominent inverted V rather like a Moorhen. At one point one of the male Tufted Duck 'went for it' as if to drive it off, and it looked nothing like his drab female Tufty. At another moment it stretched its neck upwards as if in some sort of display, making it look much larger than the Tufties.

PLANTS:

SUN 2 MAY

The far south east corner of the Southleigh Forest known as Longcopse and backing on to Monks Farm at Westbourne is always a delight to visit at this time of year and today I was amazed to count over 900 EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS there plus the tiny white stars of flowers on THREE VEINED SANDWORT (*Moehringia trinerva*). My only wish for improvement to this isolated area of damp sunlit woodland would be to find Opposite Leaved Golden Saxifrage in this 'flood plain' – mainly because this attractive little plant seems not to exist in 'my patch'.

SAT 1 MAY

BIRD'S FOOT TREFOIL is sometimes called 'Eggs and Bacon' and like them it is essential as a breakfast item preceding the main feast of summer flowers. I found a good many of its flowers already open on Portsdown this afternoon, together with spreading panicles of several species of grass whose flowers will soon open. The only grass of which I could be confident was the SOFT BROME (Lop Grass) but I brought home a couple more species that I have not yet studied, together with what I think was CHALK MILKWORT (but I see that once more I omitted to look for the major key item for identifying it, the presence of a basal rosette of leaves – the base of all the plants I looked at were hidden in thicker vegetation). Despite the growth of scrub around the roadside south of Crookhorn Lane a few plants of Common Gromwell can still be seen, though not yet flowering.

Gwynne Johnson has given me the botanic highlights of the Evening Class visit to Lowton's Copse where BUSH VETCH, TWAYBLADE, PIGNUT, SANICLE and SOLOMON'S SEAL were 'first flowerings', as was BOG BEAN in the Clanfield Village Pond. Other good sightings were of ALBINO EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS (three among other normal coloured spikes), TOOTHWORT, Woodruff and Early Dog Violet. I was particularly interested to hear of a patch of SHINING CRANESBILL flowering at the road junction just north of Clanfield Church where you turn left to East Meon opposite the Rising Sun pub.

FRI 30 APR

Driving past Lumley Wood at Stansted this evening I was able to see around half a dozen plants of LEOPARD'S BANE in flower and I had the impression that the large patch of leaves is not intending to send up any more flower spikes – we shall see. In Stansted Forest this morning the Yellow Pimpernel in Lyels Wood was in full flower as the Wood Anemones fade away. Bluebells are of course still giving a fine show as Hawthorn everywhere comes into full flower. Two other plants that are now starting to flourish are Common Vetch and Thyme Leaved Speedwell.

THU 29 APR

On Budds Mound today I found my first GREEN FIELD SPEEDWELL of the year and on the South Moors I was able to identify DISTANT SEDGE which is now showing multiple spikelets of flowers with a good 'distance' between them. I had been puzzled by this species on my last visit to the Moors when it was only showing a single male spikelet at the tip, the lower females being still hidden in the leaf axils. Coming back along Mill Lane a large tuft of GREY SEDGE was holding out its long, multi-spikelet stems with no attempt at concealment

WED 28 APR

At Sandy Point this morning large patches of close cropped turf were either white with the flowers of

SUBTERRANEAN CLOVER (easy to overlook these as a scattering of white petals that have fallen from perhaps Blackthorn blossom), blue with COMMON DOG VIOLETS, or pink with a mass of LOUSEWORT. Nearer the shore where SEA MOUSE-EAR was the dominant flower close inspection of the turf revealed a million minute points of sky blue from smaller than usual plants of WALL SPEEDWELL and even closer searching revealed both BIRD'S FOOT and SPRING VETCH with plenty of CHANGING FORGET-ME-NOT. Easier to spot were the bright yellow petals of TORMENTIL, another first flowering for me. Pete Durnell also showed us COMMON MILKWORT in bright blue and pure white, and HEATH MILKWORT (with its lower leaves set opposite each other) in a pale slatey blue. Before arriving at the reserve I had been to Gunner Point where the GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS are profuse and probably at their best (one or two already going over), and SEA RADISH, BUR CHERVIL and THRIFT are now fully out. On the shingle the plants of LITTLE ROBIN are the largest I can remember seeing, but not a hint of a flower showing yet, and on the corner by the Ferry Inn the plants of 'Snow in Summer' (Cerastium tomentosum) are now flowering. On the shingle of the Eastoke promenade one plant of PERENNIAL WALL-ROCKET held out its large yellow flowers to passers by. Cycling along the Seafront Road I found the grass verge outside number 164 had been mown, exposing a mass of Doves Foot Cranesbill and a few flowering plants of the MUSK STORKSBILL which Pete Selby discovered there earlier this year (the large distinctive leaves have suffered from the mowing and the remaining flowers are remarkably pale pink - perhaps from shock)

By The GEORGE pub on Portsdown the first WHITE VALERIAN is flowering alongside RED, and PINK OXALIS can be seen by the roadside in the valley north of the hill near the Wayfarers Way at Purbrook Heath where John Goodspeed found a white flowered plant which he believes may be Perennial Honesty, a species whose existence I had to check in Stace – as it is not mentioned in the Hants Flora I wonder if this was the normal Annual Honesty which can occasionally be white flowered.

TUE 27 APR

Today's only new flower was LESSER SWINE CRESS growing from another roadside crack in Havant (and giving off the strong scent of cress when picked)

MON 26 APR

Today's surprise was to find a single healthy 'bush' of CORNSALAD growing from a roadside crack where the Pallant carpark in Havant exits onto the Pallant. Should it survive to seed I hope to check its species, but for the moment it goes down as Valenianella locusta/carinata.

I made a quick afternoon visit to Catherington Down and was much impressed by the state of the reserve where considerable scrub clearance has taken place along the eastern edge and in the grassland, much of it by human volunteer effort but greatly aided I think by animal grazing. The net result is much more close cropped sward than usual, with great potential for flowers and insects to flourish and already there is a tremendous display of COWSLIPS (mostly tiny to suit the style of sward). Among the other plants currently flowering I think I found SPRING SEDGE as well as the inevitable Carex flacca. The one I could not be sure of (and dare not pick on the reserve as at first I could see only two plants) was very small (max 6 or 7 cm high) and had its terminal male spikelet (already flowering) of reddish brown (unlike the black of the Glaucous Sedge) but the leaves were of a yellow green colour where Francis Rose says they should be bright green. I must go again with book in hand. On the way home I visited Chalton Down and found my first COMMON MILKWORT and noted that a mass of MUSK THISTLES on the east facing brow of the hill above the railway bridge were already forming their flower heads – I am always surprised how early these thistles flower. WAYFARING TREES were already in full flower.

INSECTS:

SUN 2 MAY

In today's sunshine I watched a small bee or wasp constructing what I assumed was a nest in one of the bricks of my house wall. Presumably there had been a small fault in the brick but there was now a small round tunnel about 5 mm in diameter into which the small black insect would fly to emerge with a granule of brick in its jaws a moment later – it would then fly about a metre, dropping the spoil, to return to the hole and repeat the process. If anyone can suggest the species I would be grateful.

SAT 1 MAY

A phone call this morning from Theo Roberts told me that during his butterfly transect in the Fort Purbrook area of Portsdown yesterday (Apr 30) he had seen the first two GREEN HAIRSTREAK and that he had then gone to the south facing slope of the hill above Paulsgrove (below the now abandoned DRA site) and had seen 5 WALL BROWN sunning themselves on the bare chalk of the paths that cross this face.

I made a brief visit to the Fort Purbrook site around 4pm today but my only butterfly finds were of a HOLLY

BLUE along with the inevitable Orange Tips and male Brimstone plus one Speckled Wood. I did however spot a large 'woolly bear' caterpillar in the grass and am pretty sure from its size, colour and presence on grass, and by the time of year, that it was a DRINKER MOTH caterpillar. These hibernate as caterpillars and continue feeding on grasses until they are about 7.5cm long when they pupate in June to emerge in July. They get their name from the caterpillar's reported habit of drinking drops of dew (have you ever seen any caterpillar drinking?).

FRI 30 APR

In sunshine yesterday and today I have seen many Orange Tip butterflies together with Small and Green Veined Whites (even one possible Large White), Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Brimstone, Speckled Wood and two Commas but no more Holly Blue and no new species. In Stansted today I came on two Bee-flies and with a colony of tiny black mining bees (presumed *Halictus rubicundus*) there were a number of tiny black and yellow (sometimes looking like specks of gold) insects that I think may have been *NOMADA FULVICORNIS* (it had the orange/yellow legs of this species as well as the patterned abdomen). It's presence among the mining bees and it's interest in their nest tunnels would agree with it being a 'cuckoo species' which this is.

WED 28 APR

Yesterday Mark Litjens made a brief lunch time visit to Yew Hill and recorded 3 Small Tortoiseshell, 6 male and 4 female Brimstone, 4 Speckled Wood, 1 Peacock, 1 Green-veined White and 1 Holly Blue. Today he also managed to take in Magdalen Hill Down and his list was 19 BRIMSTONE (8 MALE and 11 FEMALE), 3 Small Tortoiseshell, 3 Peacock, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Green-veined White and 4 Orange Tip where it was sheltered. Good to see that there are now plenty of female Brimstone.

Today John Goodspeed took a lengthy walk in the country north of Portsdown where he says he lost count of the Peacocks and Small Whites but noted one COMMA, half a dozen Speckled Wood and three Orange Tip. In Emsworth Brian Fellows noted three Peacock chasing each other around Brook Meadow today – this species is certainly thriving.

I know that Holly Blues and Orange Tips has both been seen by some for about a month now but it gave me great pleasure to see my first Holly Blue at Sandy Point this morning and then to return home to find one flying in my garden. To top this a female Orange Tip (again my first female) settled in a perfect pose on a Raspberry leaf, giving a full sunlit view of the upper side of its left wing and the beautiful underside of its right wing at the same time. During the morning on Hayling I saw a good many Speckled Wood and singles of Small White, Orange Tip, Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, and in the Sandy Point reserve a Brimstone Moth flew past and then settled in the sun to give us good views. Less beautiful were the many ST MARKS FLIES now dangling their jet black bodies in the air (I see St Marks Day was last Sunday, April 25th)

MON 26 APR

At Martin Down and Kitts Wood last Saturday Mark Litjens saw single Orange Tip and Peacock with 3 Speckled Wood, then in Martin Village came on 4 Orange Tip, 1 Holly Blue and 2 Brimstone. At Bentley Wood he found 12 male and 4 female Brimstone with single Speckled Wood and Peacock. Today at Hursley just one Orange Tip came out at lunch time, choosing to take its sustenance from Cow Parsley.

At Catherington Down this afternoon I enjoyed one male ORANGE TIP and then glimpsed a large, dark fast flying butterfly which seemed to have the red and white flashes of a RED ADMIRAL. Also on this reserve I found a number of TAWNY MINING BEES, the first I have seen this year. Going on to Chalton Down I came on what I believe to be a 'PILL WOODLOUSE' (it rolled itself into tight ball before I could see its legs) and on looking it up I find it has the memorable name of *ARMADILLIDIUM VULGARE*. At the foot of the down – not in the marshy habitat it is supposed to like but in damp vegetation – I saw one of the small but long and thin black and red striped rove beetles which I believe to be *PAEDERUS LITTORALIS*, and if so they are apparently one of the most poisonous insects of our countryside (I discovered this after encouraging a very young girl to take one home in her bug box, but so long as she did not eat the insect she probably came to no harm).

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 1 MAY

The Evening Class made an unusual discovery at Lowton's Copse near Clanfield today of an EDIBLE MOREL fungus. Gwynne Johnson who told me of this find also told me that she has had Grass Snakes, Slow-worms, Toads, Frogs and both Common and Palmate Newts in her garden at Soberton, and Sue

Drewett told me of the first GRASS SNAKE seen hunting in her pond and of a 'mangy Vixen' seen in her garden for which she would like some dietary advice. When I was on Portsdown today I disturbed an old Fox with a long piece of 'hairless rope' for a tail and Sue says here Vixen shows the same symptom of a hairless tail.

FRI 30 APR

While in Lyels Wood at Stansted today around midday I was walking along a ride which has deep tractor ruts when I saw a STOAT dashing towards me down one of these ruts. I was about twenty yards away when it saw me and immediately turned tail, disappearing by a left turn at the next junction only to re-appear crossing the junction and heading off to the right. A lovely sight and much nicer than the road casualty I saw recently near Idsworth.

WED 28 APR

Pete Durnell tells me that Herpetological experts have declared Sandy Point nature reserve to have one of the highest SLOW-WORM and COMMON LIZARD population densities anywhere in the British Isles and I am prepared to believe this after seeing Pete lift a small square of corrugate iron (only about 2 ft x 2ft) to reveal a collection of 9 Slow-worms, mostly large, this morning.

The six large TERRAPINS which Brian Fellows saw at Baffins Pond on March 16th are still there – he saw them sunning themselves on the main island yesterday. (Having watched the BBC 2 'Hisory Zone' programme about the 'Land Runners of Arizona' broadcast on Saturday evening, May 1st, I must add a comment on the 'TERRAPIN DERBY' races that – along with wrestling bulls to the ground by biting their noses with your bare teeth – formed one of the entertainments of these everyday frontier folk. They would collect hundreds of Terrapins and put them on the ground within a huge version of one of those circular pastry cutters used for cutting out the pastry for mince pies and the like. After marking the shells of the Terrapins and placing their bets the circular metal wall retaining them was lifted by a crane and the Terrapins headed off to make their escape from this unfriendly situation and the first one to head in the right direction and cross the finishing line was the winner.)

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 16 APR 19 – 25

BIRDS:

SUN 25 APR

My final trawl for messages before putting tonight's edition (and myself) to bed produced the best fish of the day. Just two messages – the first from Trevor Carpenter who was at Gilkicker from 6.30 to 9am today, seeing 2 ARCTIC SKUA and 1 adult LITTLE GULL plus Terns, etc, and then at Hill Head from 4 to 6.45pm where his list included 3 ARCTIC SKUA, 1 KITTIWAKE, 31 WHIMBREL and 2 BLACK NECKED GREBE on the sea. Trevor also speaks of two Little Egret regularly seen in Fareham Creek (possibly a pair that will nest at Bedenham) and passes on news from Selsey of more SKUAS (6 ARCTIC, 1 POM and 1 BONXIE), plus news of a GRASSHOPPER WARBLER at Browndown. The second of tonight's messages was from Ian Calderwood who has just returned from a round the world trip to do some real birding at Selsey where he was this morning from 8 to 11am. He missed the Pom and Bonxie but did see 4 ARCTIC SKUA, 3 RED THROATED DIVER, 1 LITTLE GULL about 10 WHIMBREL, about 40 COMMON SCOTER including some white bellied males, plus Common, Sandwich and Little Terns. (I'm not sure of the significance of the white bellies on the Scoter – I thought males were black all over – can anyone enlighten me?). Ian then had a PEREGRINE and singing GRASSHOPPER WARBLER at Church Norton, and tells me that others had seen BLACK TERNS with a GREEN SANDPIPER at Sidlesham Ferry. He did see both SAND and HOUSE MARTINS at Chichester (Ivy Lake). He ends by saying that security has been tightened at the Bedenham/Frater Naval Armaments Depot and that although Egrets can be seen flying in and out of the Heronry he is finding it harder than usual to get access to count the birds.

Kevin Stouse's long walk from Warblington to Farlington Marshes and back offered excellent birding and none of the anticipated rain. Swallows have now started to settle in and a pair that we hope will nest in the 'big black barn' were weaving among the cattle on the Warblington fields as we strained our eyes to identify a flock of Bar Tailed Godwit on the Northney saltings. A single Egret flew south from the Wade Court area and two families of baby Coots were on Langstone Pond where the Moorhen whose nest was recently robbed by a fox was back on the nest. One Egret was in the South Moors Tamarisk Pool and two Brent could be seen at the mouth of the Langbrook but at the west end of the sea wall a Wheatear sat on the post of the old stile – as we watched it turned into two Wheatear (male and female) and then added

a lovely male WHINCHAT to its repertoire. We had excellent views of all three birds but missed a Short Eared Owl which Chris Slade was watching over North Binness at this time. Nothing special was on the Budds Farm pools (the Swan and Canada Goose pairs were at their nests, Tufted Duck numbers were down to just over 40, and the two pairs of Shelduck were present again). Along the shore here at least a dozen COMMON TERN were patrolling and a flock of more than 20 Turnstone were on the sewage outfall casing as 11 superbly plumaged Black Tailed Godwit flew by, and in the mouth of the Hermitage Stream the Swan herd was up to 33 birds. Over the sewage works a mass of Swallows was hawking and with them were two SWIFTS and at least one HOUSE MARTIN and one SAND MARTIN while a Cuckoo called from the scrub. Chris Slade told us he had recently seen Sand Martins over Petersfield Heath Pond, and I guess they will now be back at the Sand Pits at West Heath (which is of course 3 km east of Petersfield Pond in square SU 7822 – I have never been sure what it is west of, but my guess is that it is the westmost of the heaths running west from Midhurst through Stedhamd an Iping Commons). I left the walk party at Broadmarsh and came home through Bedhampton and this evening a message from Kevin tells me that I missed a Whimbrel in Chalk Dock and a Cuckoo in the marshy area of Farlington Marshes just inside the Chalk Dock entrance. Further down the east shore there were three more Brent at the Deeps and both REED and SEDGE WARBLER were heard on the reserve where others had seen another Whinchat. On the way home a single Willow Warbler was heard near Southmoor Lane (I heard one on the Broadmarsh Playing Fields area but they are not as common near th coast as they are inland).

Another Turtle Dove was heard today at South Holt Farm (between Finchdean and Forestside) by Mrs Tunks who both saw and heard Cuckoo at the same spot

A week ago (April 17) I commented on a bird seen by Chris Fairhead and described as having a black cap (suggesting Blackcap or Marsh/Willow Tit) but making mewing calls like a cat. At the time I suggested the possibility of Willow Tit song and today Chris has told me that he has had a good look at a Blackcap and is pretty sure that the mystery bird was more like the Willow Tit with the sharp contrast of black cap against white cheeks. That is encouraging for Willow Tit enthusiasts (of which I am one) but at the same time I have a note from Tony Gutteridge describing a dispute between two Blackcaps which he witnessed yesterday in which one bird made a series of high pitched “peeioo” calls (with the pitch falling at the end of the note). Chris also tells me that his wife has reminded him that there were two of the original mystery birds seen by them, and that if they were catbirds we should be on the lookout for “kitten-chicks” in the not too distant future. More in our next episode

Brian Fellows has passed on a very interesting list of recent birds seen on Hayling by Nick Green recently. Top of the bill was a group of 5 MED GULLS seen together close to the Beachlands Funfair on April 19th. Describing them Nick says “there were 3 full adults (1 obvious pair), 1 second-summer bird with black lines on the webs of the outer primaries and finally 1 first-winter moulting into first-summer plumage.”. He also saw a female Wheatear near the Ferry that day and another on the Golf Course on the 20th with 5 Sandwich Tern at the ferry and 1 Egret at the Kench. On Wednesday he again had two adult Med Gulls at Beachlands with 5 Common Tern at the Ferry and a female Sparrowhawk going west to Eastney. On Thursday there were two Egrets and a Common Tern at Black Point, and on Friday 6 Common Tern at the Ferry plus a male Wheatear on the Golf Course, and yesterday a WHIMBREL flew east along Hayling Bay past the Coastguard Station near Eastoke Corner.

Brian Fellows spent his morning checking out the 1km square at Fishbourne (SU 8404) which he has taken on for the BTO Breeding Bird Survey. He heard seven different SONG THRUSHES singing in the square, adding to comments from various people that there seem to be a lot more of these rarities around this year (no doubt proving the effectiveness of the RSPB campaign to stop people using poisonous slug pellets – incidentally the ‘Betterware’ catalogue which came through our letterbox this week offers a ‘new and highly effective means’ of dealing with slugs and snails – it’s a plastic container which you put on the ground and all the slugs walk in and drown, but only if you fill the inside with beer – so it seems real sacrifices are being made by British beer drinkers in aid of having more Song Thrushes to annoy Brian with their dawn chorussing (on March 11th he complained that one woke him at 5.30am and it still sings for 3 hours each morning). Getting back to Fishbourne Brian found a new ROOKERY of 12 nests in the grounds of a nursing home in Apuldram Lane at SU 844045. After completing the square Brian had a look at Fishbourne Creek and saw 30 Swans, 9 Shelduck. 6 BRENT (where 12 were to be seen last summer), 1 Egret, 2 Redshank and 32 Black Tailed Godwit

SAT 24 APR

Tony Gutteridge and I were at Warblington early this morning for a CBC visit and both independently saw a HOBBY just before 6.30. I might have missed it if I had not been looking up to see a small party of WHIMBREL setting off north east overland, making their lovely calls as they went. A lone REED

WARBLER was back in the seawall reedbed (later in the morning I heard another at Langstone Pond), and two Whitethroat seemed to have settled in for the summer but we could only detect three singing Skylark in the whole 150ha plot. When Tony Gutteridge started this CBC in 1977 the analysis of observations indicated that there were 33 Skylark territories and this number has fallen year by year ever since – in 1987 it was down to 17 and this year it looks as if we will have half a dozen at the most. It was good to find one family of Song Thrush just out of the nest, and interesting to find what seemed to be three different male Kestrel (usually there is a nest on the plot, sometimes in the tower of Warblington Castle, sometimes in a tree near Pook Lane, but we have not detected a nest or seen a female this year). Tony told me he had found more Blackcap than usual (they do seem to be having a bonanza this year) and that one of two having a dispute was making high-pitched “pieooo” calls that might be similar to Chris Fairhead’s recent mystery ‘catbird’ calls heard in Stansted Forest. Both Tony and I saw a slightly unusual bird on the water off the plot – a Lesser Blackback in full breeding plumage.

Trevor Carpenter was also out early at Hill Head and watched a significant westward movement of Terns going the ‘wrong way’ along the Solent, though after a time they ceased to move west and began to mill around offshore, perhaps suggesting they had made a diversion from their eastward route to search the sheltered waters of the Solent for their breakfast. Trevor counted 197 Common Tern, 21 Little Tern and a few Sandwich Tern before they stopped moving and counting became too difficult, but he then had two adult MED GULLS overhead and a single Wheatear on the shore.

Ros Norton was at Kingley Vale today and heard the purring of the first TURTLE DOVE – sadly the rambblers with whom she was walking showed no interest...

I hear via Bob Chapman and Kevin Stouse that a FERRUGINOUS DUCK was seen at Budds Farm pools today by Jason Crook. Although I have tried to check on the number of Tufted Duck there on my recent visits I have not thought that a rarity might be lurking among them and will look carefully for a ‘female Tufted Duck’ that is slightly smaller than the others and has white under its tail.

Brian Fellows spent the afternoon checking Nightingale sites at Emsworth and Stansted for Nightingales without success (and Ros Norton visited Marlpit Lane today without hearing them). Brian did however come on some 30 HOUSE MARTIN with a few Swallows over Aldworth Pond and it is to be hoped that these Martins are intending to nest at Stansted House a little north of the pond. At Emsworth there was a SEDGE WARBLER in the damp copse between Maisemore Gardens and the open field north of Nore Barn, with Blackcap and Chiffchaff singing in the damp copse and in the drier Nore Barn wood

FRI 23 APR

Late this afternoon Brian Fellows heard at least one NIGHTINGALE at Racton Park Wood and two (possibly three) at the Marlpit Lane site so it seems that the south east winds accompanying our current dismal weather have brought more birds – there was also a Whitethroat in the bushes east of Marlpit Lane today. Although Brian is being cautious in saying he can only confirm two Nightingales there he did hear one today in the hedge with trees west of the Lane but he could not be certain it was not one of the birds from east of the road moving across.

You must have heard the news that Cyril the Swan has been banned from Swansea Football Ground for being excessively noisy – that’s going some for a Mute Swan, but what’s in a name? Also in the news this week was the story of the brave policeman who caught and removed a Swan that had stopped traffic on the A27 Havant bypass in the morning rush hour – I would guess that the reason the Swan was on the road was that it had already suffered some encounter with a vehicle as it was flying along the Hermitage Stream and over the A27.

THU 22 APR

Following the series of rumours that have been circulating about the supposed release of RED KITES in Hampshire during the past year John Clark has been in contact with Ian Carter, the person at English Nature in charge of the re-introduction project, and Ian states that there have been no birds released anywhere in Southern England other than in the Chilterns, and the last release there was in 1994. All birds seen elsewhere have been there of their own volition and indicate the success of the introduction and subsequent wild breeding. The October 1995 edition of British Wildlife has a full article on the re-introduction programme with photographs showing the wing tags both in flight and at rest.

Kevin Stouse took a long walk through Stansted Forest and East Park to Aldsworth Pond and back today and gives a very interesting account of female BLACKCAP SONG. He says that in the west of Stansted every small thicket had its Blackcap and he noticed a significant difference in some of the songs, but could not make out any which were definitely Garden Warbler. With patience he eventually saw one of the ‘unusual songsters’ which was a female Blackcap. (I wonder if unpaired females sing to attract a mate?). He heard plenty of Chiffchaff but only one Willow Warbler, and came on just one Whitethroat in the hedge north of Sindles Farm. Perhaps the best news was that half a dozen of those rarities (HOUSE

MARTINS) were over Aldsworth Pond with 2 Swallows. Also on the pond were five well grown COOT CHICKS with their parents. Another piece of good news was that there was at least one LAPWING on territory east of Sindles Farm. The local Cuckoo was calling from the Groves where Kevin saw a few of the Early Purple orchids.

Brian Fellows and John Gowen made a circuit of The Holt at Rowlands Castle this morning and came on a 'young CHAFFINCH' (presumably this implies a juvenile just out of the nest) as well as Blackcap, Bullfinch, Chiffchaff and Marsh Tit among others. In the evening Brian went alone to Marlpit Lane and heard 2 SINGING NIGHTINGALES, one by the footpath going east from Marlpit Lane (presumably the 'Apple Tree' site) and the other very encouragingly by the tip site where I thought the new earth wall would have made that site untenable. A TAWNY OWL flew over the Marlpit Lane area while Brian was there – he also checked out the Racton Park Wood and Stansted 'Five Oaks' (Park Slip) sites without success.

I made my usual Thursday visit to Havant Thicket where I was surprised to hear at least seven Goldcrest singing (last week I did not hear any and thought they must have ceased while nesting). The only bird of interest was a male Sparrowhawk which dashed into the carpark just as I got out of my car, perched looking at me for a few seconds, and was off again. Unlike the Holt over the road Havant Thicket is full of Willow Warblers (I heard at least 8) but has few Chiffchaff.

Brian Fellows sent me a further bulletin on the discussion about why there seem to be flocks of female LINNET but few males. As I suspected one of the contributors confirms that the males do acquire their pink breasts by abrasion of feathers whose tips were initially dull grey brown – this process can take longer in some birds than others and some of the birds with no red showing could well be males. I am a little surprised that Chris Mead talks of males defending territories as I have always thought of Linnets as social breeders without 'territories' from which they exclude others (but I suppose that even Gannets packed within bill's reach of each others nests do have a 'territory' defined by that bill's reach, and defend it aggressively). One thing that is certain is that not all the birds will feel the breeding urge at the same time and there will be some breeding while others (especially young birds) are still in winter flock mode.

WED 21 APR

Gale force winds along the shore made birding difficult today but I was just able to walk up Budds Mound and then along the South Moors seawall. On the Budds Farm pools I was surprised to see the Swan pair back with one of them sitting on the nest (and no Canada Geese in sight). With them were 64 Tufted Duck and at least 1 male Teal. 5 BRENT were along the harbour tideline – two off Budds Wall and three at the Langbrook mouth. Nothing to report from Langstone Pond but it was interesting to see an Egret once more in the Wade Court Yew tree, possibly sheltering from the winds of the open harbour, and good to see a pair of SWALLOWS back at Wade Court Farm – presumably intending to nest there.

Brian Fellows asks if I have any comment on a discussion taking place on the internet about the sex composition of current LINNET flocks. It seems that most of the birds seen in flocks at the moment are female in so far as they show no pink on the breast. The questions are (a) why they should be in flocks now and (b) why the flocks are all female. I have certainly seen one or two flocks of around 20 birds recently but I have not noticed the colour of the breasts, and I have assumed these are groups of birds returning to their nesting areas but still enjoying some social life before nesting chores forbid it. As Linnets are social or colony nesters they do not seem to have the same territorial aggression as is found in other species staking out their own feeding areas around a single nest site, so I do not find the existence of flocks very surprising. As to single sex flocks I have not comment – possibly there is a surplus of females, possibly many of the birds are young males that have not fully developed their plumage or breeding urge, possibly the pink on the breasts is not yet as bright as it will be (do Linnets, like Greenfinch, acquire the colour through abrasion of the plumage they first grew in the autumn?)

Brian himself spent the sunnier part of the day in Hollybank Woods where yet another fire has occurred (Michael Prior claims that April is the worst month of the year for forest fires with so much dead bracken and wood lying about – later in the summer there is much more sap in the plants and trees to dampen the flames). Nothing very exciting in the way of birds but he found 7 Blackcap singing and heard one Willow Warbler – these do seem more numerous than usual this spring

TUE 20 APR

A note from Maureen Coleman today tells me that there were two CUCKOOS at the Oysterbeds this morning and that there was a redhead MERGANSER there on Sunday – possibly one that intends to stay the summer. Last year winter birds were seen almost daily up to April 22 when there were 7 off Warblington, and then occasional sightings of summer birds at the Oysterbeds, Thorney Deeps and

Fishbourne. Maureen also reports that last Sunday she heard Whitethroats at the Oysterbeds and at Sparkes Boatyard near Black Point (where there was a small flock of Turnstone)

News from Mark Litjens today is of the first (and only?) REED WARBLER heard by him on Sunday at Titchfield Haven. Luckily he heard it before being deafened by two Cetti's Warblers that took delight in shouting into both his ears. One reason for the absence of reports of Reed Warbler could be that they are not where we expect them – on arrival they usually check in at the reed beds where they intend to nest but then move on into the surrounding countryside and only return when the reeds have grown tall enough to support nest and provide cover and food. I remember being surprised to find a Reed Warbler one year working along a Blackthorn hedge on the southern slopes of Butser Hill one May.

The BLACK SWAN was still at the Mill Pond with 63 Mute Swans and 32 Mallard when Brian Fellows made his Emsworth circuit yesterday. 8 Canada Geese were a surprise on the Slipper Mill Pond where a single redhead MERGANSER was still present (looks as if this one intends to stay the summer though it may retreat to cover on the Thorney Deeps). Three pairs of Coot are sitting, and the first two broods should hatch any day now but it will be some time before we see cygnets from the Peter Pond Swan nest (she is now sitting properly). The Coot nest in Peter Pond has grown taller since the first effort was overtopped by the water. No Sedge or Reed Warblers heard here and no Nightingale heard at either Marlpit Lane or Racton Park Wood (All Brian's info is for Apr 19)

Today Brian made a quick visit to Portsmouth and found 38 Swans on the Southsea Canoe Lake, no doubt this large group for the time of year would have been dispersed by boating in better weather. After dark, when the rain ceased around 9pm, Brian made another check on the Marlpit Lane Nightingale site with no more luck than before.

MON 19 APR

A walk around the east of the the Stansted estate on a glorious sunny morning was made very worth while by a totally unexpected WOODLARK flying straight and level, about 100 feet up, from north to south down the valley lying between the eastern edge of the Forest and the road serving the House and Lumley Seat. I was on the road in the dip by Lumley Wood (SU 763109) and heard the unique liquid trilling notes of Woodlark away to the north and then as the bird flew past me had a full view of the distinctive short tailed profile. When last seen the bird was still going south over the fields in front of the House where sheep are grazing. Later I met Barry Collins who told me that in past years he has found wintering Woodlark in exactly this area and I suppose this could be a young male with no territory returning to scenes of childhood in the hopes of finding a mate or territory – the non-stop flight did not indicate that the bird thought it had found either.

On this same Stansted area walk I heard my first Cuckoo in the Groves and saw the Emperor Goose still present in the field west of Aldsworth Pond. I also saw my first female Blackcap and a lovely sunlit male Bullfinch. In the late afternoon I cycled to Budds Farm and returned across the South Moors, finding 30 Swans at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream and 3 Brent still at the mouth of the Langbrook. A COMMON SANDPIPER was on the tideline by Budds Farm outfall with two Sandwich Tern overflying, and from the South Moors I saw four distant LITTLE TERNS off the Oysterbeds, identified by their small size, jerky flight, and vertical dives from a great height. Barry Collins also had his first Little Terns on Thorney today. The Swan pair do seem to have abandoned their Budds Farm nest (neither of them there) but 48 Tufted Duck remain. One Egret was in the South Moors Tamarisk Pool and two more were on the Langstone Pond shore.

PLANTS:

SUN 25 APR

The shores and lowlands visited today on Kevin Stouse's walk from Warblington to Farlington Marshes yielded a much richer haul of flowering plants than did yesterday's outing on Portsdown. The SHINING CRANESBILL which started flowering around April 12th in the 'twitchel' footpath joining Havant Old Town Hall to the Pook Lane footbridge over the A27 was abundant this morning (mainly at the Pook Lane end) and on the same path Lesser Periwinkle was flowering near Wade Court Road. At the foot of the wall of the Royal Oak pub at Langstone the year's first LESSER SEA SPURREY was opening its flowers and Sea Campion (out long ago on Hayling) was just starting to flower on the South Moors shore but the best flowers were found after I left Kevin's group and headed back through Bedhampton. Where the Hermitage Stream comes under the A27 a ROWAN tree was covered in blossom and around the south end of the footbridge over the road a number of unidentified planted trees were in full flower – perhaps someone can suggest a name for this tree that is very close to a BIRD CHERRY but has many of its long racemes of white flowers standing erect, not pendent. At the north side of the footbridge the colony of

POT MARIGOLDS (sometimes called African Marigolds) are flowering well on the roadside under the bridge and close by where the first flowers I have spotted on COMMON NETTLE.. An unexpected first flower was seen on GOATSBEARD along the north side of Solent Road opposite the Tesco petrol station with Scarlet Pimpernel and Lesser Trefoil also flowering by the dusty roadside. After I left Kevin's party they continued to Farlington Marshes and in the 'Slip Field' along the south side of the A27 at the Chalk Dock corner of the reserve Ros Norton spotted a clump of ADDER'S TONGUE FERN in the grass close to the path (the 'usual site').

SAT 24 APR

Although I live within a mile of the east end of Portsdown I rarely make the uphill journey to see the rich chalk downland flora so a visit to Fort Widley for a 'Spring on the hill' walk with the Friends of Portsdown gave me a welcome change of scene and my first glimpse of common plants such as Hairy Violet and Glaucous Sedge. Unfortunately the majority of the wonderful flowers that will be seen there in May and June were still resting and the walk was timed to fall between the early spring flush of Violets and Cowslips (still putting up a good show) and the flowering of Ox Eye Daisies and Spotted Orchids that will soon usher in the summer profusion. One rather surprising plant which was in flower was Pendulous Sedge.

THU 22 APR

Though probably of no interest to anyone else I was both pleased and surprised to find a second plant of HARD FERN in Havant Thicket today. This very common plant in many areas is surprisingly sparse in my patch (SU 70/71) and Havant Thicket is the only place where I have found it.

WED 21 APR

The Ox Eye Daisies on the south facing slope of the Havant bypass are now coming into full flower, and around Havant Doves Foot Cranesbill, Herb Robert and Horse Chestnut are all coming into full flower, but the new item on today's flower list was the presence of the first leaves on SOUTHERN MARSH ORCHID plants (I counted 18, one with spotted leaves) in the South Moors 'orchid field' where some 200 Kingcup plants are already going over. I also found two plants of CELERY LEAVED BUTTERCUP flowering in the central streamlet serving the Tamarisk pool and BUR CHERVIL flowering within a tiny Blackthorn bush immediately in front of you as you step over the Mill Lane stile (it had escaped the grazing cattle within the bush). First leaves of Knotted Hedge Parsley can be seen in the usual place, and returning to Havant up the Billy Trail I saw Wood Avens in flower/

MON 19 APR

Where Park Lane passes Ham Copse (belonging to Sindles Farm) on its south side and the Stansted Park Slip to the north it is rich in wildflowers and among the Moschatel and Wood Anemones I found WOODRUFF in flower and also EARLY as well as Common Dog Violet. Walking on across the East Park and turning right on the road towards Lumley Seat the large patch of LEOPARD'S BANE in Lumley Wood stood out from a distance on account of its pale green leaves which form a close carpet over the woodland floor. No flowers out yet, but half a dozen spikes with flower buds stood tall above the ground hugging leaves. In the Forest WOOD SPEEDWELL was in flower, easily picked out as not Germander by its paler flowers and double checked by hairs all round the stems. At the end of my walk, in the Groves, I at last found BUGLE in flower with yellow anthers protruding above the triple lips of the purple flowers. By the roadside I later found what I am sure was FALSE FOX SEDGE about to flower, its flower heads not yet having the golden yellow tint that they will acquire. In the late afternoon, cycling along the South Moors seawall, I found HAIRY BUTTERCUP in flower – very similar to the Bulbous Buttercup I have already seen inland, this seaside species has much paler yellow flowers.

INSECTS:

SUN 25 APR

With less sunshine today the midday warmth was less pronounced and the only butterfly I came on was just one Green Veined White by the Brockhampton stream.

SAT 24 APR

As the sun eventually broke through and warmed the air at midday my garden received brief visits from a male Brimstone, a male Orange Tip, a Peacock and a Green Veined White nectaring on apple blossom – there may also have been a Small White which flew through faster.

THU 22 APR

In their tour of The Holt at Rowlands Castle this morning Brian Fellows and John Gowen recorded 2 BRIMSTONE, 2 ORANGE TIP, 1 PEACOCK and 1 SPECKLED WOOD – probably more than the rest of Hampshire put together!

WED 21 APR

Mark Litjens tells me that in Monday's sunshine he saw 3 ORANGE TIP and 1 COMMA during his lunch time break at Hursley, and Rosemary Webb says that on Sunday a male HOLLY BLUE was a newcomer to her South Hayling garden where two SPECKLED WOOD are firmly established.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

WED 21 APR

On March 25th I commented on finding some SLIME MOULDS and repeated what may well be an 'old wives tale' about these being a sort of single organism which developed from the fusion of many minute single cells – that was what I thought I had heard an expert tell me in the past. Today I have heard from Audrey Berrie, one of the Friends of Portsdown Hill, that the 'large lumps of colourful Marsh Mallow' which is what we first see of a Slime Mould are in fact huge single cell (a mass of cytoplasm technically known as a plasmodium). Later the mass dries and hardens, then spore producing bodies develop on the surface and eventually shoot off the spores. Part of what I misheard about many individual cells coming together to form the new mould was probably based on the fact which Audrey passes on that it requires the fusion of two spores in appropriate damp conditions for a new plasmodium to grow. Those who remember the IBM Clubhouse off Southmoor Lane will know the overflow carpark area by the tennis courts south of the footpath across the South Moors. In the clinker surface of this now abandoned carpark today I found a mass of some ALGAE which I call 'Land Seaweed' – its not uncommon but I cannot find a proper name for it (the 'leaves' are generally rounded, black and rubbery). Going back across the South Moors to the magnificent Blackthorn Hedge separating the IBM playing fields from the moors proper I also found lovely fresh JEWS EAR fungus on a dead branch of a still thriving Elder bush.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 14

APR 5 – 11

BIRDS:

SUN 11 APR

Sonia Bolton rang in the afternoon to tell me that the GREAT GREY SHRIKE is still to be seen in Stansted East Park today, but my own trip to Gunner Point produced nothing more interesting than my first two Sandwich Tern unless you think it interesting that there was one Egret in Stoke Bay and another perched in the 'Little Owl tree' in the meadow hedge a little south of the bay (in line with Daw Lane) – there are thickety places thereabouts where a pair could think of nesting. I also looked in the thicket between Knotts Marsh and the Westcroft Stables (SU 717026) for the Little Owl reported to have been seen there on March 31 by Martin Hampton (has the pair that seemed settled in the fields west of the Daw Lane/West Lane junction moved north? The manure heaps around stables are attractive sources of worms and insects for Little Owls)

Tony Gutteridge also rang this afternoon and told me of two good sightings on Dartmoor (High Willhayes?) from where he has just returned. Best was a pair of DOTTEREL which were disturbed and flew towards him giving good views and a quiet 'grunt' note, then he saw a pair of GOLDEN PLOVER behaving as if on territory (reluctant to leave, skirting round Tony and Helen on the ground) and I learnt that there is a southern race of Golden Plover (which does breed in small numbers on Dartmoor) which never achieve the black belly of the northern race and looks 'spotty' in its best breeding plumage. Tony also spoke of large numbers of Swallows heading west along the north coast of Cornwall (perhaps they want to enjoy the Scillies without all those birders).

Brian Fellows walked round the Cobnor Peninsula today and enjoyed lunch at The Old House at Home at Chidham as well as seeing a few birds, among which were around 70 Curlew in the Thorney Channel and the pair of Swans on Chidmere Pond with no detectable nest. Two Sandwich Tern were seen near the point, Skylark sang over the fields, a pair of Kestrels was near the small saline ponds on the east shore and a Swallow dipped to drink from the roadside pond (recently 'improved') near Eastfield Farm. Coming down the rather barren west shore you come to a shore line oak copse which has botanic interest at most times of year (in the summer Marsh Mallow grows at the edge of the beach), and today Brian was impressed by a lovely patch of Red Campion somewhere here (maybe in the depression with gorse just north of the trees).

SAT 10 APR

Despite the weather Mark Litjens was in the New Forest this morning and heard the first CUCKOO calling as well as TREE PIPIT SONG. In the Bolderwood area Mark found plenty of Redstarts and 'quite a few' Lesser Spotted Woodpecker with only a few Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff – well I suppose habitat and habit on the part of the birds does give a different abundance of birds in the New Forest to what we see here around Havant.

The Evening Class walk was around Stansted East Park today and the walkers enjoyed good views of two separate BUZZARDS, one soaring over Lordington Copse, and the other perched in a tree near Park Lane. The regular pair of Kestrel were seen by Lumley Seat but the Great Grey Shrike failed to show and only one Blackcap sang for them despite some good habitat. To my mind their most interesting sighting was of 3 SHELDUCK flying over. Each year a number of them move from the coast to set up base camp at Aldsworth Pond from where they fly another mile or so inland to places in the Stansted area where they presumably nest. I have regularly seen Shelduck inland here, and in the fields near Stubbermere, and also in Ashling Wood just south of Kingley Vale – no wonder we do not see many juveniles on Chichester Harbour in the summer. I guess there are plenty of rabbit burrows and the like for them in these places, and I have seen a pair investigating the 'cave' under the roots of a large fallen tree.

When the sun eventually showed in mid afternoon I headed east on my bike for some fresh air and possible bird interest in the Thorney/Prinsted area. Personally I was pleased with my first Swallow over Thorney Deeps, where 5 Greenshank were cooling their legs in the water with seemingly nothing better to do, but the only item that might be of interest was the presence of 5 Brent in the meadow east of Prinstded Bay (favoured by large flocks in the winter). Shelduck is one of the few species still present in any strength (30 or 40 on the Great Deeps east end and smaller groups elsewhere, and Black Tailed Godwit is another (though on passage only) – a flock of over 100 was by the Emsworth channel. Looking south from Thornham Lane I was pleased to see what is now a rare sight – three Lapwing making their wild display flights over the marshes by the deeps. Along the Thorney channel I listened in vain for the tittering of Whimbrel – they should be passing now and one 'small Curlew' caught my eye with faster and lower flight than usual.

John Goodspeed has been away for a few days and returned to find a message on his answerphone reporting a RED KITE going south over Baffins Pond in Portsmouth at 8.30 last Sunday (Apr 4). The caller's name was not clear but his first name was Brian.

FRI 9 APR

Tonight's hot news is of a PIED FLYCATCHER seen at Sandy Point this evening by Peter Gammage and then by Alistair Martin. Other news today comes from Barry Collins to say that four CORN BUNTINGS are back on Thorney Island where they will hopefully breed as in previous years (though the removal of concrete has required much machinery and big lorries which have flattened rather a lot of bushes and changed the habitat somewhat).

Brian Fellows was in the Hollybank woods today and was surprised to find no Willow Warblers there – he did have plenty of singing Chiffchaff and Blackcap, plus Goldcrest and Bullfinch (the latter only calling) Talking to someone reading my garden gate poster today I learnt that he had recently (midday on Mar 31) seen a LITTLE OWL in the copse between the Hayling Coastal Path and the Westcroft Stables, i.e. SU 717026 immediately south of Stoke Bay and more than 500 yards north of the 'dead tree' site west of Daw Lane.

Yesterday Keith Betton sent me a copy of the 'Recent Reports' which he has just prepared for the next HOS Newsletter – a usual there is lots of interest for which I have no room here without swamping the current latest news but some of the items which caught my eye were a PURPLE HERON over Romey on Mar 28; a WHITE STORK over Farnborough on Apr 2 (two days before the one glimpsed at Titchfield Haven); sightings of single Red Kites in the New Forest, near Winchester, at the Lower Test and over Alice Holt during the past three months; and a max count of only 27 Bewick's Swan at Ibsley back in January.

THU 8 APR

Driving home from work down West Lane on Hayling Tim Lawman saw a commotion of gulls over the Hayling west shore and stopped to find an OSPREY with them causing panic among the gulls. The Osprey remained there long enough for other Hayling birders to come and see it, then headed north and west past the South Moors (where Mike Collins saw it) towards Farlington Marshes.

Mike Collins dropped in to tell me about the Osprey and also about a possible RED KITE sighting as he drive home past the Southleigh Forest last night. This report co-incided with one I had heard from Barry Collins in the morning of a good sighting (by a someone known to Barry as a good birder) of a Red Kite over the Horndean Road at Rowlands Castle on Tuesday. Putting these reports together with other recent ones in the Rowlands Castle area, and knowing that Red Kites often do scavenge rubbish tips, it looks as if we may have have one regularly visiting the Southleigh Forest tip.

WHITETHROATS have now started to arrive and have been seen on Thorney Island on Wednesday (by Barry Collins) and today (by Brian Fellows). Brian also saw his first two Swallows and noted that the Mallard in the 'canal' south of the Little Deeps still has eight ducklings of the 11 seen last Sunday. Another report reaching me today tells of a railway engine driver seeing a BARN OWL over the pony fields north of Havant station very early in the morning recently – this could be a report of an escaped tame bird rather than a wild one.

Alan Cokes was in the Hurstwood area of Waterlooville in today's sunshine and enjoyed the bright colours of two male GREY WAGTAIL by the Hermitage stream – he thinks he knows where one pair is nesting. Overhead he saw both Sparrowhawk and Kestrel – the latter is now by far the less common of these two. Brian Fellows passes on news of a GOSHAWK seen as a Bank Holiday treat in 'a wood to the north of Petworth' by Mike Elliot who comes from Canterbury – he had pulled in to a field entrance to stop for tea and happened to pick out what he at first thought was a Buzzard perched in a tree nearby. He was able to watch it preening for some time before "it fell off the branch, opened its wings and glided out of sight"

WED 7 APR

HOUSE MARTINS were seen at Hursley House near Winchester today by Mark Litjens. Mark does not give a number of those seen, nor the number which he expects to nest there, and I hope those numbers have not diminished in the same way that those at Stansted House here have in the last few years (from at least 30 nests to less than half a dozen). When they have all arrived and started nesting it will be interesting to hear how they are doing.

Another message today was from Mark Cutts who is being posted from Gosport to Yeovil by the Navy at the end of the month. He tells me that a Willow Warbler was singing strongly, along with four Cetti's Warblers, by the River Alver last Saturday (Apr 4)

Today's news from Emsworth is that the Peter Pond Swan was on her nest when Brian Fellows passed it this morning.

There were certainly two, maybe three, Willow Warbler singing in the Hayling Billy track near my garden this morning and I heard two more near Langstone Pond with a Blackcap singing from the overgrown old orchard by the unmade part of Wade Lane south of the farm.. Around Budds Farm and the South Moors I could only see four BRENT and the only shore birds with a count over 50 were Curlew and Oystercatcher. There were still a dozen Teal at the outfall and another two on the pools where there are still around 30 Tufted Duck. Back in Havant the Town Pigeons were circling in alarm as a female Sparrowhawk soared among them, and Starlings everywhere seem now to be collecting food for young in their nests.

TUE 6 APR

The first REED WARBLER was seen at the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth today by Brian Fellows who also saw SEDGE WARBLER and heard both WILLOW and CETTI'S WARBLER – the latter was in the reeds around a different lake from that where he last heard it, but as these birds seem to fly across the Eastern Road between Milton Common and Great Salterns Lake I guess movements between the three Milton lakes are not unusual. What was unusual was the presence of a second pair of Swans at these lakes – the established pair are already sitting on at least four eggs at Swan Lake and the second pair were on Duck Lake (sounds like the cue for a Danny Kaye song about an ugly duckling which turned out to be a Swan). Talking of Ducklings Brian found a family of 8 on the Southsea Canoe Lake where the Swans are down to 23 in number following the Bank Holiday and start of the boating season, accounting for the origin of the two at Milton and possibly the increase of the Braodmarsh herd which now numbers around 20. Brian wonders where the Ducks nested, but my experience of them at the IBM North Harbour site is that they can manage quite well in any flowerbed and there should be plenty of scope for them in and around the 'Rose Garden' area.

At Eastney today Brian could only see 8 Brent and 5 Merganser with a couple of Sandwich tern . At Baffins Pond there were still 52 Tufted Duck and a Canada Goose had laid a couple of eggs in a tatty nest and left them exposed. Perhaps as a seal of approval on the improvements to this pond a Willow Warbler was singing there. While at Milton Common Brian saw his first Wheatear on the Langstone harbour shore and he also saw a Reed Bunting around the lakes.

I guess the WILLOW WARBLER which I half-heard in the Hayling Billy trail yesterday was genuine as one was making its presence very clear this morning in an Elder bush where my garden overhangs the old rail track – I both saw and clearly heard the bird. The wind was too strong for good birding but I did make a circuit of the South Moors area in the afternoon and bumped into Jason Crook who told me he had seen the first COMMON TERN on April 1 at Sandy Point where he counted a total of 130 Sandwich Tern passing east. Jason also told me he had recently seen a BRAMBLING – I think at Farlington Marshes

where the Wheatear passage remains exceptionally low though they have made up for that with the variety of migrants seen and by a record spring maximum of 29 SAND MARTIN present at one time.

MON 5 APR

Trevor Carpenter tells me that a WHITE STORK was seen to drop into Titchfield Haven at 16.30 yesterday (Mar 4) by Dave Treacher but it seems no one else saw it then or since. Trevor did his best to compensate for not seeing it by spotting a pure albino PHEASANT in Biddenfield Lane near Wickham but unlike the Stork that did not go out on the pagers. Dave Treacher also passed on news that a second STONE CURLEW is back at Martin Down. Going back to the theme of white birds Trevor on Sunday found two smart adult MED GULLS on the flood at the north end of Titchfield Haven near the village and on Saturday saw two LITTLE GULLS flushed from the Hill Head shore by walkers. While at the north end of the Haven on Sunday Trevor made an interesting observation of a Sparrowhawk which flew he saw fly all the way to the Isle of Wight – this was only one of five Sparrowhawk sightings by him that day and he thinks that maybe some sort of passage was in progress.

HIRUNDINES started to arrive in strength on Sunday when Trevor Carpenter saw ‘many SWALLOWS, SAND MARTINS and at least one HOUSE MARTIN’ at Titchfield Haven, and when Mark Litjens was there on Monday morning (today) he saw at least 20 SAND MARTIN and one SWALLOW. In the evening Mike Collins had 3 SWALLOWS (and a smart Wheatear) over Langstone South Moors between 5 and 6pm

Other arrivals reported in this evening’s messages are of 1 YELLOW WAGTAIL seen at Titchfield Haven early this morning by Mark Litjens and 2 TREE PIPITS heard by Mark over Old Winchester Hill (where a Corn Bunting was singing) on Sunday morning. At Bolderwood in the New Forest on Monday 3 REDSTART (and 3 Lesser Spotted Woodpecker) were seen by Mark who also on Saturday saw 2 LITTLE RINGED PLOVER and a smart pink flushed WATER PIPIT in a quarry just north of Keyhaven Marshes (with 2 Greenshank and a nearly black SPOTTED REDSHANK on the marshes)

John Goodspeed saw the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still present in Stansted East Park on Sunday and heard WILLOW WARBLER in the New Forest on Saturday where Mark Litjens found one in Milkham enclosure on Sunday (I think I heard one in the Haylign Billy line trees this afternoon but the first song is always very weak and although I chased after the bird I could not pin it down). John Goodspeed also reports 30 SANDERLING were at Black Point on April 1st, and with the 71 seen on Pilsey Sands on Sunday by Kevin Stouse’s party it sounds as if they are on the move

A message received from John Goodspeed after compiling the above news says that there were 3 PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle as the tide was rising this morning and that he saw single SWALLOWS flying along the shore and over Milton Common where a CETTI’s WARBLER was still shouting from Frog Lake reeds. John also saw 8 Bar Tailed Godwit on the Budds Farm shore and at Farlington Marshes compiled a very good list of his own sightings – 1 YELLOW WAGTAIL, 12+ SAND MARTIN, 6+ SWALLOW, 5 WHEATEAR and 1 SHORT EARED OWL. Inevitably he had two Egrets and saw Merganser, and he remarks that there were no Goldeneye (the last in my database was on Mar 19). On the reserve notice board 3 REDSTART and WILLOW WARBLER were listed

Brian Fellows’ news from Emsworth is that the Peter Pond Swan nest (seen to be empty on Sunday) had an egg in it on Monday morning. On the Slipper Mill Pond a third pair of Coot has arrived and already has a nest while the Black Swan remains with 67 Mute Swans on the Town Mill Pond

Three reports of LITTLE EGRET this weekend are all of two birds – Brian Fellows had two in Emsworth Harbour, I had two on the South Moors shore and Mark Litjens had two at Keyhaven – making me wonder in how many cases two birds make a pair thinking of nesting.

This morning’s visit to the South Moors did not force me to eat my words about the Brent having gone last Friday night – there were just two parties of eight geese, one at the Langbrook mouth and the other south of Budds Mound. Two Egrets were feeding on the shore and two Merganser offshore with ten Turnstone flying in, otherwise the only birds seen in any number were Black Headed Gulls, Oystercatcher and Curlew. On Budds Farm pools the Tufted Duck were up to 60 but the Shoveler had gone and I did not see any Teal, just Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and the usual Swans, Canada Goose (one seen), and Shelduck (pair on water)

PLANTS:

SUN 11 APR

For several years I have kept an eager eye out for a special plant reported to grow on South Hayling and today I found it. The plant concerned is SHEPHERD’S CRESS (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) and as is often the case what I found was very different from what I had been looking for. I was expecting a plant very like

Thale Cress but with a basal rosette of pinnate leaves – what I found was something that I took to be Smith's Pepperwort but with leaves that looked very like those of Wall Rue. I found it when the first flowers of SEA CAMPION caught my eye as I was cycling the track along the south side of the miniature golf course east of the proper golf course (near the east end, approaching the toilet blocks, at around SU 705989). There was a patch of these plants perhaps two yards in diameter on the north side of the track on a slight rise in the ground. Each plant had a central flower spike not more than 4cm tall, with a circle of other flower spikes curving out and up from the common central base to form a 'bowl' as does Smith's Pepperwort. The flower heads were mainly tight (a bit like miniature Sweet Alison) but several had already turned to seed, again looking at first glance somewhat like pepperwort but not standing up to scrutiny as such.

At Gunner Point at least 15 GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS were in full flower (but as yet no sign of the thousands that will hopefully follow them) Sheep Sorrel was starting to be prominent as was Sweet Vernal Grass. I also found Field Woodrush here and had earlier seen big plants of Sea Radish about to flower (at West Town station there is now a lot of Wild Radish in flower). The other seaside special that obliged me with its first flower was BUR CHERVIL. Heading home, at the southern end of Langstone Bridge under the Welcome to Hayling sign, a mass of Ox Eye Daisies are just about to flower with white showing in their buds.

SAT 10 APR

The afternoon sunshine brought me out of the house to cycle east to Nutbourne. Several plants of BEAKED HAWKSBEARD, not yet in flower but standing tall with flower buds showing, caught my eye by the roadside but the news item of the day was the presence of many plants of BULBOUS BUTTERCUP in full flower, their sepals turned down to touch the stem and their petals of a rich deep yellow which would in previous year's have caused me to assume they were Meadow Buttercups (but they press their sepals up against the petals as do the common Creeping Buttercups. In the fields Rape is now almost fully in flower.

Among a good list of plants seen by the Evening Class group in the Stansted East Park area today I note they saw the HERB ROBERT which is very recently started to flower but has so far evaded my eyes. Brian also comments on finding Cuckoo Flower in a Beech Wood – I agree that it is unusual but I guess that the plants are more interested in the dampness of the ground than the trees around – usually Beech woods are dry but this must have been an exception.

THU 8 APR

A foray into The Holt wood at Rowlands Castle today gave me my first sight of EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS in flower this year – later there may be 300 spikes flowering here but today I could only see about a dozen spikes and of these just three had their lower flowers open. Around them, among the mass of Bluebells, the delicate leaves of PIGNUT were already abundant, and among the trees the season pointed out where a strip of NORWAY MAPLES had been planted along the edge of a SCOTS PINE block – the maples have their wonderful yellow blossom at its best now.

Alan Cokes is the first to report a spring flower for which I have been looking for about a week – HERB ROBERT. He found it flowering in the Hurstwood area of Waterlooville along with several other woodland spring flowers.

TUE 6 APR

A big old HORSE CHESTNUT tree at the junction of Havant Road and Court Lane in Cosham is inevitably the first one to flower in our area and sure enough it had its candles lit as I passed it today. Heading up the old A3 from Cosham and turning left onto Portsdown Hill Road at the top I saw a number of COWSLIPS flowering by the Candy Pits steps. These may well be the first natural wild ones unlike those that have been flowering for some time where the Lymbourne Stream emerges from the A27 Havant bypass (they were planted years ago and have survived well). I also found SEA BUCKTHORN in flower along the A27 shore of Chalk Dock where Common Vetch, Spotted Medick, Broom and Annual Wall-Rocket were all in flower. Surprisingly there is quite a lot of Wood Spurge flourishing along the shoreline here, and not so surprisingly the bare earth mounds around the Bedhampton Water Works site are now a startling and delightful mass of Ground Ivy flowers.

MON 5 APR

WOOD AVENS (or Herb Robert) was not one of the plants I expected to see this morning but there it was beside the Hayling Billy track with two flowers, one almost over. One that I did expect, and have been watching for several days, is DUKE OF ARGYLL'S TEAPLANT so I was not surprised to find half a dozen purple flowers open this morning on the big bush on the South Moors. HEMLOCK WATER DROPWORT was seen by me in flower at the IBM North Harbour site on Jan 16 this year but the plant I found flowering on the banks of the Langbrook stream between Tesco and De La Rue this morning was

the one I will take as my first of the season. Also seen this morning were a couple of plants of the beautiful HEDGEROW CRANESBILL by Southmoor Lane where it never ceases to flower and in Havant Town Centre I saw three plants of GREATER CELANDINE flowering from pavement edge cracks by shopfronts in West St right opposite St Faith's church (so it is not just the hot air of Tesco's bakery that brings it into early flowering).

INSECTS:

SUN 11 APR

Cycling past the Kench on Hayling this morning a tiny spot of colour on the open flower of a Daisy was enough to catch my attention and give me the pleasure of seeing an early SMALL COPPER butterfly. Continuing round the Golf Course to its southern side I added one each of four more species – ORANGE TIP, SMALL WHITE, SMALL TORTOISESHELL and PEACOCK.

Mark Litjens toured the butterfly sites at Magdalen Hill Down, Yew Hill and Whiteley Pastures today, seeing what I think is his first Holly Blue at Yew Hill and a single female Brimstone among 9 males at Whiteley. He also had a female Orange Tip there (Barry Collins is the only other person to have seen a female so far) Others seen included 9 Peacocks, 4 Small Tortoiseshell, and 3 Speckled Wood and a male Orange Tip

SAT 10 APR

After a windy and wet morning the sun shone over Bentley Wood (near Salisbury) at 13:30, bringing out 9 Peacock, 2 Orange Tip, 5 Brimstone and 1 Speckled Wood for Mark Litjens.

FRI 9 APR

Barry Collins had his moth light on last night for the first time this year and brought along some of his catches to show me before releasing them. Other than one Carpet (the very pretty RED GREEN CARPET) which belongs to the Geometer family (the ones with the 'inch worm' caterpillars) the moths were all member of the large family of Noctuids and included an EARLY GREY, both POWDERED and TWIN SPOT QUAKER and a species which Barry said he had not trapped before which was I think called FROSTED GREEN. Also in Barry's collection were CLOUDED DRAB and HEBREW CHARACTER (The presence of a couple of PIPISTRELLE BATS over my garden last Monday evening showed that they know that the moths are out)

THU 8 APR

Today in Havant Thicket I made the acquaintance of a common day flying moth which I have never seen before – an ORANGE UNDERWING. The reason for my ignorance of it is probably that it is only on the wing for about a month in March April, and another reason may be that it spends much of its time on Birch trees, not flying over open rides and sunning itself on bare ground as this one was doing. In the Thicket I saw one SPECKLED WOOD, a couple of PEACOCK and several male Brimstone, and in a foray across the road into the Holt I saw COMMA. SMALL WHITE, more Peacocks and male Brimstones and one FEMALE BRIMSTONE (my first). Back at home I noticed a tiny moth on the car which may have hitched a lift from Havant Thicket – at first I thought it was one of the Longhorn moths that will soon be dancing around bushes in woodland but it had shorter antennae and different markings – one possibility from Chinery's selection of micro-moths would be Lampronia praeletella which has larvae which 'leaf mine' strawberry leaves.

Messages from Mark Litjens and Brian Fellows both mention sightings of SMALL TORTOISESHELL which is probably the least numerous of the hibernating species. Mark had one at Hursley yesterday (not seen again today) but Brian had two in Emsworth's Brook Meadow. At Hursley today the first SPECKLED WOOD was out and one PEACOCK was seen on both days. Alan Cokes was in the Hurstwood area of Waterlooville today and saw both SMALL WHITE and SPECKLED WOOD as well as Brimstone and at least on Tortoiseshell.

TUE 6 APR

The first natural emergence of a GREEN VEINED WHITE was seen by Jason Crook who had one at Bedhampton on March 31 (the one which appeared in Stephen Harwood's house on March 19 probably emerged un-naturally early when the plants in which it was hibernating were brought into the warm house)

A SMALL WHITE was seen today on Milton Common by Brian Fellows, and on his return to work at Hursley Mark Litjens saw 5 Brimstone, 1 Peacock, 1 Comma and 2 Tortoiseshells during his lunch break A PEACOCK was in my garden today and my first ORANGE TIP male was flying in the sunny shelter of the Hayling Billy line. I also met Martin Baggs in the afternoon and he told me he now had HOLLY

BLUE in his garden on the south slope of Portsdown.
Late last night I found a moth in my porch and was able to identify it as a HEBREW CHARACTER – a very common species which should be on the wing now and which survives well as it's caterpillars are said to be 'polyphagous' (meaning that they will eat almost anything)

MON 5 APR

Last Saturday my wife found a newly emerged female STAG BEETLE on her back by our front door and moved her to the edge of the lawn (right way up). When I looked for it later it had disappeared but it came back on Sunday and we again pointed it in the right direction. Last year I had just 12 records of Stag Beetles, the earliest being on May 29 and the last on July 22, but I have in the past heard of one being seen alive in November and presume they can be equally early. Other indirect evidence of early emergence of Stag Beetles came in a phone call this evening from someone asking about 'hundreds of white grubs with pincers' seen at Langrish this weekend – I doubt the veracity of 'hundreds' but I think the origin of this garbled message was probably that someone had dug up a tree stump in which the grubs were present, and that some of them were starting to emerge (hence the reference to pincers)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 11 APR

Brian Fellows passes on confirmation of the damage which can be done by pet TERRAPINS which have been abandoned by their owners when they reach the size at which there is a serious threat of losing fingers when feeding them. It seems that Channel 5 TV recently showed film of them killing birds as large as Collared Doves or Little Egrets that are foolish enough to come to drink or fish in the ponds where these dinner plate sized submarine 'tanks' lurk. The news came from a member of the Buckinghamshire Bird Club and I think there may be more about this subject on their website at <http://www.geocities.com/Yosemite/Forest/1809/>

FRI 9 APR

While trimming the edge of my lawn along the garden path with a spade today I found (and luckily did not damage) a very small SLOW WORM, gold above and black below, which I would guess was only a few days old. My Reader's Digest Animal book tells me that they are usually born in the late summer but the adults do occasionally give birth in the spring. Although the young are laid in an egg the egg is never hard shelled and the young emerge from it moments after it is laid so it can best be regarded as a 'live birth'.

Brian Fellows had 10 FALLOW DEER in the west end of Hollybank Woods today and yesterday Alan Cokes saw 'several deer' on the Leigh Park side of the A3M just north of the Hulbert Road interchange in what is marked as Beech Wood on my map – that suggests a bunch of Fallow rather than Roe which are normally seen in small family groups (max 5), but I am not aware of Fallow in that area and there may have been more than one family of Roe present.

THU 8 APR

Walking along one of the sunlit rides in Havant Thicket at about midday I would have trodden on a GRASS SNAKE if I had been deaf – as it was I heard a rustling at my feet and saw the snake going as fast as it could to get away but I almost overbalanced in avoiding putting my boot on it. The snake was a foot to eighteen inches long, quite big but not full size.

An item I forgot to report was the first occurrence of PIPISTRELLE BATS over my lawn last Monday evening – two of them.

TUE 6 APR

To allow John Goodspeed to entertain friends over the holiday I had volunteered to do this week's poster delivery round and this took me to Fort Widley where Richard Jones told me of an unusual recent encounter with wildlife. He now has a team of Goats for scrub browsing (Cattle and Sheep graze, Goats browse) and he found one of them with several bleeding wounds inflicted by a FERRET which also had a go at him before it was subdued. Richard suspects that the Ferret was a tame one which had been abandoned, had got into the moat but was unable to get out and could not find food there – it saw the Goat as its chance of survival from starvation. All three somehow survived.

MON 5 APR

My book on Slugs and Snails describes the excitement experienced by 'Snail Men' venturing into their gardens after dark with a torch to find mollusc's on the move as they emerge from hibernation – so far I have not become hooked on this as a way to spend my spring evenings but I must admit to finding it worth getting off my bike last Saturday to check out a colony of WHITE LIPPED BANDED SNAILS

that caught my eye beside the Hayling Billy trail during the day. This snail species is always pretty to look at, and each individual seems to have a different pattern – the ground colour of the snail can vary from ivory white through yellow to a pale rose pink, and the dark banding is as variable as the bar codes in a supermarket. In this colony the half dozen which I saw in the grass from my cycle turned out to number 27, and they varied in size from full grown adults measuring about 14 mm high by 17 across down to last year's babies still only a tiny fraction of that size. Back in my garden, clearing long grass around the lawn edges, I came on what I at first thought was a very large Snail, seemingly without a shell, but I soon realised it was a big slug which had curled itself into a large ball for hibernation and probably did not welcome my intrusion into its dreams. So if you think you might find an evening's entertainment by torchlight in your garden worth sacrificing the TV then now is the time to start.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 13

MAR 29 – APR 4

BIRDS:

SUN 4 APR

Kevin Stouse led a walk around Thorney Island today which could hardly be expected to produce as exciting a list of birds as his walk last weekend at Pagham, but the sight of 71 SANDERLING on the Pilsey Sands was probably worth the effort of getting there. The party also saw 6 GREENSHANK at the east end of the Great Deeps (under the landing lights), heard singing Blackcap and saw 6 Sandwich Tern and 8 Bar Tailed Godwit plus a Hare and 2 Seals

I cycled along the shore from Langstone to Thorney Deeps this morning and found nature celebrating Easter with a family of 11 MALLARD DUCKLINGS on the seawall canal between the Little and Great Deeps (for part of the time a male Mallard was accompanying the female and pecking viciously at any ducklings that came within range, but later he left the family in peace). Just one BRENT was seen in that north west corner of Chichester Harbour where Shelduck and Merganser are now the only wildfowl requiring more than five fingers to count. I did see one Egret at Nore Barn and a few Redshank and Black Tailed Godwit, and of course a mass of Swans at Emsworth. At the Little Deeps the Swan was on her nest (this year in an 'offshore island' of reeds close to the seawall path) and later she was seen holding bills with her mate on the water.. Barry Collins arrived while I and Kevin Stouse's walk party were scanning the Little Deeps and Barry told me there are perhaps half a dozen Bearded Tits present but very elusive – the only bird of interest was a hunting Sparrowhawk seen briefly by Margaret Collins. Another amusing item from Barry was an account from the past of seeing a Cormorant trying (fairly successfully) to perch on the power lines above the reeds where it seemed intent on roosting for the night. Barry also told me he had seen the Great Grey Shrike at Stansted East Park yesterday and had seen it fly off to trees well south of its regular spot (maybe leaving us?), and had seen a Buzzard over the same area

Ten AVOCET dropped in on Pilsey Sands on March 31st for a short visit before flying off north east, and were seen by Barry Collins.

Kevin Stouse tells me that on Good Friday as he was driving past the Warblington Farm fields on his way to Emsworth he saw a CUCKOO fly across the road – they certainly should be unmistakable in flight and it was the day after April 1st.

Brian Fellows had yesterday seen one of the Emsworth Peter Pond Swan pair on their nest but today both birds were on the water and the nest was still unlined and held no eggs. Upstream north of the pond a pair of GREY WAGTAIL seem to be holding territory and will make a colourful addition to Lumley if they do – they could find a ledge or crevice under one of several bridges over the stream beside Lumley Road as a nest site. Not breeding this year were 72 Swans currently in or around Emsworth Mill Pond, and unlikely to breed were singleton Brent, Merganser and Egret seen in the harbour (though the Egret could surprise us!)

SAT 3 APR

A walk around the Budds Farm/South Moors area this afternoon seemed to prove that the last migrant BRENT departed last night as all I could find today were six in the Broadmarsh area, eight on the South Moors shore and two at the mouth of the Langbrook ((three which flew in to join the birds at South Moors were probably from the Broadmarsh group). On Budds Farm pools passage of wildfowl was still ongoing with 50 Tufted Duck and 4 male Shoveler present and there was an extra male Tufty with the resident pair on Langstone Pond. Apart from Chiffchaff the only arriving migrant encountered was a single Blackcap singing by the Billy Line in Havant.

Brian Fellows walked his regular circuit of the Lower Ems valley in today's drizzle and saw one Egret in the fields. Plenty of bird song, including four Chiffchaff, and at the end he saw one of the Peter Pond Swans sitting on the usual nest near the main road.

FRI 2 APR

SEDGE WARBLERS were yesterday singing on Thorney Island (from Barry Collins) and today at Titchfield Haven (Mark Litjens). At Titchfield Mark also saw both one LITTLE GULL on the south scrape and watched a couple of COMMON TERN fly by. Earlier in the day he had a LITTLE RINGED PLOVER with two Wheatear at Keyhaven Marshes and saw 12 Sandwich Tern and a SHAG off Hurst Castle.

A morning circuit of Bedhampton. Broadmarsh and the South Moors gave me a GREEN SANDPIPER in the Hermitage Stream (Bedhampton Water Works) and what I now think may be a second one in the Wade Court meadow pool. In between I spent some time counting BRENT to reach a total of 123 between Broadmarsh and Langstone. With them were most of the wader species I would have expected (no Ringed Plover or Bar Tailed Godwit that I could see, but there were still 11 KNOT and Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Black Tailed Godwit, Turnstone and Dunlin plus a couple of Egret) The Hermitage Stream mouth Swan herd is up to 23 and there were still Merganser, Tufted Duck, Teal and Mallard on the sea but no Wigeon. On Budds Farm pools there were 28 Tufted Duck with 4 Teal, 2 Shelduck and the expected Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe plus the nesting Swan Pair and what seemed to be just one pair of Canada geese. Just one Blackcap sang in the Broadmarsh area.

Brian Rackett tells me he saw the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still in the same place at Stansted this evening as late as 7pm – no need to be there at 11am, it seems.

THU 1 APR

The first SWALLOW has at last been seen by Mark Litjens at Yew Hill near Winchester – I think this is the first year that I can remember in which no one seems to have seen a Hampshire Swallow before the end of March

Barry Collins heard the first SEDGE WARBLER on Thorney Island this morning and last night made a roost count of 71 LITTLE EGRET (a good score at a time when many are away on breeding duties). During the past week Barry has seen 2 SAND MARTIN over Thorney as well as 7 Sandwich Tern and 4 Wheatear but he has not yet had Willow Warbler, Swallow or House Martin. (This news via Brian Fellows).

Brian Fellows found the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still performing well at Stansted today and he thinks it may have been giving free hunting lessons to the resident pair of Kestrel as one of them was imitating the technique of perching on the power lines and pouncing on small creatures (probably mainly insects) seen in the grass below.

It is now a couple of days since Theo Roberts saw the last of the wintering Blackcap in his garden and I think we can take that as a general indication that any heard from now on are migrants that will spend the summer with us. Theo also has two Robin nests with birds sitting in his garden one had five eggs in it on Mar 25

Walking in Ditcham Woods (on the downs south east of Buriton) this morning I reckon that at least 200 FIELDFARE moved north over my head in parties of various sizes. I heard perhaps two REDWING with them. Out in the open a couple of MEADOW PIPIT also headed north (as I remarked recently I have so far missed any sight of their mass movement north which is normally a feature of March birding).

WED 31 MAR

Paul Boulton stopped off at Staines Reservoirs today and saw a female LONG TAILED DUCK, a LITTLE GULL, and other birds including 'quite a lot' of Goldeneye and some Gadwall, Shoveler, Wigeon, etc. Paul tells me he finds the best place to watch Rooks is Brands Hatch where activity at the Rookery helped to fill in the gaps between races in the British Superbike Championship.

A message from Pete Potts this evening reports that, for only the second time in nine years over which Pete has been familiar with Bishops Waltham Moors, he has just heard SNIPE DRUMMING over the reserve. I don't think he expects a pair to stay and nest, more likely it was a bird getting in a bit of practice so that it can put on a better show when it gets back to its breeding grounds.

Mike Collins tells me that when he was out on Langstone Harbour in his boat last Sunday (Mar 28) he saw five BLACK NECKED GREBE 'well on their way to summer plumage'. In most winters these birds have all left before the end of March but recent rumours of birds possibly nesting locally (and the recent sighting of two in breeding plumage on the Staines reservoir in London) might indicate the possibility of more staying on in the south. On the previous Sunday Mike went out with friends in another fishing boat and witness the sad sight of a dead Guillemot being hauled in after becoming trapped in nest – he does not go into the gory details but I understand this to be a regular occurrence and that in order to get rid of the corpse without having to hold up the process of hauling in the nets the fishermen have a technique of

grabbing head and body from opposite sides of the neck and separating them with a quick twist – this explains the sightings of headless bodies or bodiless heads washed up on the shores

A message sent to Brian Fellows from Nick Green reports 6 Sandwich Tern in the Black Point area and 9 Wheatear at Gunner Point last Saturday plus a total of 13 Sandwich Tern seen off Hayling on Sunday. Interestingly the Wheatear were of mixed sexes (3 females among 6 males).

Sunshine after two days of drizzle sent me around Bedhampton and Langstone to look for any new birds.

Before starting I noted that the CHIFFCHAFF which has been singing a measured 'Chiff-chaff' from the Hayling Billy line near my house since Mar 16 has this morning doubled the speed of its song, presumably with the intention of calling down any migrant females that may be passing overhead. At the Bedhampton Water Works I found a GREEN SANDPIPER in the usual place by the Hermitage Stream and on Bedhampton Mill Pool saw the resident Swans had built their nest in the new place where I saw the bird apparently sitting on Mar 12 (the nest is made of masses of Hay, no doubt supplied by Mrs Kelly at the Mill from her ponies food stock). Downstream at Broadmarsh slipway a Blackcap sang as I passed and (unusually) I was able to see the bird at first glance in the direction of the song. The building summer herd of Swans now numbers 15, but the most numerous shore birds were Oystercatcher, Curlew, Black Tailed Godwit and Brent. I only saw two Wigeon, and Teal numbers were down to half a dozen but there were three Tufted Duck on the sea. Going on to Budds Farm I spotted the KINGFISHER flying downstream from the Brockhampton stream corn wharf. On the Budds Farm shore there were 14 KNOT among 40 Dunlin and 1 Bartail among 15 Black Tailed Godwit, and on the pools I saw the heads of two Canada Geese, one on each of the two overgrown islands in the west pool so I guess both pairs will nest in that pool and not on the bare island in the east pool this year. The Swans were sitting and a pair of Shelduck were on the water with two dozen Tufted Duck and 6 Teal. A total of 95 BRENT were strung out along the shore from Chalk Dock to Langstone and I was amused by three of them which were continually flying rapidly over and around the grazing flocks as if desperately trying to stir them into action for company on the long flight ahead. 22 Turnstone flew from the Langbrook mouth shore where there were 13 Merganser and the pair of Swans which might be the Langstone pond birds as I could see neither of them at the pond when I got there. Three Egrets were on the South Moors shore and one was surprisingly on the Wade Court yew (the tide was not high enough to have forced it from the harbour and I will keep my eyes open to see if it remains there – possibly with a mate on a nest in those trees). Finally, there was a Green Sandpiper on the Wade Court meadow pool – just dozing in the background – probably the one that I had seen earlier at Bedhampton.

This afternoon at Stansted I heard a BLACKCAP singing and wondered if its presence there (where it is unlikely to have spent the winter) meant that it was a migrant. Later I saw two BUZZARDS keeping close company gliding low over the trees – I wonder where they will nest this year? – and on my way home I found a pair of GADWALL still on Aldsworth Pond with at least 15 Tufted Duck and the Emperor Goose with three or four pairs of Canadas – earlier I had seen two pairs near Stubbermere pool, one pair seeming to be intending to set up home there. Among news gathered from people I met there was a second hand report that Michael Prior had seen a Red Kite over the Rough Avenue (maybe the one seen over Havant Thicket, but I have no date for Michael's sighting). Another person told me they had seen a Kingfisher at Brickkiln Pond today and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker by the main avenue north of Lyels Wood. My own favourite sighting today was of two Treecreeper, both within five yards of me as I arrived at what I am sure was their nest tree at the same time that they did – one of them kept going to the crevices that looked ideal nest sites, then flying back to the next tree as it realised I was still standing close by.

TUE 30 MAR

Brian Fellows was in Portsmouth today and found the Southsea Canoe Lake swans were down to 37 from 62 at the beginning of March and 57 on the 15th. At Eastney there were still 54 Brent to be seen and on Baffins Pond there were still 53 Tufted Duck but the two Barnacle Geese that were absent from parade on his last visit were still absent (40 present out of the 42 normally seen – we hope the other two are nesting)

A note from Maureen Coleman which reached me this morning reports the biggest flock of SANDWICH TERN so far – 12 at Black Point on Sunday (Mar 28) and 5 WHEATEAR somewhere along the Hayling seafront (probably at Sandy Point) on Saturday (Mar 27)

Continous drizzle for most of the day was not conducive to bird watching but I had to visit Horndean this morning and cycled back via Blendworth where the 'chakking' of a FIELDFARE surprised me – having checked that there was only one bird I cycled on towards Rowlands Castle only to find a flock of more than 50 Fieldfare (with perhaps half a dozen Redwing only identified by their smaller size and slimmer build) in trees near Woodhouse Lane. A Skylark and a Yellowhammer were singing here as if the sun were shining and a smart pair of STONECHAT moved ahead of me down one hedgerow.

This evening I was interrupted by a phone call telling me that a pair of Egrets were nesting by the Hermitage

Stream and that if I went to a certain point and looked upstream I could see the bird sitting on its nest on the ground – as these birds always do the unpredictable I felt I should check this out and went to have a look, seeing a white object of the right size in the place described but closer inspection found the white object was plastic sheeting.

MON 29 MAR

News from Brian Fellows that the 80 Swans which have been on Emsworth Mill Pond for the second half of March are down to 25 today, plus the reluctance still being shown by the pairs which nest on Peter Pond and the Little Deeps to get on with the task of raising this year's brood, made me wonder if the Swans know something about the weather to come in April that we do not. Checking what we do know about these birds last year and this it looks as if things are not as bad as they might seem. Today's efflux from the Mill Pond may well be associated with the regular monthly emptying of the pond, now in progress and there were 38 Swans in the harbour nearby making a total of 63 which is close to the 1998 number present for most of March (this year's figure of 80 over the past fortnight is exceptionally high). And when we look at the nesting performance of all the pairs in the area they are more or less on schedule – the pair on Budds Farm pools were first seen sitting on Mar 27 in both years, and the Milton Common pair which started sitting on Mar 17 in 1998 were building on Mar 15 in 1999 while the Bedhampton Mill pool and Langstone Pond pairs are both now sitting as they were last year. The reluctant pairs are those on Emsworth Peter Pond (which suffered trauma last year and may be uncertain of their fate this year) and the Little Deeps pair which may now be geriatric to judge by last year's failure to produce young. Alistair Martin tells me that he saw 5 SANDWICH TERN fishing off Gunner Point on Saturday evening (Mar 27) – the first report reaching me of parties moving along the coast – and Dave Mead tells me the same story for WHEATEAR of which he found 5 on the Hook (Warsash) shore on the same day, along with 5 DARTFORD WARBLER in the gorse there. On Sunday (Mar 28) Dave Mead took his RSPB group to Stansted and found the GREAT GREY SHRIKE still performing well, while Alistair went to Farlington Marshes on Sunday afternoon and enjoyed 3 SHORT EARED OWLS (two at the Point and one hunting along the main marsh side of the stream reeds).

PLANTS:

SUN 4 APR

If you believe that the Oak and Ash can give us a forecast of the amount of rain in the following summer then be warned that here the Oak trees are already opening both leaves and flowers (they always come together on Oak) whereas only a few flowers have opened on Ash trees (their flowers always appear long before their leaves). I have never understood whether it is the flowers or leaves which count, but in a normal year the Ash has its flowers open long before any Oak buds burst - this year the reverse seems to be true here, and that is supposed to forecast a dry summer. ('If the oak before the ash then in summer we will have a splash' rather than the 'soak' predicted if the ash is out first)

Another early flowering was seen by me at Nore Barn, Emsworth today where a mass of ENGLISH SCURVYGRASS can be seen in flower on the saltings near the tiny stream flowing out by Maisemore Gardens. Danish Scurvygrass is the commonest of the species hereabouts and is generally very small but the thing to look for is the leaf shape – Danish has Ivy shaped leaves where the English has leaves that are longer and thinner with wedge shaped bases tapering into the stem (technically 'cuneate')

SAT 3 APR

Walking down the Hayling Billy trail in Havant I was surprised to see PENDULOUS SEDGE in full flower but less so to see a plant of HONESTY flowering (someone told me a little while ago they had already seen that out). I was heading for the South Moors and went down Mill Lane where the only plants of RUSTY BACK FERN that I know of are putting out new leaves, exposing their 'rusty backs' as they uncurl (later you will have to lift the small serrated edged leaves to see the colour). On the 'orchid field' of the Moors I counted 255 KINGCUP plants and found the DIVIDED SEDGE already starting to flower (male anthers adding a touch of yellow to the tight brown heads). The first thin spikes of Field Horsetails were also to be seen as were a good few plants of Cuckoo Flower.

One common plant now flowering, which I forgot to mention when I first saw it on my garden lawn several days ago, is FIELD WOODRUSH (*Luzula campestris*) which goes by several English names including GOOD FRIDAY GRASS which was very appropriate this year.

FRI 2 APR

The BUTTERBUR plants in Emsworth Brook Meadow were counted again today by Brian Fellows and he tells me there are now just two short of 300 plants. Brian also tells me he fears the other vegetation in this well watered spot will swamp the Butterbur plants – my reply is just wait and see what the Butterbur

plants can do when they start spreading their huge leaves – I'll put my money on them to shade out any competition.

THU 1 APR

In Havant Thicket I found my first fresh fronds of MALE FERN just starting to uncurl from their tight 'shepherd's crooks' and also found three stems of BRACKEN with stems erect and leaves already stretching out sideways in an urgent attempt to stop my passage and to block the light from the ground – it won't be long before they succeed in both endeavours. Earlier, up on the downs at the edge of the Ditcham Woods, I found a mass of WILD STRAWBERRY plants in flower with much larger, brighter green leaves than the Barren Strawberry that has been flowering for some time.

WED 31 MAR

This morning's surprise was to find the first flowers open on normal HAWTHORN trees by the Brockhampton stream. Less dramatic were new catkins on Silver Birch and Hornbeam, and also worth a mention were the first flowers on Hoary Cress at Broadmarsh where the Lucerne bushes are showing vigorous leaf growth. On the bank overlooking the Budds Farm Pools (west end of mound) one Elder bush which I noted earlier as having flower buds before leaves now has leaves opening but the flowers are also well advanced and must be open for Easter. The grey leaves of SEA WORMWOOD were to be seen for the first time along the seawalls.

This afternoon I scored two more good 'ticks' by finding both WOOD SORREL and CUCKOO FLOWER (or MILKMAIDS or whatever you call Cardamine pratense) – both were seen at Stansted where I also found yellow flowers on a bush of BROOM and yet another first sight of a yellow flower was at Denvilles where several large clumps of SPOTTED MEDICK were in full bloom. While at Stansted I also noted a good show of ORPINE plants, but often it seems that these fail to flower when we reach their late summer season.

TUE 30 MAR

GARLIC MUSTARD was flowering by the roadside as I approached the Staunton Arms road junction from Havant this morning – another tick on my flowers of the year list. Nothing further of special news value was seen by me in a circuit of Horndean, Blendworth and Rowlands Castle but the country lanes around Blendworth are a delightful reminder of the country lanes of my youth.

Christoph Harwood today tells me that the TOOTHWORT which he saw on Sunday was not at the Lowtons Copse site but in less familiar territory to me about 1km south west of East Meon where a public path passes the eastern edge of Duncoombe Wood. He gives a map reference of 677212 which I make to be the north east point of the wood.

MON 29 MAR

Christoph Harwood walked from Catherington to East Meon in yesterday's sunshine and enjoyed a long list of flowers from which I would select YELLOW ARCHANGEL as my highspot, partly as it is only just appearing and partly for its bright yellow beauty. In second place I would put GERMANDER SPEEDWELL for the same reasons (apart from one sighting by myself by the IBM Lake this is the first report I have had of this beauty). MOSCHATEL and TOOTHWORT were both seen (I guess as they passed the west side of Lowtons Copse at Clanfield), and the list includes Bluebells, Ground Ivy, Primrose, Lesser Celandine, Dog Violets, Primroses and the lovely white version of Sweet Violet.

INSECTS:

SUN 4 APR

A RED ADMIRAL was seen on Thorney Island today by Margaret Collins, and while telling me this Barry Collins filled in a gap in our record of early butterflies by telling me that he had already had two male ORANGE TIP on Thorney - one on Eames Farm fields on Mar 27 and another further south on Thorney on April 1. Mar 27 sounds early, but I see from the Hampshire Butterfly report for 1997 that the two were seen at Bartley (west of Totton) on Mar 19 in that year.

FRI 2 APR

SMALL TORTOISESHELL numbers have so far lagged far behind those of Brimstone and Peacock in the current emergence but this morning Brian Fellows found at least one of them in Emsworth Brook Meadow

THU 1 APR

Theo Roberts this morning told me of three new butterfly species on the wing. Last Saturday (Mar 27) the first SMALL WHITE was in his Cosham garden and on Sunday (Mar 28) the first HOLLY BLUE male appeared there, and then, on Mar 31 at Leigh Park Gardens, he saw the first LARGE WHITE and a second Small White. Speckled Wood are now a daily sight in his garden.

Mark Litjens made a circuit of butterfly sites today, starting at Bentley Wood near Salisbury where he found 25 Brimstone, 5 Peacock and 3 Comma. At Yew Hill near Winchester another 7 Brimstone (and the first SWALLOW) were seen, and at Whiteley Pastures near Fareham another 11 Brimstone and 8 Peacock went in his notebook with another single Peacock in his garden where it has been resident for the past two days. Mark tells me that of all the many Brimstone he has seen since they started to emerge only 2 have been females, confirming my thoughts on the dangerous strategy used by this species – it makes sense to have the males out first as they are expendable – the important thing is to make sure the females get mated as soon as they emerge – but the time difference between the emergence of the two sexes seems to be carried to absurd lengths in this species. (See my note below)

Brian Fellows was in Stansted East Park today and reports 6 Peacock and 4 Brimstone butterflies

My first SMALL WHITE was in my garden today, along with two Brimstone and two Peacock. Earlier I had seen a Brimstone at Ditcham School and then passed what I took to be a female Brimstone in Rowlands Castle – walking in the Ditcham Woods I had seen the first leaves appearing on Alder Buckthorn and was wondering if the females timed their emergence to coincide with the appearance of the leaves under which they will lay their eggs, and keeping the males waiting for up to a fortnight before they (the females) emerge. At Havant Thicket in the afternoon I saw at least half a dozen Brimstone, a couple of Peacock and a Small Tortoiseshell, and glimpsed what must have been two SPECKLED WOOD chasing each other in a sunlit, dry corner of the wood. I was quite surprised to see a CRANE FLY already on the wing, and on one pond to see several each of WHIRLIGIG BEETLES and POND SKATERS. Among the various bumble bees now on the wing I think I can recognise *Bombus lucorum* by its white tail and yellow band around the middle of its abdomen, and also *B. pascuorum* (which I have seen a couple of times just recently) by the reddish brown colour of the whole of its thorax.

WED 31 MAR

Today's warmth brought out at least six male BRIMSTONE, two PEACOCK and one COMMA while I was in Lyels Wood at Stansted today, and Brian Fellows found at least 10 Brimstone and a Peacock in the Hollybank Woods

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 4 APR

The party walking round Thorney Island today with Kevin Stouse enjoyed the now rare sight of a HARE and also saw two SEALS (Barry Collins had seen six there earlier this morning). Kevin tells me these were Grey Seals and as I have not had the chance to talk to him about this identification I will just comment that all the other Seals seen in our harbours have (as far as I know) been Common Seals. I am under the impression that Grey Seals inhabit rocky shores where the Common Seals occur in sandy, muddy habitats, and the Common Seals are the ones which have rounded heads (easily mistaken for mooring buoys) with short noses giving them a very 'friendly' look. Grey Seals are larger, growing to six or seven feet long where the Common do not exceed 5½ feet, and have longer muzzles which do not give the very rounded look of the Common Seal when only the head is visible in the water.

THU 1 APR

In Havant Thicket this afternoon I disturbed a 'family' of three Roe Deer from their enjoyment of the afternoon sun but although I was within 50 yards of them they only got up, looked vaguely in my direction, and waited for me to walk on before the presumably resumed their sunbathing. The buck had a full head of antlers and seemed to have no velvet remaining (the base of the antlers are rough and knobbly so it was difficult to see how clean they were against the sun) and the two does (presumably mother and last year's kid) were of similar size to each other.

WED 31 MAR

Mike Collins tells me that when he was out in a friend's fishing boat a mile off Selsey on Mar 21 he had good views of several PORPOISES within 150 yards of the boat, seeing at least five at a time (but there could have been more). Mike comments that these were plumper animals than the sleek Bottle Nosed Dolphin which he has seen before and my only source of info on this subject being the Readers Digest book of British Water Life I can contribute from that book the statement that the Common Porpoise is the only one found in British waters.

Two seemingly reliable observers whom I met while walking round Stansted today both told me the same story of at least one pair of HARES currently having three LEVERETS in fields not far from Lyels Wood, and one of the people told me several pieces of evidence for the presence of MUNTJAC in the area. My own eyes showed me the tubby form of a FIELD VOLE bouncing across one of the woodland

rides (in a damp area) with its relatively short tail sticking out behind, and at Brickkiln Pond I watched a group of presumably CARP spawning in shallow water with a lot of splashing and the sight of large triangular fins above the water.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 12

MAR 22 - 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 MAR

Kevin Stouse led a walk at Chichester Gravel Pits plus Pagham Harbour today and had a wonderful time.

Blackcap and Chiffchaff were singing at Chichester lakes and a Redwing was seen in addition to the many birds on the water which included a couple of Pochard. At Sidlesham Ferry they saw 2 RUFF, 2 SPOTTED REDSHANK, 1 GREEN SANDPIPER and 4 Snipe. Walking the shore path to Church Norton they found 2 AVOCET still present with two pairs of PINTAIL and around 25 Wigeon plus 3 SAND MARTINS in the distance. 2 WILLOW WARBLER were in the churchyard (1 seen, 1 heard) and a SANDWICH TERN settled beside them as they ate their sandwiches on the gravel spit at Church Norton (a KNOT was also seen by those unable to untie their packed lunches). For desert they had not brought any ice-cream so a huge white gull rose from the centre of the harbour to remind them of their forgetfulness – although it was the first GLAUCOUS GULL seen by Kevin other birders confirmed its identity before mentioning that they were just off to see a HOOPOE in fields near the Church Norton carpark. Kevin's party did not hesitate to tag along which they saw both on the ground and flying up into a tree. Heading on for the Clock Tower, Greenlease Farm, Severals circuit they both heard the Hoopoe and saw a female BLACK REDSTART before they had passed the Clock Tower but at this point their luck ran out and they saw nothing more of interest on the way back.

On his return home Kevin Stouse had a message from Penny Cooper (well known to TV audiences for her co-starring role with Chris Packham when he visits Brent Lodge hospital but better known to Kevin and myself as an ex-colleague at IBM) to say that she had seen a pair of BUZZARD making a display flight over woodland north of Portsdown when she was walking her dogs down Pigeon House Lane (this could locate the birds over the Hookheath nature reserve, which would please Theo Roberts as its warden)

Brian Fellows did a follow up act to Kevin by visiting the Chichester lakes in the afternoon where he watched Great Crested Grebe displaying (8 birds seen) and found 2 male Pochard on the East Trout Lake in addition to the many Coot, Tufted Duck, Swans and other birds

Cycling over Langstone Bridge and past the Oysterbeds to Gunner Point this afternoon I distantly saw around 50 BRENT on the South Moors shore (and one in Bridge Lake nearer the Oysterbeds) but little else of interest. Along the water's edge Black Tailed Godwit were probably the most numerous waders, along with Oystercatcher, but less than 50 of each. There were just two Egrets east of Langstone bridge and only four Shelduck in total.

SAT 27 MAR

The Evening Class chose Pagham Harbour for their outing today and listed 55 species of which the highlight was a SPOTTED REDSHANK feeding in the harbour close to the reserve centre. They also saw a Green Sandpiper and a Black Tailed Godwit with colour rings (yellow over lime) in the Ferry Pool. The reserve notice board reported the first WILLOW WARBLER had arrived today, and listed 1 Firecrest, 6 Black Redstart and 2 Ruff (not since Mar 24). On their way home they called at the Chichester Lakes and probably saw what I had wrongly thought to be Little Gulls last Tuesday but they rightly identified as first winter Black Headed Gulls coming into first summer plumage. My only excuse for the size error is that I have only just started using 8x bins in place of the 10x that I have used for years and everything looks smaller, but that is no excuse for not picking up on one feature which I did note (the black trailing edge to the whole wing) which I now see is a feature of Black Headed at this stage but not Little Gull. At the time I was puzzled by the lack of more black on the crown of the gulls heads and other features and I have since seen the same pattern of plumage and behaviour on several gulls at Sinah Lake (Sunday 28 Mar) which were the same size as Black Headed.

Mark Litjens went to Hurst Castle this morning hoping for some seabird passage but only saw one FULMAR. On land one WHEATEAR was present and a female BLACK REDSTART was seen (probably the one that has been there through the winter).

John Goodspeed tells me that yesterday morning there were four PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle. Those BRENT won't go. Visiting the Warblington fields for our second CBC visit I was not surprised to find

four that are not intending to leave were still enjoying the growing wheat, and looking over the water I could see a few out on the Northney saltings which I assumed were half a dozen more summering birds until Tony Gutteridge told me he had seen at least 25 fly from there, and going on to join the Friends of Langstone Harbour litter pick in the South Moors/Budds Farm area I found just under 100 there - obviously birds from the west are still passing through. Also on the Budds Farm shore 18 Wigeon, 20+ Teal, 50 Black Tailed Godwit and a similar number of Oystercatcher were present with a good sprinkling of Dunlin and Redshank – and at Langstone there were still 17 Teal on the Wade Court meadow pool. On the Budds Farm pools a pair of Swans had moved in and one was sitting on a nest on the bank dividing the two pools, one pair of Canada Geese were occupying the tiny bare island in the east pool and a second pair were on the west pool with at least 20 Tufted Duck. I probably saw at least four different Egrets this morning.

FRI 26 MAR

A message from Ian Thirlwell tells me that a CETTI'S WARBLER was singing strongly at Portsmouth's Milton Lakes today, and can now be heard regularly – last Tuesday (Mar 23) he heard two there. Also today he saw the first Little Egret for some time on the Langstone Harbour mud off Milton Common – the Egrets will be few and far between over the next couple of months while on breeding duty which probably takes the majority of them back to the continent, though hopefully more will stay to nest here each year now following successful breeding in Poole Harbour and at Portsmouth Harbour's Naval Armaments site.

Brian Fellows took on a new bird survey today in the Southleigh Forest where he has been allocated square SU7409 for the BTO Breeding Birds survey. It was in this square that a couple of singing WOOD WARBLER appeared at the end of May last year and were heard until mid-June but I reckon Brian will be lucky to have these birds back there (they have not been recorded in Southleigh Forest before to my knowledge, and it was thought these were failed breeders from elsewhere which set up camp here after being booted out of some more favourable site)

A Northney gardener recently saw what he took to be a Blackbird entangled in some old chicken wire that happened to be in a Forsythia hedge. Going to the assistance of the bird, presumably without taking any precautions against personal injury, this kind man managed to extricate the bird from a situation in which it could not move (but not without feeling the bird's talons on his hand). Although (luckily) the bird was in an exhausted state, after a short while it recovered its faculties and flew off, apparently without injury. As the bird turned out to be a Sparrowhawk, which had crashed into the wire after a high speed attack on birds at the nearby garden bird table, I reckon that the rescuer was very lucky to have little damage to his hands from the hawk's beak or talons, and the luck of the bird in being rescued goes without saying. This story came to me via Anne Cunningham and John Goodspeed, and reminded me of how we recovered another Sparrowhawk from a South Hayling garden after it had tangled with a fruit cage and broken a wing – the hawk was able to walk but not fly and we caught it by placing a large cardboard box on the ground in a corner of the garden so that the bird could walk in, and we also placed a rug on top of the box so that it would fall to cover the opening. We then very gently moved the bird towards the box until it went in, when the second person (by now out of sight of the bird) moved in quickly and dropped the rug over the opening. (See the Wildlife Organisations page of this website for wildlife rescue contacts if you have to deal with an emergency)

The Great Grey Shrike was still at Stansted this morning, with the female of the local Kestrel pair and a Fox in the same field for company. Other birds noted on my outing were a Canada Goose pair, probably nesting, on Brickkiln Pond (no sign of the Swans, they presumably are on the old boating lake behind the pond by the road). The Emperor and at least half a dozen other Canadas were by Aldsworth Pond, on which there is still a pair of Gadwall, a male Shoveler and at least 12 Tufted Duck as well as the Coot, Moorhen and Dabchick. At Racton Park Farm I counted at least 39 Rooks nest from across the valley (where around 20 Linnet chattered very noisily from an oak) and at Aldsworth I could count at least 31 Rooks nests.

THU 25 MAR

Today Brian Fellows walked down the north west shore of Thorney Island from Emsworth and found a pair of Swans on the Little Deeps – for many years now a pair has bred there regularly and has a tradition of being the first to hatch their cygnets of all pairs in our area, then last year something went wrong and no young were ever seen (the sitting bird sat on and on, probably on infertile eggs). This year the pair (presumably the same as last year) have been very reluctant to show up on the Little Deeps. If they stay, now they are back, they are unlikely to keep up their record of early hatching. Over the seawall Brian found 18 KNOT on the mud with more than 40 Redshank, 4 Curlew and 6 Black Tailed Godwit. 6 Shelduck seen were presumably birds that may nest nearby (though some fly a long way inland, e.g. to

Stansted, to find nest holes – I would be interested to know if any of these ever get any chicks back to the harbour after a walk of five or six kilometres which involves crossing the live rail of the railway and the busy A27 road). I was a little amused today to pick up a glossy leaflet advertising Emsworth (produced by Emsworth Business Association and Havant Borough Council) which selects for its snippet on birds in the harbour Brent, Shelduck and Bar-Tailed Godwit and appears to say they all come from Siberia (as far as I know the furthest the Shelduck travel is to Heligoland or Bridgwater Bay for their summer moult).

After finding a fresh Woodpigeon eggshell on my lawn (probably dropped by a thieving Magpie) my morning was spent in Havant Thicket where I found bird song is increasing to the stage of confusion but the singing birds were all regulars – the best being a Marsh Tit. A couple of Song Thrushes were putting out the volume to which Brian Fellowss recently objected at 5.30am when he was trying to sleep. Although I had no unusual birds it was more rewarding than last Tuesday night's after dark visit to check for owls – not a single bird heard in a 50 minute circuit.

WED 24 MAR

Theo Roberts this morning told me that he had been in the Hambledon area last Saturday (Mar 20) and had heard the “wet-my-lips” call of a QUAIL from weedy fields just north of Hoe Cross Farm – he had stopped at the crossroads (SU 630149) south of the farm at around 4pm. Bird of Hampshire tells us that there were several reports of Quail being flushed by winter shooting parties in the 1950s, and Birds of Sussex confirms that they do occasionally winter. In that same area Theo heard a singing CORN BUNTING and saw a BUZZARD (away to the north)

Brian Fellows this morning watched the Stansted GREAT GREY SHRIKE for half an hour at distances down to 20 yards at SU 764107 where it would have been clearly visible from the public path running due east from the north side of the immediate grounds of Stansted House. Most of the time it was clearly visible on overhead power lines but it regularly dropped to the ground and spent several minutes foraging out of sight. If anyone does attempt to see it please remember that the drive up to the house is clearly marked ‘Private Drive’ and that there is no parking place beside that drive where anyone leaving a car will not incur the wrath of the inhabitants of the estate Park in the Main Avenue carpark and walk from there. Also in that area this morning were around 100 FIELDFARE, and Alistair Martin tells me he had at least 40 Redwing in the north west of the forest last week. Brian Fellows clearly heard Tawny Owl hooting some distance to the south while he was there.

The EMPEROR GOOSE is still in the Aldsworth Pond area with its retinue of Canada Geese (about a dozen). Brian Fellows had earlier this morning seen the Geese on Brickkiln pond. I could see no Gadwall on Aldsworth pond and only 6 Tufted Duck with Coot, Mallard and Moorhen, and Brian saw 4 Teal still there. In the afternoon Brian made his regular walk around the Lower Ems valley, finding little change in the birds (even at 4pm 37 Robins and 18 Greenfinch were singing). The one newcomer species was a pair of CANADA GEESE in the main field by the river – Brian seems unperturbed by their arrival but to me I see little difference between them moving in and Serbians invading Kosovo.

TUE 23 MAR

Brian Fellows toured Portsmouth sites today and his main news appears to be that those Brent won't leave us – there were 90 on Eastney Lake (the polite name for the ‘Glory Hole’ west of the Hayling Ferry spit) and 18 more on the Portsmouth College fields by the Eastern Road (at a guess they may be cowards who do not intend to leave and are hiding their shame by keeping out of the way of the migrants on the harbour). At Baffins Pond one of the Swan pair may have been on a nest on an island and a female Pochard was still present. Calling at Broadmarsh on his way back he found 78 Black Tailed Godwit on the mud (many in summer plumage) with Oystercatcher, Dunlin, 46 Redshank and 14 KNOT. On the water were still 28 WIGEON and 3 Merganser, and the SWANS now number 14 which looks as if the summer flock is starting to collect (I had the same thought last Saturday Mar 20 when I found 10 Swans there with 2 more up the Brockhampton Stream). Looking down on Budds Farm pools Brian also had clear views of the WATER RAIL which I had seen on Saturday (it patrols the east side of the bank dividing the two remaining pools) and found three Canada Geese present (probably the pair that intend to nest on the small bare island in the east pool plus ‘Auntie’ – or maybe one of their offspring). Along the South Moors shore 280 BRENT could be seen – this is a favoured spot to see the last migrants.

I headed for the Chichester Gravel Pits today, passing the corpse of a BARN OWL beside the A27 north of Emsworth (just before the service station), close to where Colin Law saw a dead Barn Owl in December. The most numerous birds on the Chichester Lakes were 216 Coot and 167 Tufted Duck but I did see two pairs of Pochard and one of Gadwall as well as a few Great Crested Grebe, Little Grebe and Mallard. The real interest started at Runcton Lake when a small gull swam rapidly into my foreground, twisting this way and that as it actively pecked at the surface of the water. I was soon able to compare it with a Black

Headed Gull and see that it was quite a bit smaller, and I am sure it was a LITTLE GULL though it had minimal black markings on its head, just a splodge behind the eye and a hint of a band going over the crown from eye to eye. The mantle was an uneven light grey colour and the primaries were black. I was looking into the light and spent some time trying to decide on the bill colour (eventually I noted it as pale flesh), and after watching the swimming bird for some time another similar bird flew past with hints of the W pattern on its wings and with a fair amount of black terminal bar on the tip of its very short tail. In the air this bird seemed to have a black trailing edge to its wing, and hovered and dipped as a Little Gull should. Moving on to Vinnetrow Lake I saw other similar birds flying among the many Black Headed, and I guessed that there might be up to ten or even twelve Little Gulls present. My guess would be that they were second winter birds, but I remain surprised at the lack of black on their heads

Going on to Sidlesham Ferry I found the recent sightings of interest - on Sunday (Mar 21) there had been two SANDWICH TERN (and an Avocet) at the Ferry Pool (unusual to see them inland so early?) and on Saturday there had been two BLACK REDSTART at Selsey Bill and 6 LITTLE STINT in the harbour with another in the Ferry Pool with one Ruff - one Slav Grebe was still off Church Norton with 2 Firecrest near the church. On Mar 18 there had been a Merlin at Church Norton, and on Mar 16 there were 36 EIDER and 2 GREAT NORTHERN DIVER off Church Norton. Nothing special in my own sightings today other than three male KESTREL over the reserve hut together. Still on the subject of raptors a SPARROWHAWK (presumably female) put up all the Havant Town Pigeons, then soared high above the town with just two Crows for company.

Further to the recent BUZZARD saga I last night had a message from Alan Cokes who had seen one over the Queen's Inclosure in Waterlooville on Mar 21 (at a guess the same one that was seen over the nearby Catherington Down that same day. Of more interest was news from Dave Mead that Bird Line had recently been reporting several Buzzard over Kent, which could support the theory that we had an invasion of continental Buzzards drifting west over Southern England on Mar 21,21. (Also note Theo Roberts sighting of one over the high ground north west of Hambledon – see Mar 24)

This morning I found a note in my letterbox from Dave Mead telling me that he had just seen a GREAT GREY SHRIKE hawking from telegraph wires over rough grass in Stansted East Park, and it seems this was a chance discovery without any knowledge that Michael Prior had seen one there earlier in the month. The bird was seen from the public path at around SU 764107, but there is no nearby parking and the spot is about 1 km from the public carpark at Stansted Main Avenue or about 2km if you walk up from Walderton village - there is unlikely to be anything else of interest in that area other than a flock of Fieldfare and a resident Kestrel and you are likely to have a long walk of double the distances given and see nothing as the bird is likely to leave any day now.

Also in the east of the Stansted estate Sonia Bolton has seen several Red Legged Partridge which she believes were driven from their normal fields by spraying operations. One of the birds had lost its sense of balance and she wonders how many ground birds suffer poisoning from spring crop spraying.

MON 22 MAR

Having just decided that all the BRENT left Langstone Harbour last Saturday night a trip to Northney this morning seemed to confirm this with only ten of the geese visible in the whole of the Langstone Bridge to Emsworth area, but Stoke Bay had a flock of 120 plus another 30 in the adjacent Oysterbeds. Merganser are still common on the water and Shelduck on the mud (I saw 18 of the former and 30 of the latter) while the tideline is still rich in passing waders – in ‘Texaco bay’ by Langstone bridge I saw 30 Redshank and 12 Black Tailed Godwit, and in the Oysterbeds main pool a flock of around 100 Dunlin had at least 14 Ringed Plover and a Turnstone attached to it, while Oystercatcher and Curlew were widespread in small numbers. Six Egrets were in the area between Langstone and Northney. I met Jason Crook at the Oysterbeds and he told me he had just been watching a single LITTLE STINT (he thought it likely to be one of the four overwintering in the harbour – originally they were together at Farlington Marshes but for some time only three have been seen there) and had seen a RINGED PLOVER pair displaying. Among other news he passed on was that the three Little Ringed Plover which arrived at Farlington Marshes on Mar 12, and were seen for three or four days, have not been seen recently (hopefully nesting and ‘gone to ground’), and he also told me that in January a flock of 25 SISKIN was in the Alders over the Hermitage stream between Hendy Lennox garage and the railway where he sees them every winter (and always 25 of them), and finally he confirmed the presence of a breeding pair of Kingfisher on the Hermitage stream in the usual place.

Michael Prior had excellent views of a GREAT GREY SHRIKE in the East Park at Stansted on March 6th, but I only heard of it today when he passed the news on via Alistair Martin, who also told me that there was a large flock of Brent at the Kench this morning.

John Goodspeed was in luck yesterday when he had good views of his second LESSER SPOTTED

WOODPECKER for this year, this time in the Queens Inclosure at Waterlooville (SU 694103). He also heard BLACKCAP in full song at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown on both days of the weekend. Brian Fellows found 87 Swans on and around Emsworth Mill Pond this morning with the Black Swan and 2 Canada Geese also present. 15 Brent were in the harbour and 46 Mallard on the Mill Pond. At the Slipper Mill Pond a dozy Merganser was asleep on one of the rafts, probably the same one that I saw sleeping there recently, renewing thoughts that this pond is perhaps known to birds as a pleasant hospice in which to end their lives (gulls regularly die on the rafts and this Merganser maybe feels the end is near). Very much alive were the Little Grebe which are now back to 4 in number, and up on Peter Pond a Mallard was demonstrating its versatility by flicking water over its body with one foot - something that neither Brian nor I have noticed before. The Coots were also demonstrating their urge for life in having three nests with sitting birds - two on the Slipper Mill and one on Peter Pond (where the Swans have still not buckled down to nesting). In the afternoon Brian was in the north west of Stansted where he heard much bird song including Marsh Tit, but although he saw Treecreeper he did not hear it sing.

PLANTS:

SUN 28 MAR

South Hayling had four newly flowering plants for me this afternoon and several others of interest. Best of the flowering plants was the massive bush of TARTARIAN HONEYSUCKLE that grows at Sinah on the west side of the short road leading south from Ferry Road into the anglers entrance to the Sinah Gravel Pit. I was coming out onto the main Ferry Road and found a mass of pink flowers on the bush on my left at the junction with the main road. Going on round the Golf Course I then came on SPRING BEAUTY in flower by the entrance to the Ferry Sailing Club, and when almost round the course (south of the club house) I found a first flower on HOARY CRESS and several plants of 'Yellow Rocket' - in this case the AMERICAN WINTERCRESS version. All the way along Ferry Road past the Sinah Gorse I was almost overpowered by the strong smell of the Gorse flowers, and on the shingle at Gunner Point the first purple shoots of SEA KALE were visible and Oxford Ragwort was in flower. Checking the Green Veined orchids I found several plants with sheathed flower spikes and one without a sheath on which I could already see purple flower buds. Near these orchids I found something most unexpected which I can find no record of having seen there before - POLYPODY FERN growing on the sandy soil.

FRI 26 MAR

A tour through Southleigh and Stansted Forest areas, returning via Walderton, Racton and Aldsworth gave me my first patch of CROSSWORT in flower along the road from Racton to Aldsworth, RED CURRANT flowering in Hollybank Woods, and my first wild WOOD SPURGE dangling clusters of yellow 'flowers' by the roadside at Stansted sawmill. Woodlands Lane, as usual, had a wonderful display of flowers of which I noted YELLOW ARCHANGEL showing bright yellow in its flower buds, my first MOSCHATEL, Bluebells, Wood Anemones, Sweet (white and pinkish flowered) and Early Dog Violets, Lesser Celandine, Ivy Leaved Speedwell, Barren Strawberry, Primrose, Spurge Laurel and Green Hellebore flowers plus the first spring RED CAMPION - I didn't check the Butcher's Broom but I'm sure I would have also found tiny flowers on that. At the Racton road junction the show of BUTTERBUR remains very poor (without searching I could see less than 20 flower spike) while the Hampshire colony in Emsworth's Brook Meadow, counted by Brian Fellows this week, had 248 spikes on Mar 24. In Denvilles one very advanced plant of MEADOW BUTTERCUP stood tall with at least half a dozen branches and a total of at least a dozen flowers, nearby Cow Parsley was in full flower and in many places now GREATER STITCHWORT is covering banks with white flowers. In one place near Racton a cluster of SOUTHERN WOODRUSH was in flower.

WED 24 MAR

EARLY PURPLE ORCHIDS could be flowering by April 5th (the date on which I saw the first flowers last year) to judge by the sheathed flower spikes now visible on many plants which I saw today - the tallest of the flower spikes was already 8cm high. In the same woodland I found a mass of my own first EARLY DOG VIOLETS and many Primroses, and driving home I passed a roadside bank of Greater Stitchwort in flower. Also in Stansted this morning I found a couple more BLUEBELLS with their flowers opening and saw my first Bugle plant (not yet in flower)

MON 22 MAR

Cycling south over Langstone Bridge this morning I noticed DANISH SCURVY GRASS flowering along the roadside edge (salt laid on the roads in the winter and splashed onto the verges by cars creates an ideal habitat for them for miles along our coastal roads), and along the road from the bridge to the hotel at Northney the flowers made a dense white-line edging. Ground Ivy is similarly now turning many lane

banks into purple carpets, while the BLACKTHORN blossom is now opening on the really tough old bushes – it made a magnificent sight on the Hayling ‘North Common’ south of Northney Marian today, and the thick hedge separating the South Moors from the old playing fields was turning white yesterday. Also on the North Common at Northney, in the hollow by the north west corner of the meadow between the common and Northney village, the first leaves of the magnificent colony of GOAT’S RUE are now just appearing from the ground and swathes of Sweet Violet are enjoying their brief turn to feel the warm sunshine before the Teazels and other plants shade them out.

INSECTS:

SUN 28 MAR

Warm sunshine brought one each of Brimstone and Peacock into my garden today but the highspot was my first BEE FLY with its furry brown bottom and incredible spike of a proboscis sticking out in front.

SAT 27 MAR

Mark Litjens drove to Bentley Wood on the Wiltshire border this morning and counted 30 BRIMSTONE, 8 COMMA and 5 PEACOCK on the wing

Despite the warm sunshine I only saw one butterfly today – a male Brimstone heading out over the Budds Farm shore to cross the water to Broadmarsh. Also on the shore, in the tideline rubbish, I spotted a tiny insect of bright scarlet colour – the colour and size suggested a ‘Money Spider’ but this was more like a minute Woodlouse when I looked more closely. It had small antennae and curled up when threatened by my capture of it (though not in a tight ball) but then ran round my hand and dropped off into the shingle never to be seen again. The nearest I can get in Chinery’s Insect book is a Velvet Mite which is said to be common in spring.

FRI 26 MAR

Today I saw my first large BEETLES of the year – one was similar to a BLOODY NOSED BEETLE (I believe there is a Lesser Bloody Nosed Beetle and this small beetle might have been that species) and the other was one of the long bodied shiny black ground beetles scurrying across the road.

WED 24 MAR

The first SPECKLED WOOD of the season was out in Theo Roberts garden last Saturday (Mar 20) along . This sheltered garden at the foot of Portsdown (south side) always has a good selection of butterflies, and usually has the first to be seen in our area of all the species that frequent gardens. Theo says this is not an earliest ever first sighting of Speckled Wood for his garden (though it beats the first Hampshire sighting for 1997, Mar 27, given in the most recent Hampshire Butterfly Report). Hopefully Theo will be seeing the first Holly Blue any day now (in 1997 the earliest in Hampshire was seen on Mar 10).

One item that I omitted to report at the time was the presence of many small mining bees (*Halictus rubicundus*, I think) digging their nest tunnels on a dry bank at the IBM North Harbour site last Saturday (Mar 20), and my first 2-spot Ladybird in the house yesterday.

TUE 23 MAR

A slight revival in butterfly activity was noted by Mark Litjens today during lunchtime around the IBM site at Hursley. Within the site he saw 1 each of BRIMSTONE and PEACOCK, and in nearby lanes found 2 TORTOISESHELL and 1 Brimstone.

While I was at the Chichester Gravel Pits today I saw just one TORTOISESHELL exploring nettles – presumably a female about to lay eggs. As they were alongside a public path it made me wonder just how many of their eggs fall victim to our human urge for tidyness, cutting back the wayside or garden nettles before the caterpillars even emerge.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 28 MAR

A phone call at around 8pm this evening from someone who lives in Eastern Road, Havant (running along the north of the pony fields north of the big railway station carpark) reported up to 20 large bats – possibly Noctules – around the Horse Chestnut trees which overhang the Lavant stream where it flows from the old Oak Park School site before disappearing into the tunnel which takes it under Havant town centre. Anyone interested in bats might like to check out this site on future evenings as the bats have been seen here in previous summers and probably have a summer roost in the trees.

FRI 26 MAR

While crossing the Stansted East Park on the public path going east from Stansted House to Walderton this morning I heard rustling noises from a tree filled ‘dell’ in the wheat field south of the path and watched 8 FALLOW does emerge and set off across the field to join a bigger bunch of 8 bucks and perhaps another

8 does. I was quite surprised to see a party of mixed sexes as I thought they kept separate except during the autumn rut.

THU 25 MAR

I know very little about SLIME MOULDS but occasionally come on them on trees or dead wood, usually looking like rather damp and over-squidgy Marsh Mallow. Yesterday in Havant Thicket I found some of a bright yellow colour on pine wood in Havant Thicket, and today I found two pure white lumps on Willow at Stansted. My understanding is that these start as a very large number of individual cells, separate from each other, and that somehow in damp conditions they move together until they form a squidgy lump which then hardens and produces spores. If anyone can tell me more, or where to find information about them, please tell me.

WED 24 MAR

The first GRASS SNAKE of the year was seen swimming across a pond in the Rudley Mill area (about a mile west of Denmead, between Anthill Common and Newtown) by Theo Roberts last Saturday (Mar 20), now doubt finding a few Frogs still around near the water. Most Frogspawn has hatched into Tadpoles now and Toad spawn can be found in the few ponds favoured by Toads.

35 paces from the stile into the Stansted Redwood Grove path this morning I found very fresh Badger dung pits at the edge of the path (difficult not to step into them). I understand that Badgers place these pits around the periphery of their territory as a warning to other Badgers not to pass this point. Maybe here they are intended to keep humans out of their territory.

MON 22 MAR

When at IBM North Harbour last Saturday (Mar 20) I found the first tiny shells of this year's crop of POINTED SNAILS (*Cochlicella acuta*) on the underside of a Dock leaf at ground level. Hopefully by the summer these tiny things will have grown to around 15mm from top to bottom of their spire shaped shells and in hot weather we may again, as last summer, see a thousand or more clustered on low posts which they climb to avoid being baked on the ground – just a few inches above the ground the temperature is noticeably lower than on the ground itself, and any slight breeze accentuates this cooling.

HABITAT:

WED 24 MAR

Theo Roberts today reminded me of a very practical and timely task recently undertaken by the Portsmouth group of the Hampshire branch of Butterfly Conservation. This has been the widespread planting of 400 ALDER BUCKTHORN bushes in public and private places during the past winter to encourage and support BRIMSTONE butterflies (the leaves of this shrub are the foodplant of the butterfly's caterpillars). The recent exceptionally large and widespread emergence of this species (surprising in view of the small number of these butterflies seen before hibernation last autumn) seems to indicate that the word got around among the butterflies.

TUE 23 MAR

Two pieces of good news from Havant Borough. The first being that after seemingly years of waiting the HERMITAGE STREAM RESTORATION scheme is at last getting under way, and before this year is out we should hopefully see a small stretch of the stream running through Leigh Park exchanging its concrete corsets for more comfortable underwear and looking more like the natural upper and lower sections of this stream. Anyone wanting to see the beginnings of this restoration can come along on April 24 to help pick up the litter trapped over the years in the streamside hedgerows that are now being cleared to allow access to the stream – this operation will start at 10am on that day and go on until noon and is in the section running past Chalton Crescent in the north and Corhampton Crescent, in the south with Purbrook Way running through its centre (Ring 446445 after Easter for more details). The second piece of news is that the supposedly contaminated land of the BROADMARSH PLAYING FIELDS will be covered with a large amount of clean topsoil after sealing off the present surface, hopefully providing an improved area for sports, dog walkers and (most importantly) winter feeding Brent Geese. As with the Brimstone butterflies mentioned above (Mar 24) it seems that the word about the supposed contamination got around among the Brent which have boycotted this previously favoured feeding ground during the past winter. Perhaps the wonderfully named 'Sheep's Foot Roller' that is an essential part of the operation can mark out on the new surface a message to the geese telling them to come back next winter.

MAR 15 - 21

BIRDS:

SUN 21 MAR

A brief walk to the South Moors this afternoon found a harbour devoid of BRENT - not strictly true as there was one all alone off the Langbrook Stream mouth, but that emphasised the departure of the others. A little later four more Brent flew to the Langbrook, and later I saw ten more in the lee of the Ship Inn at Langstone. There were still three Snipe on the South Moors, but a couple of singing Meadow Pipits, one Skylark, and a pair of Linnet, indicated a change to summer mode. From the South Moors I saw one Egret, one Merganser and one Redshank, while at Langstone there were three Egrets, a few Redshank and even a pair of Teal in the Wade Court meadows. Both Swans were on the pond and the female could be seen on the usual nest side among the north edge reeds (I heard a Reed Bunting near her). On the way home, crossing the pony fields north of Wade Court, a Goldcrest sang from an isolated Scots Pine and I heard a Bullfinch by the drive into Wade Court and a couple of Nuthatch near the Lynbourne footbridge (these are now established there).

SAT 20 MAR

Mark Litjens had today's prize bird - a STONE CURLEW - at Martin Down. Mark had heard that some had arrived back in Norfolk and found just one, looking a bit lonely and standing/sitting in one spot within the area set aside for them in the reserve. Mark asks if this is an unusually early date, prompting me to extract the tables of summer migrant arrival dates from the Hampshire and Sussex bird reports and put these on the website for general information - I have sorted them into sequence by the Hampshire 'average arrival date (1971-95)' and put the table on the What's New page. In Hampshire this average arrival date for Stone Curlew is April 3, so Mark has done well, but he still has to beat the earliest (Feb 25 in 1938). The earliest for Britain, according to Lee Evans book 'Rare Birds in Britain', is Feb 12 for a bird seen in Devon in 1993 (this comes from Mark)

Alistair Martin revisited Stansted Forest today and had yet another good sighting - a smart male BRAMBLING perched atop a Larch before flying off north

A female SISKIN was on the metal nutholder in Brian Fellows' garden this morning (scorning the red plastic bag of nuts put out specially to attract Siskin). This is his first in the garden this year. He has also had a female BLACKCAP in the garden during the week.

Brian Fellows' account of his part in today's WeBS count (covering his usual south west Hayling sector) begins with 5 SANDERLING on the tideline west of Black Point, and as the tide rose a small roost of Grey Plover, Dunlin and Turnstone developed on a small grass island (birds now on passage don't know the local customs and traditional roosts, so may be found anywhere). On the water 200 Brent and 79 Shelduck (a large flock for this site) were present with some Teal, Wigeon and a couple of male Shoveler. On the Tournbury Farm pond the feral Pink-footed Goose was still present, as were the Swan pair and 3 Little Grebe, while 26 Tufted Duck sounds an unusual crowd for this pond. 12 SNIFE got up as Brian approached, mainly from the shore, not the marsh on which there were 22 Curlew and over which 6 LAPWING were making their wonderful breeding display flights and calls. Elsewhere in Chichester Harbour, off Old Park Wood in what is still Chichester Channel before it becomes Fishbourne Creek, Martin and Margaret Baggs watched a flotilla of 25 Merganser, probably passage migrants.

This morning I visited the IBM Lake for the monthly WeBS count to find my old enemies, the CANADA GEESE, preparing to keep up their year on year perpetual increase in numbers. There were only 28 of them, but 12 of these were paired and standing by their nest sites. The Swan pair were present but showing no signs of getting down to business, and a breeding plumage GREAT CRESTED GREBE was on the water (they successfully nested here for the first time last year) but I never saw two together. Six pairs of Little Grebe will probably also nest and are showing their usually noisy territorial aggression (I saw one charge at an innocent Teal, causing the duck to fly). Seven Teal and twelve Tufted Duck, but no Pochard, were seen and there were still a couple of Snipe. Bird of the day was undoubtedly an adult MED GULL which gave me quite a thrill as I was scanning the 500 or so gulls and suddenly saw the scarlet bill and jet black head in great contrast to the brown heads and dull bills of the Black Headed Gulls. In the same flock an adult British race LESSER BLACKBACK in full breeding plumage possibly outclassed the Med Gull in elegance of plumage with its pure white offset by the charcoal grey wings (very fashionable this year) and the bright yellow bill and legs. From my recent observations in the Havant area I thought most COMMON GULLS had already left but I saw at least 25 here, one or two in breeding plumage. I came on a couple of Reed Bunting and heard the Green Woodpecker, while another top of the bill bird was very smart male KESTREL which I saw attacking and driving off a pair of crows, stooping at them really fast (the effect was spoilt later when a tremendous din from a pair of Pied Wagtail showed them seeing the Kestrel off their territory). At one point the Kestrel disappeared into a crevice in

the west face of Building F, and the gardeners told me the birds are probably nesting in there, and that they had recently seen four Kestrels together having an argument thereabouts.

In the afternoon I cycled round Brockhampton and the South Moors, finding a Swan pair by the old Corn Wharf on the Brockhampton stream (a pair once nested on the far bank against the electricity sub-station but the nest was vandalised by humans). On Budds Farm pools I watched a WATER RAIL running along the waterline of the central pool and saw it drive off a COMMON SANDPIPER which had been resting there - both birds then remained in view for some time on opposite sides of the pool. One Snipe got up from the South Moors and one Meadow Pipit sang but the main interest was in the string of over 350 BRENT along the shoreline. While watching them I saw around 40 Brent flying east high from Farlington Marshes and continuing south east over Hayling out of sight - I waved them good-bye. A flock of 16 RINGED PLOVER and 6 TURNSTONE were also on the shore and there were still 5 COMMON GULLS on the water.

The Evening Class group visited Titchfield Haven this morning and found a pair of POCHARD still present - Birds of Hampshire shows that they were not proven to nest at the Haven during the survey work for this book but they certainly nest regularly in other parts of Hampshire. The group enjoyed close views of Gadwall and male Shoveler but did not spot the Water Rail nor Firecrest which were both probably there, nor did they see any Bearded Tits (but I do not know if they are currently present). Singing CETTI's WARBLER were naturally among the 45 species they logged and Stonechat and Reed Bunting were seen. From the shore they watched a good sized flock of BRENT still present off Hill Head.

FRI 19 MAR

Alistair Martin was in the north west section of Stansted Forest today, hoping for Siskin or Crossbill, when he heard a corvid commotion and was able to get a good view of two very large 'crows' with wedge-shaped tails and protruding necks giving the 'cross shaped' plan view of the body, and to hear the distinctive gruff low notes of RAVEN before the birds soared high in the air and headed north west. I feel no hesitation in passing on this info as I can hardly expect the birds to be thinking of settling in to nest at Stansted (any more than I expect further sightings of last week's Red Kite over Havant Thicket).

Alistair did not see Siskin but did see a flock of around 30 Goldfinch feeding on the Larches, and he found under several trees the same carpet of Larch cone flakes which I saw there last Saturday (Mar 13). I suppose there is the faintest possibility that a single pair of Crossbill are nesting in the forest (in which case they would be keeping a low profile and not advertising their presence), and being early nesters they could have young in the nest now demanding lots of food - all conjecture, but I will be keeping my eyes and ears open in that area.

I passed around 550 BRENT this morning as I cycled from Langstone to the Kench, including a flock of around 250 in Stoke Bay and other smaller flocks scattered along the shore. With them were a good selection of waders that were probably on passage, among them Black Tailed Godwits coming into summer plumage and a few Ringed Plover that may well have reached their journey's end and be intending to nest at the Oysterbeds. On the outer wall of the Oysterbeds a single bird looked very like a WHIMBREL, smaller than most Curlew, with a straightish bill ending in an abrupt hook, but it was too far away to see any head stripes (and if it were Whimbrel it could just as well be a wintering bird rather than an early migrant, but we can expect the first very soon now). In the lagoon of the Oysterbeds three male Merganser were actively courting two females while another two females were sleeping unconcernedly a little way off - I wonder if these were the two that spent last summer at the Oysterbeds, having renounced interest in male birds? Down at Gunner Point there was no sign of Sandwich Tern, but I hear via Alistair Martin that two have been seen off the coast of the west solent.

Last Sunday at West Dean woods Alistair Martin saw a pair of Treecreeper and was able to see the male's bill moving as it made it's charming song - he agrees that the song starts with a descending scale like a Willow Warbler and ends with a flourish similar to the end of a Goldcrest song. I only hear this song once every few years and am envious of Alistair's luck.

On the subject of departing Brent John Goodspeed has sent me this note referring to a visit he made to Farlington Marshes last Wednesday (Mar 17). "On Farlington Marshes I reckoned there were about 1,000 Brents but Bob Chapman said there were 2,600 the previous day. He had watched a group of a couple of hundred fly high and set off east at least as far as Hayling before they came back. I was hoping to find Wheatear but no luck and Bob said he had not heard of any appearing on the reserve yet. I did not find the little ringed plover that were on the board either."

Brian Fellows has only heard Cetti's Warbler once or twice this winter on his visits to Portsmouth (Milton Lakes/Great Salterns lake) and Dave Mead who lives in Portsmouth admits he has never heard it yet but this evening Ian Thirlwell sent me a message of encouragement for them, saying "I hear the Cetti's

probably at least once a week when I walk the dog on Milton Common - I just haven't seen the critter yet! There have most likely been up to two here during the winter."

Today Brian Fellows was getting his ear tuned to Cetti's Warbler by visiting Titchfield Haven where he heard at least 5 and enjoyed the smart plumage of male Shoveler and Gadwall, but he did not spot the Firecrest that is still reported there. Along the coast at Gilkicker had come on small groups of Brent but no Wheatear nor a couple of Stonechat which others had just seen.

Yesterday I was foolish enough to drop my binoculars and to find they then gave me double vision. In urgent need of comfort and a replacement, but reluctant to go as far as Winchester or Southampton, I today visited the London Camera Exchange shop in Fareham's West street (north side, just east of Osborn Road) and came away very satisfied with the choice and service available, and with the fact that the 10% discount which Trevor Codlin promises to HOS members if they visit him at the Winchester branch is also available at Fareham. Those who remember dealing with Graham Roberts at the same premises before he abandoned commerce for a life with Otters may be interested to know that he still owns the property and no doubt ensures the same quality of service.

Last Wednesday (Mar 17) Dave Mead took his RSPB group to the New Forest and saw HEN HARRIER still present as well as hearing many singing DARTFORD WARBLER.

WED 17 MAR

A HOUSE MARTIN has already been seen at Budds Farm last Monday (Mar 15) according to Bob Chapman. John Goodspeed heard this news at a meeting of the Friends of Langstone Harbour last night. Perhaps a visit to the Chichester Gravel Pits would discover the Sand and House Martins that usually arrive there first in our area.

GREENSHANK were prominent around Thorney today with up to 10 at the Great Deeps west and a single at Nutbourne Bay. I assume these are still wintering birds as spring passage does not normally start until mid-April. BRENT seemed to be absent when I arrived on Thorney at high tide and I could not see one in the Emsworth Harbour area, but before I had finished a trip along the shore to Nutbourne Bay I had logged just over 200 in various groups including 80 on the meadow which they favour on the east side of Prinsted Bay. Back at the Great Deeps west there was a very grey headed Cormorant (probable sinensis) and I was pleased to see a pair of PINTAIL and 15 Wigeon there and another 33 Wigeon in Nutbourne Bay. No Swans were visible at the Little Deeps where 6 Tufted Duck shared the water with Black Headed gulls, Coot, Mallard and Little Grebe. An unusual sight on the Slipper Mill pond was a female Merganser fast asleep on one of the rafts

In The Holt Brian Fellows today watched a pair of SONG THRUSH gathering nest material – quite an exciting observation nowadays. (Hopefully they were quiet with their bills full of grass and leaves – unlike the loud mouthed singer which disturbs Brian's sleep in Emsworth)

What has happened to MEADOW PIPITS this spring? Last year from Feb 26 to Mar 20 Meadow Pipits could be seen moving north on most days, sometimes in flocks of 20 or so, sometimes just ones or twos, and that is the pattern which I have come to expect over the years. This year I have not seen any flocks and hardly any birds moving north. Can anyone explain what's happened to them?

TUE 16 MAR

Colin Law tells me that 150 CORN BUNTING can still be found in a winter flock on the Downs east of Brighton where he saw them last Sunday (Mar 14). A flock in the same area in the previous winter began to disperse on Mar 13 1998 and was all gone in a few days. I can remember seeing a flock of 100 one winter at Fishbourne, but that was so long ago that I cannot give a date for certain. Back in the present Colin says that the HEN HARRIERS have now departed but he is still seeing a MERLIN on the Downs.

2 PURPLE SANDPIPER were seen at Southsea Castle by Brian Fellows this morning, and he also heard one CETTI'S WARBLER at the Great Salterns lake. Over at the Milton Lakes the Swan pair were building their nest and 160 Brent were just offshore (other than a flock of 110 on the Great Salterns section of the Golf Course these were the only Brent to be seen). Southsea Canoe Lake still had 57 Swans and Baffins Pond had 55 Tufted Duck (another 7 on Milton Lakes), otherwise things are settling down in Portsmouth.

News from Stephen Harwood includes yet another BUZZARD sighting - one over Catherington Down on Sunday (Mar 14) - the day after they were seen everywhere else.

A perfect evening for checking the presence of owls in The Holt at Rowlands Castle for our HOS survey with Venus shinging brightly from a clear starlit sky, but the owls thought otherwise. I walked the main public path from Rowlands Castle towards Horndean and back without hearing a bird of any sort. Does anyone have any tips on the best time at which to hear them calling? Maybe at dusk when they begin to stir? Just as I finished writing this the phone rang and Jim Berry told me that he had been in The Holt the morning after my visit and had heard a male Tawny hooting at around 10am – Jim wondered if this was

unusual, but I believe that at this time of year the female owl will be sitting on a nest in the best shelter available while the male will have to find whatever perch he can nearby – usually on a branch up against the tree trunk – where he is quite likely to be disturbed by Squirrels or birds and to hoot his objection to having his slumber disturbed.

MON 15 MAR

Langstone Harbour and Hayling Bay were calm as a mill pond at this morning's high tide, but the water and the shores are rapidly losing their winter bird life. Two species that are now long gone are the Lapwing and Golden Plover flocks, and checking my records I see that I have seen no substantial flocks of either since Feb 19th when there were around 150 of each at Langstone. Mar 19th is, according to Richard Williamson, the day on which the Brent leave us, but I reckon many have already gone and the ones we are now seeing may well be ones that wintered further west or south and are just passing slowly along the coast. Between Langstone and the Kench I saw around 500 today, many of them flying apparently purposelessly from place to place, either exercising their wings in preparation for the flight ahead or, unfamiliar with the local scene, moving around to find the best places for feeding or resting. I also had the feeling that many of our Egrets have now moved off - I only saw three in total today. One species that seemed unexpectedly numerous was Shelduck, with one flock of 92 by the 'mid-way saltings' half way down the Hayling west shore. Two other sightings which caught my attention were of my first singing Meadow Pipit (at the Oysterbeds) and a flock of over 100 Curlew feeding in a field where I have not noticed them before (SU 718024, just south of the Westcroft Riding Stables, south of the Stoke Bay area). At Langstone the Teal are still in the Wade Court meadow where I counted 67 (with two Foxes in the background) this morning.

LITTLE RINGED PLOVER are noted on the Farlington Marshes notice board as having returned on Friday (Mar 12) when two were seen. Andrew Green was at the Marshes on Saturday and saw one for himself (by the stream)

On Sunday (Mar 14) Trevor Carpenter walked the Titchfield Canal path and heard at least three CHIFFCHAFF singing - he thinks that one with a particularly weak song was probably a migrant but I'm not sure on the reasoning behind this (because the bird was exhausted from its journey? or being careful, having just arrived in a new situation, not to stick its neck out and boast? or Saharan sand stuck in its tubes?). With all the reports of these birds singing everywhere it seems certain that migrants have arrived, but in my book the only real indicator (other than seeing the birds fly in from the sea) is to see a group of them near the coast feeding with unusual eagerness, or to hear singing birds moving rapidly and purposefully north rather than moving around within a given area.

Trevor Carpenter also passes on news of a RED NECKED GREBE reported on the sea off Hill Head on Saturday (Mar 13).

Moira Doherty tells me that yesterday she had excellent views of 2 BLACK NECKED GREBE displaying to each other on Staines Reservoir, but on Friday evening she had a much more frustrating encounter with a bird at Broadmarsh. She had arrived at the small western carpark and set out (in drizzle) north over the grass towards the main road. Before she had gone any distance a lark sized bird got up about a yard in front of her and flew low to the gorse bushes. She says "it sort of flew (right wing looked drooped down a bit) off towards the gorse at low level from under my feet and I couldn't get the scope on it. It was a fair size brown + white bird with yellow round the head/neck level at front." If anyone has seen an unusual bird that might answer this description we would all like to know about it.

Brian Fellows' news from Emsworth is of 80 Swans, and the BLACK SWAN, still on the Mill Pond, but only 7 Brent visible in the harbour, while the 5 Little Grebe that were recently a regular sight on the Slipper Mill Pond have now dwindled to just one bird seen today. Of the two Coot pairs one is still sitting but the other has not started nesting yet. The Peter Pond Swan pair are also biding their time (no further nest building) but nearby a singing Chiffchaff was thought to be a migrant. In the afternoon Brian was at Langstone South Moors and found 300 Brent on the shore there.

A note from Sonia Bolton tells of 5 BUZZARD over her cottage on the Stansted estate last Saturday, adding one to the total score (on the assumption that the four which I saw distantly over Forestside were in fact a group of five).

PLANTS:

SUN 21 MAR

On the South Moors there would in past years have been at least 600 KINGCUP plants in flower where the Autoliv Factory now stands, I counted just 57 plants in flower this afternoon. After the factory was built another 200 or so plants bloomed in the strip of land left between the factory approach road and the old IBM carpark, but these too have vanished in levelling the ground where the new factories are to be built. One relic of IBM that does live on is the colony of female BUTTERBUR plants and if you have never seen them you should do so at this moment when the flower spikes are at their best and the huge leaves have not developed - to see them walk down the Langbrook stream path and you will see a mass of them just south of the unofficial gardens on the west bank (i.e. from the tarmac path which leads to a locked gate over the stream, and further south around the farm entrance track and old orchard). In that area I also saw my first Sycamore leaf buds bursting. Further south near the sea one plant of ENGLISH SCURVY GRASS was in flower very early (it is usually a lot later than the Danish species which has been out for a little while). Not yet out, but showing flower buds, was the Duke of Argyll's Teapant, more Hybrid Spanish Bluebells were flowering along Mill Lane, and coming back over the Lymbourne footbridge by Wade Court I found the HORNBEAM overhanging the bridge was opening its leaves.

SAT 20 MAR

At the IBM North Harbour site, always rich in strange and untimely plants, I saw my first GERMANDER SPEEDWELL in flower, COMMON SPOTTED ORCHID leaves, and HYBRID SPANISH BLUEBELLS in flower. One patch of Red Clover was flowering and I came on two plants of BLUE FLEABANE laden with fresh flowers. On last month's visit (Feb 13) I found the first CHANGING FORGET ME NOT in flower and a lot more was out today.

In Havant (under the hot air vents of Tesco's bakery) the GREATER CELANDINE had its first flower open and near it MEADOW BUTTERCUPS were in flower, while the WYCH ELM tree overhanging the Budds Farm Pools where steps lead to the shore now has clearly developing seeds replacing its flowers. The most significant find of the day came by the Hayling Billy line in Havant where a single plant of LORDS AND LADIES has curled back its lady's skirt to reveal the Lord's presence. In Havant itself the yellow of flowers on BITING STONECROP could today be seen on the top of the old wall around St Faith's Church Hall.

The Evening Class group visiting Titchfield Haven were impressed by the display of KINGCUPS seen in the marshy ground of the reserve - other places are not so lucky in being able to continue to support these lovely plants.

FRI 19 MAR

This morning's surprise came at the Hayling Oysterbeds where a second bushy plant of BORAGE, about 30 cm tall and generously decked with beautiful blue flowers, had appeared near to the 'weir' of the lagoon on what was effectively bare ground a week or so ago. This reminds me that during the week I saw a first plant of GREEN ALKANET in flower but did not record it as it was in a garden (though probably occurring there as a casual).

Cycling down the Hayling Coastal path in a very chill north west wind this morning I noticed the BLACKTHORN is at last starting to blossom freely, putting me in mind of the phrase 'a Blackthorn winter'. Hopefully the wind will not bring frost or snow as the Ground Ivy and Coltsfoot are also coming into widespread flowering while the Lesser Celandines are not just past their peak and will be dying back. Another tick on my journey was for the first flowers I have seen on Common Mouse-ear this year.

THU 18 MAR

TOOTHWORT had appeared along both the east and west fringes of Lowton's Copse when Sonia Bolton looked for it today. She also found Moschatel and leaves of Early Purple Orchids that will be flowering within the coming month. I am aware of Toothwort sites extending south from Lowton's Copse towards Lovedean (including the old Lanes south west of Catherington) and of a site in Grevitts Copse south of Up Marden, but I would be interested to hear of other locations for this strange plant with parasitises the roots of Hazel and Elm.

My only note today was of a mass of WOOD ANEMONES surviving in Leigh Park in the copse lying between the entrance to the Staunton Community School and the main Petersfield Road despite the trappings of students in their lunchtime activities.

KINGCUPS (or MARSH MARIGOLDS) are now looking superb in the few places where they still exist. John Goodspeed remarks on a clump in Hook Heath pond and earlier this week I was delighted by a single clump in the Havant Homewell stream where the stream reaches Park Road South. The sight also renewed my sorrow at the loss, under the Autoliv factory on the Langstone South Moors, of several hundred plants which should now be flowering. Hopefully these flowers can still be seen in large

numbers on the meadow draining the Johnston's Coppice pond along the west side of the A3M just north of the Purbrook Way bridge, and perhaps also on the west side of Crooked Walk Lane (the minor road ascending Portsdown on its north side from the Southwick roundabout - the plants used to flourish close to the first bend in this road about 300 yards after leaving the roundabout).

Andrew Powling today confirmed that he had seen the WILD DAFFODILS in Creech Woods west and confirms they are genuine wild ones.

WED 17 MAR

Cycling through Emsworth I noted HORSE CHESTNUT leaves emerging from their sticky buds and the yellow flowers of Rape (casual seedlings, not this years planted crops) opening in fields and at roadsides. At Chidham, where ditches were full of Primroses, I stopped by a bank of Sweet Violets and found they had a backing group of my first GROUND IVY flowers. The best sight of the day was without doubt the red tinge of catkins on the many tall ITALIAN POPLARS around the Nutbourne orchards - from my garden I can see the same lovely colour on a local tree, but the mass against the blue sky was spectacular. Brian Fellows was in The Holt at Rowlands Castle this morning and reports finding Violets, Coltsfoot, Primroses and Wood Anemones – the latter are very few and difficult to find in Havant Thicket over the road.

TUE 16 MAR

Andrew Powling tells me that he has already found MOSCHATEL flowering near Hambledon and he is now hoping to see the Wild Daffodils reported from Creech Woods by Richard Hallett (who tells me that he also knows of ROYAL FERN in those woods).

Walking along the road to my home today I at last found a general flowering of IVY LEAVED TOADFLAX getting under way. I saw one plant in flower on Feb 25 and have been expecting others but have not seen any until today. In the same garden I also saw substantial plants of THALE CRESS in flower (and with seeds - they must have been out for some time).

MON 15 MAR

SEA MOUSE-EAR, one of the tiniest of our seaside plants, was in flower on Hayling Beachlands shore this morning, and by the Ferry Road outside the Hayling Health Society 'village' I added SWEET ALISON to my list of plants now in flower. I also found Common Storks Bill in flower at West Town Station and spotted a Hazel tree on which the growing leaves were as noticeable as the decaying catkins.

INSECTS:

SAT 20 MAR

Last Saturday's outburst of butterflies was not repeated today. I saw three BRIMSTONE around the IBM North Harbour site, and at Whiteley (not far west along the M27) Mark Litjens saw one BRIMSTONE, one PEACOCK and one SMALL TORTOISESHELL. Earlier in the morning, when the sun was warm in places sheltered from the wind, Mark was disappointed to find no butterflies in the Kitts Wood part of Martin Down, though he did find a couple of TORTOISESHELL near Martin village.

Cleaning out nest boxes in Old Park Wood near Bosham today Martin Baggs found a QUEEN HORNET in one, where it had presumably been hibernating, but I have no information on her state of health.

FRI 19 MAR

GREEN VEINED WHITE is the sixth butterfly species to emerge from hibernation in our area (if we count the Red Admiral seen at West Dean Woods by Tony Gutteridge on Mar 13) and has chosen Catherington Down for its debut, appearing in Stephen Harwood's house adjoining the Down - a fitting reward for the work he puts in as warden of the reserve. Stephen thinks the butterfly may have been hidden in plants brought in from the garden and been woken by the warmth of the house - he hopes to feed it and release it when the sun shines, but I guess it cannot be regarded as a natural emergence of the species.

WED 17 MAR

A male BRIMSTONE has been patrolling our garden for several days and today it was joined by a PEACOCK which flew round several times, disappeared, then re-appeared going fast and high with a second Peacock flying a few inches behind and above - presumably a pair about to mate. Later in the day at Nutbourne Bay I saw a pair of SMALL TORTOISESHELL settling in the grass to get on with the important business of life. Hopefully many other pairs will have met up today to resurrect this species from its very low numbers last year.

Jim Berry had a much more productive butterfly morning in The Holt at Rowlands Castle, recording 17 BRIMSTONE, 7 SMALL TORTOISESHELL and a COMMA, and Brian Fellows (who, with John Gowen, was in the same wood this morning) spotted 34 Brimstone and a Comma

TUE 16 MAR

Mark Litjens noted 12 BRIMSTONE in the grounds of IBM Hursley at lunchtime today and compares this to his expectation of seeing 2 or 3 at the most on a good spring day. Another report of Brimstone, this time in the East Meon area, comes from Christoph Harwood

MON 15 MAR

My first positive sighting of PEACOCK butterfly came today on the Hayling Billy Trail in Havant, and back at home a male BRIMSTONE was once more patrolling the lawn for a brief time.

Mark Litjens counted 8 BRIMSTONE in the grounds of Hursley Park near Winchester at lunchtime today. Other sightings (all yesterday) were by Andrew Green who had a COMMA on Portsdown (Portchester), and by Trevor Carpenter who had 2 PEACOCK in Stubbington near Gosport, and then a Brimstone in his north Fareham garden. So far it seems the Small Tortoiseshell is the least numerous of the species that should be out in strength now to ensure a good summer brood.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 19 MAR

The wet meadow south of Wade Court had its usual complement of just two Foxes lying out together along the Lymbourne Stream hedge this morning - with no sign of the 'young couple' which I saw further south in the same field recently. Reading Havant Borough's excellent little book on dealing with Urban Foxes I learn that Foxes live together in groups of varying sizes even during the current breeding season, so perhaps I should not be surprised at seeing more than two in close proximity. While on the subject of Foxes my son who lives on Hayling Island tells me that if he ever walks to the local shops after dark the Foxes make no attempt to hide as they pass you on the pavement, and I have heard in the past of one Fox in Fratton which was unperturbed by football crowds invading 'its street' on a match day. Perhaps I witnessed the same lack of concern for humans when I was in Havant Thicket yesterday and stood openly in a ride watching a Fox equally openly walking about the same ride only 75 yards from me, sometimes looking at me but mostly sniffing and marking a tuft of grass (probably to tell me not to pass it as the territory beyond was his).

When in Stansted Forest today Alistair Martin was lucky enough to come face to face at less than 20 paces with a superb STOAT.

THU 18 MAR

We tend to think of HARES as animals of wide open fields, spending the day crouched low in their 'forms' out in the centre of the fields, but they are also happy to spend the day in the cover of woodland, only emerging into the fields at night, and it seems that the only ones that we are likely to see nowadays are those of the woodland persuasion. I believe that a number still survive in the eastern woods of the Stansted estate, and Jim Berry has now seen one twice in the same place on the Rowlands Castle edge of The Holt wood – his sightings were a month apart on Feb 17 and Mar 16, in both cases seeing just one Hare.

ROE DEER are not uncommon in our woodland but a group of five which John Goodspeed saw today near Hook Heath may be of interest. Unlike the Fallow Deer which are normally seen in small herds (sexes segregated except in the autumn rut), Roe are normally seen as lone bucks or in family groups, and at this time of year that will often include a buck (staking his claim prior to the May rut) as well as the doe with last year's young. I know that Roe often give birth to twins and I find that triplets do occur and survive so I guess that this was one such family. Roe are to be found in almost all our woods but Fallow are more restricted in their choice of woodland and are not normally encountered west of the Stansted/Southleigh Forest complex – today Brian Fellows came on a couple in Hollybank, the south part of Southleigh Forest.

TUE 16 MAR

Brian Fellows saw at least 6 TERRAPIN sunning themselves on the main island of Baffins Pond today and expresses concern about the potential damage they may do there. My understanding is that these creatures usually arrive in ponds when they have grown large enough to take substantial bites out of the fingers of the children whose pets they were, and that, with no predators and the ability to survive our weather, they continue to grow until they are as big as dinner plates with a matching appetite and increasingly sharp teeth. I have seen a couple of monsters in the moat of Fort Brockhurst at Gosport and fear that six in Baffins Pond are not good news. Perhaps we should superglue notes saying "Show me the way to go home" to their shells and drop them in the sea from Southsea pier - they might get back where they belong (after all, we recently read of a man in Perth, Australia, sending a reply to a message in a bottle dropped in the North Sea by a youngster)

MON 15 MAR

Tony Gutteridge this morning told me of a SLOW WORM in his garden yesterday – not the first to emerge this year I am sure but good to see. ADDERS should also be out but I have not yet heard of any being seen.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999 **WEEK 10 MAR 8 - 14**

BIRDS:

SUN 14 MAR

At least two WHEATEAR reached Havant this morning - John Gowen had one on the South Moors and I had a male at Warblington during our first 1999 visit to the CBC plot where 20+ Redwing were still present and 10 Brent were still on the big field south of Church Path (at a guess these may be birds that have no intention of migrating and are hiding out here to avoid the rude remarks of those that are on the move). Three Snipe were still in the marsh east of the cemetery (I may have saved one from the jaws of a Fox when I put it up - the Fox's head appeared within a yard of the Snipe when I disturbed them), a Green Sandpiper was in the watercress beds and four Egret were still on the fields but most birds were in spring mode with lots of song (Tony Gutteridge heard a Chiffchaff and noted one Mistle Thrush singing continuously for a long time, even when in flight). In Gorse along the 'Selangor Avenue' footpath I must have been close to finding a Long Tailed Tits nest - the birds became very agitated and flew round almost within arms reach as I searched the bushes. Only one singing Yellowhammer was present where we normally have several but we had a drumming Great Spotted Woodpecker that I did not expect as well as a noisy Green Woodpecker. Tony Gutteridge counted 63 Crows in one flock - we always have a substantial flock of non-breeding birds but this was a record number

Returning from Warblington via Langstone Pond I found the Swan pair on the pond but showing no sign of nest building, and on Wade Court wet meadow some 60 Teal were dozing despite the presence of three Foxes in the same field - the Green Sandpiper was among them and a Chiffchaff was singing in the background.

Mark Litjens writes of his outing today "I walked around the Milkham Enclosure in the New Forest and from the car park I had a Brambling, calling overhead, flying with a flock of Chaffinches. During the walk a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, unusual in this wood, called a couple of times. On the way home I stopped

off at Whiteley and had 2 Chiffchaff singing, the first there this year."

Brian Fellows had a good view of a DARTFORD WARBLER in the gorse at the west end of Hayling Golf Course (seen from the road passing the Kench) today and later met Bob Hoare who claimed the first SANDWICH TERNS at the Kench last Wednesday Mar 10) - normally the first birds are seen passing along the sea and only later do they enter the harbours. In the afternoon Brian was in the Hollybank Woods and came on Marsh Tit and a pair of Treecreeper (do tell me if you hear their song - as with Bullfinch song I hardly ever hear it, but unlike Bullfinch the song is very distinctive, a quiet high pitched mixture of Willow Warbler and Goldcrest)

Kevin Stouse had a lovely day for his walk around the Bedhampton and South Moors area and had some good sightings starting with the pair of KINGFISHERS close to the Hermitage Stream traditional nest site where loose earth has been accumulating below an enlarged nest hole over the past couple of weeks. These birds must do most of their work at dusk and dawn, for dog walkers and children playing in the stream drive them away for much of the day (once the nest is complete the sitting bird inside the tunnel is oblivious of the outside world, but when the young need regular feeding there is a real problem in getting supplies to them on a sunny Saturday when family parties plus dogs and children can be right outside the nest hole for hours at a time). Another Kingfisher (maybe one of the pair) was later seen downstream. At Budds Farm the COMMON SANDPIPER and a WATER RAIL were both seen in the pools, and on the South Moors MEADOW PIPITS had begun their parachuting song flights, while two ROCK PIPITS were still present on the shore as was the RING BILLED GULL off Broadmarsh slipway. Inevitably there was much Chiffchaff song.

SPARROWHAWKS become more noticeable than usual at this time of year with females soaring above their territories and males beating the territorial bounds with their switchback display flights. These have not been reported as yet but Brian Fellows and I have both had Sparrowhawks over the garden in the last few days, and while I was in Stansted Forest yesterday I put up a male from the ground (close to where a forestry tractor can be seen on the north side of the main drive to Stansted House opposite the Main Avenue) and was surprised how small it looked at close range. My estimate at the time I saw it was that it was smaller than a Collared Dove and about the same size as a Mistle Thrush - if it had not been in woodland and had the broad wings of a hawk I could have taken it for a Merlin. Looking at the books I see the minimum length of a Collared Dove is 29 cm and of a Mistle Thrush 26cm while a Sparrowhawk can be as short as 28cm.

In the course of conversation today I learnt that a male BLACKCAP has been in Rosemary Webb's Hayling garden since Christmas and is still there.

SAT 13 MAR

BUZZARDS were soaring this morning over at least four places from Weat Dean Woods in Sussex to Creech Woods in Hampshire. In addition to the 8 over West Dean Woods, four over Forestside, and two over Havant Thicket that are detailed below Richard Hallett had one over Creech Woods (west). While it is likely that these were all residents of their respective woodland areas Tony Gutteridge noted that those over West Dean Woods seemed to be making steady progress west against the wind and wondered if there was some movement of the birds (though it seems strange that they should be coming from the east at this time of year).

Walking in Stansted Forest I heard BUZZARD calls when I was under trees which prevented my seeing the birds, and some time later I came to the northern edge of the Forest and looked towards the Rookery at Forestside Church only to find four soaring BUZZARD in my bins. These birds must have been Forestside village to the east of the road coming from the Forest, and I hope they indicate two breeding pairs in the area. I thought I had done well until I got home and heard from Jim Berry that the Evening Class group had also seen a pair of BUZZARD soaring over Havant Thicket (only 4 km southwest of Forestside so possibly one of the pairs I saw), and later another phone call from Tony Gutteridge told me that there had been 8 BUZZARD and a GOSHAWK over West Dean Woods - I'm not sure how many Tony saw and how many were seen by a couple of birders which Tony met, Tony is certainly not claiming the Goshawk.

A RED KITE over Havant Thicket this morning was clearly seen by all twelve of the Evening Class group but I am not expecting further sightings there. Passing on this news to Tony Gutteridge he told me that there are now said to be 70 Kites in the 'M40 corridor' of Oxfordshire where one of the major introductions has taken place, so maybe this was one of those birds taking a daytrip to the coast from the midlands. After writing this I received the following eye-witness account of the sighting from Brian Clarke (apologies for running his paragraphs together to suit my format) "The Saturday Wildlife Group had a spectacular sighting this morning - a RED KITE sliding slowly overhead, turning the occasional circle, towards the end of our walk in Havant Thicket. We had earlier seen two buzzards, one of the quite

close to us, and as we neared the end of the walk someone called - "Look, another buzzard". Then someone else called..."But that's a forked tail." Then the cry came "It's a kite!" Then - (this was a slowly-dawning, combined effort!) - "It's a red kite!" We had a terrific view of it, for three or four minutes all told. It came directly over head and was so close that in my 8x30s it filled a substantial part of field of view. Every major marking on it was visible and its head was clearly to be seen, angled downwards, no doubt looking at us looking at it."

Mark Litjens new today is that "at Milford-on-sea there was a smart summer plumaged male BLACK REDSTART. Also the wintering adult MED GULL, now in full summer plumage, was showing well.

During the early evening a Chiffchaff sang briefly in Fareham, this probably being a migrant."

A flock of around 60 FIELDFARE were seen in the West Dean Woods this morning by Tony Gutteridge, and on the way there he clearly saw a male Stonechat by the roadside shortly after passing through Stoughton on the way to East Marden - this is not normal Stonechat country and the bird was probably just passing through.

Brian Fellows and John Gowen sacrificed this beautiful day to drive to Southampton and attend a conference for WeBS counters (the people who count the wildfowl and waders each month for the "Wetland Bird Survey"). Topics of concern to us all were discussed - what will happen to our wetlands when the rising tide engulfs them? and how can the shore birds continue to find enough food when we cease pouring sewage into our harbours? Among the speakers Pete Potts put in a strong plea for the whole Solent region to be counted as one area so that it can appear higher up the lists of nationally important sites such as the Wash, and thus attract more attention to the need for habitat conservation when planning issues are discussed. Brian and John seem well satisfied that they did not waste their day.

In Stansted Forest I came on one more male SISKIN singing away as it worked a Larch tree in the northwest of the forest - when it flew off three more birds came from other trees to join it. Under the same Larches I found two areas where the ground was thickly carpeted with brown flakes as a result of something having carefully pulled apart many Larch cones. Some of the cones had fallen to the ground and showed no sign of Squirrel chewing, and all the flakes were equally undamaged. In other years I would have had no hesitation in seeing these as evidence that CROSSBILL had been at work very recently, but this year I wonder what else could have done this - and I can't imagine what I could be, so maybe there are a few Crossbill around after all.

One of the special pleasures of spring is the finding of birds nests, and those of the Long Tailed Tit perhaps have the highest score for 'artistic merit', so I was delighted when walking through compartment 10A of Stansted Forest (around SU 744111) this morning to see one of these birds holding a feather (bigger than its own body) in its bill. Standing still and watching this bird and its mate it almost immediately led my eyes to the nest - in a week or so it will be totally hidden by leaves but for the moment was visible from a distance without having to go close and disturb the birds. A little to the south of this nest John Goodspeed had an equally good sighting of a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER in the afternoon - at a guess John was on the Ornamental Drive when he saw it as he tells me the bird was at SU 743108 which is in compartment 16A just north of the once tarmaced drive.

Yesterday evening (Mar 12) Moira Doherty was at Broadmarsh and walked towards Farlington Marshes along the shore to where the stream flows out through a concrete housing to form the start of Chalkdock Lake. The tide would have been coming in but not high and it had driven a small roost of Ringed Plover onto the chalk rocks where the coast bends to run alongside the main road. Oystercatcher, Redshank and Dunlin were along the shore and there may well have been more exciting birds as Moira thinks that she saw both Common Sandpiper and Shorelark. Out on the water a reasonable number of Brent (c100) and Wigeon (c24) were still to be seen but she could not spot the American Wigeon - she does however pass on the news that it was still present on Farlington Marshes recently.

FRI 12 MAR

A highlight of Brian Fellows outings today was his encounter with a LITTLE EGRET in BREEDING PLUMAGE at the Emsworth Slipper Mill Pond, and this morning I had a phone call from Mrs Millington (well known to some for the lovely Shire Horses she breeds at Woodcroft Farm by the railway just east of Chalton village) to enquire if she really had seen a Little Egret at Droxford - she specially commented on the breeding plumes. In the morning Brian walked the lower Ems valley and found four more Egrets with most of the usual birds - his comments were on the absence of the large winter flocks of Woodpigeon and on the unusual sight of a REDWING chasing a Woodpigeon. Neither Green nor Common Sandpiper were on his list but he did come on a Bullfinch and possibly heard song from another (I envy him if that was true - I have only heard Bullfinch song once in my whole life despite doing more birding with my ears than with my eyes) - he also heard strange song from a Blue Tit which seemed to be

imitating a Chaffinch. In the afternoon Brian walked down to Thorney Little Deeps where he could only see one Swan (has one of the established pair died after suffering problems with last year's nesting?). Four GADWALL were on the water there and a large flock of Brent (400+) were on the field south of the Little Deeps. Unusually there were seven Swans on the Slipper Mill Pond.

Three Chiffchaff were singing in widely different places as I made a tour of Bedhampton, Brockhampton and the South Moors today. Several people have remarked recently on a drop in the number of Chiffchaff they encounter around the Brockhampton stream and Budds Farm, and it is possible that birds from the Budds Farm area have spread out in the surrounding areas over the past couple of weeks. I heard my first song from the Bidbury Mead area of Bedhampton (north of the railway), the second was on the high mound above the Broadmarsh slipway and only the third came from within Budds Farm. Climbing to 'Budds Mound' from the shore a fourth Chiffchaff, maybe a female, was not singing but was calling incessantly and regularly depressing its tail as it moved about in a bush (when the Willow Warblers start to arrive this tail depressing by Chiffchaff and not so much by Willow Warbler is one of the tips for separating the two species if they remain silent). After returning home I had to walk round to the shops and on the way heard (for the second time recently) strong BLACKCAP subsong from a leafy hedge by the Red Cross Hut in the Pallant.

Just after writing the above a note came from Kevin Stouse expressing the same thought that Chiffchaff are seemingly now spreading out from the places where they spent the winter (maybe they are just becoming more noticeable to us as they try to make themselves noticeable to the opposite sex of their own species). Last Wednesday (Mar 10) Kevin found 2 Chiffchaff calling from the area behind Fort Widley on Portsdown (where he also saw the male Stonechat which has I think remained there through the winter) and tells me that a Chiffchaff arrived in his garden about a fortnight ago and has been seen by him daily since then, along with a small flock of 10 Goldfinch (his garden abuts on market garden fields that should have seed for the Goldfinch).

For those interested in Swan nest sites I today noticed the Bedhampton Mill Pool pair seem to have a chosen a slightly different site this year. Several years ago they had a regular nest site at the extreme east end of the lake against the side of a 'tin shed' that was part of the waterworks property. When Portsmouth Water were ordered to enclose what had previously been open pools holding water around the Bedhampton springs the work of building new concrete covered tanks caused the destruction of this site and the birds moved to a clump of Yellow Iris on the norths shore of the pool a little further west. Last year they fooled me by hiding the nest at the extreme east end of the bank separating the Mill Pool from the Hermitage Stream (hidden by trees and a brick building). Today one Swan was on the Mill Pool while the other was sleeping, as if on a nest, further west along that bank and more visible from the public path. Another Swan pair caught my eye in the mouth of the Langbrook stream – last year a pair 'played at nesting' on the north end of the shingle spit on the west side of the Langbrook mouth (they made a nest, but never laid an egg to my knowledge). I suspect the pair I saw today may try again this spring – all Swan pairs seem to have to learn the basic facts about raising a family by experimentation over several years before they become successful.

For those interested in the mythical (but real) Southsea Canoe Lake MED GULL I have today had news from Alison Barker that she saw two Med Gulls among a flock of Black Headed on the shingle of the Eastney beach roughly south of the Royal Marine museum on Feb 28. She says "A closer look revealed that two of these were Med gulls well on their way to summer plumage with just some white left near the bill on the otherwise dark heads" and she guesses this flock were birds that would normally have been on the canoe lake.

Both Brent and Wigeon now seem thin on the ground in the Broadmarsh/South Moors area. There were around 100 Brent there this afternoon but spread out thinly along the tideline, and I saw no Wigeon at all but did hear one whistle. Another absentee on the Budds Farm shore was Rock Pipit, and I saw neither Green nor Common Sandpiper. A flock of over 60 KNOT was a surprise, and the presence of four Bar Tailed Godwit among perhaps 25 Black Tailed would have been a surprise if we had not become used to seeing a few Bar Tailed here last spring. Distantly out on the water I saw a couple of birds that I at first took to be a pair of Goldeneye, then thought the head shape wrong and wondered if they were Tufties, but the best view that I could get convinced me they were the pair of SCAIP that have been here through the winter. On my way home via Mill Lane I had a good glimpse of Kingfisher at the pool below the west end of Mill Lane, and noticed even more white splashes on the stream bank just beside the south west corner of the footbridge to the South Moors.

The noise of around 700 Black Headed Gulls was the most striking feature of a visit to Broadmarsh slipway today. During the winter they are normally fairly quiet, but today there was a foretaste of the deafening din that John Badley will soon experience when the best part of 3,000 breeding pairs descend on his islands. It was also very noticeable that the majority of the birds now have their breeding face masks, and if you want to know where the white feathers which previously covered their faces have gone look no further than the concrete sewage outfall – the weed on it has caught a million white feathers. I saw a least one adult Herring Gull raise its head to heaven and shout out its 'love yodel', but could see hardly any Common Gulls – they have perhaps now left.

Brian Fellows had a restless night, being woken early by three Blackbirds and a Song Thrush singing at top volume outside his bed

THU 11 MAR

WATER RAIL are being seen in many places at the moment. Brian Fellows has had at least two good views of one at Nutbourne but today he failed to see any at Fishbourne where Dave Mead recently saw four in one visit. If he, or anyone else, wants to renew the search for these elusive birds I hear from Alistair Martin that one seems to be established in the water channel running through the Sandy Point reserve on Hayling and has been seen both looking south from the road to the new houses and from the bridge within the reserve looking north – Tim Timlick saw this bird some time ago and Alistair has just seen it.

Another place to look is the stream just east of Warblington Church – last weekend Alistair saw one there just north of the footpath crossing the stream.

Despite a raw drizzle in the early morning I heard Mistle Thrush, Blackbird and Wood Pigeon song around my garden as well as the regular Dunnock, Wren and Robin, and arrived in Havant Thicket soon after 9am for my weekly visit to hear many more songs from Goldcrest, Chaffinch, Greenfinch, Blue and Great Tits. Best of all, right at the end of my visit when I had returned to the carpark, a male SISKIN was singing away in full view on a Birch tree (I had heard two or three Siskin in the conifers here earlier in the morning). I also put up two different WOODCOCK when exploding away from the paths.

TUE 9 MAR

Dave Mead parked at Fishbourne Church today, hoping to walk south towards Apuldram, but found the footpath down the west shore of Fishbourne Creek was closed for sea defence work. This caused him to change direction over the meadow to Fishbourne village and gave him a first WATER RAIL in one of the ditches of that meadow. Continuing past the pond he took the path south through the reed beds on the east side of the creek and walked very quietly to one of the bridges over the stream running through the reeds and here he saw three Water Rail at the same time. A few moments later a female MARSH HARRIER flew over the same reeds before heading east, and when he had walked a little further down the east shore and reached a small Blackthorn copse he not only heard a couple of Chiffchaff but saw a FIRECREST.

Although not local news it may be of interest to hear (via Dave Mead) that the first SWALLOWS have reached the west country.

A message from Mark Litjens adds to his report of last Sunday's visit to the New Forest (see yesterday's notes) with the news that SISKIN were plentiful in the Milkham/Bolderwood area. Mark assumed these were birds returning to breed rather than winter flocks. 'Birds of Hampshire' suggests that during the period of data collection for this book (1986-91) there were 150 – 250 breeding pairs in the New Forest –

it also tells us that ringing recoveries show that most of our winter birds come from Eastern Europe. A CETTI'S WARBLER gave its explosive song from the Milton Lakes reeds (Swan lake) when Brian Fellows was there today. These elusive birds have been recorded in the Milton Lakes/Great Salterns reedbeds at least six times in the past 18 months, being detected at Great Salterns in Oct 97 and Mar 98, and according to my records Brian heard one at the Milton Lakes on 20 Oct 98 (although he now says today's record was his first at Milton Lakes). Ian Thirlwell and another birder known to Ian have also seen them at Milton Lakes in Dec 97 and Jan 98. I guess this may be a single bird moving from one patch of reeds to the next as it searches for company, but it could well be that several birds are present in each site, just keeping a low profile. Above them a relatively tame pair of Kestrel were making no attempt to hide their presence, nor was a male Shoveler on Duck Lake. The Swan pair were on Swan Lake (the three pools on Milton Common have been named Swan, Frog and Duck Lakes by Portsmouth Council) and although they were showing no signs of nesting they are still likely candidates for once more raising the largest brood of cygnets in the area. The Swan pair on Baffins Pond had got the same message as those on Langstone and Brickkiln Ponds and were actively displaying to each other among a flock of 42 Tufted Duck (no Shoveler or Pochard left here). The only inland feeding Brent that Brian could find were 120 on the Great Salterns Golf Course

John Goodspeed enjoyed a walk in the Hookheath/Lye Heath/Southwick woods area today and noted a good selection of woodland birds including Jays and Green Woodpecker. Along the Wayfarer's Way through the Southwick woods (Drivetts Copse) he came on a pair of Marsh Tits close to Purbrook Heath Road. My own birding today took me to Gunner Point and Sandy Point in a vain search for early Wheatear or Sandwich Tern. The only items worth mentioning were that the Langstone Mill Pond Swan pair were side by side on the pond as I passed, dipping their necks in unison as they renew their bonds for the coming breeding season, and in the corner of the pond nearest the mill race a Moorhen could just be made out on its nest hidden among dead vegetation. Later in the day I saw the Stansted Brickkiln Pond Swans close to where I recently saw them apparently starting a nest – watch this space. Finally I took a walk around Havant Thicket after dark to check for the presence of owls that we might miss in our daytime HOS survey visits – I was able to get round in less than an hour and thought I would be recording a nil return but a female Tawny Owl uttered her unmistakable 'Ker-wick' calls right at the end of my visit.

MON 8 MAR

Brian Fellows today picked out another MED GULL in Emsworth Harbour along with a couple of LESSER BLACKBACKS and plenty of Black Headed, Common and Herring (but have you noticed how the January hordes of Great Blackbacks have now disappeared?). In the Mill Pond there were still 86 Swans (and the Black Swan) but only one Canada Goose. The Slipper Mill Pond Dabchick were down from 5 to 3 but the Coot was still sitting on its raft nest, and in Peter Pond the pair of Swans were present and there was evidence of nest building in the usual island spot.

Brian has been collecting more info on SISKIN from his internet birdnews group (and is now publishing a summary on his own website) but the story is still of very few about – he has only had one report from Hampshire (a single bird on nutfeeder in a Hythe garden 'several times in the past month') and the other reports from other counties all seem to tell the same story of few and far between. A note to myself from Sonia Bolton lists five sightings at Stansted spread out between Jan 24 (when a small but noisy flock was near Broadreed Farm) up to yesterday's cat killed single bird, but in none of these cases were more than 5 birds seen.

Mark Litjens spent yesterday in the New Forest, starting in Milkham Enclosure (SU 210100) which in his experience is the best place to see Crossbills but all he found were undernourished pine cones (if there are any Crossbills they wouldn't find much food there this winter). Not all was lost as a WOODLARK sang to him, two HAWFINCH flew over and he stumbled on a WOODCOCK which gave good views as it flew off. Taking the minor road to Lyndhurst which goes under the A31 he went on to Bolderwood where 'two cracking FIRECREST showed well and called incessantly from Holly trees opposite the Bolderwood carpark'.

PLANTS:

SUN 14 MAR

At Warblington this morning I followed my usual route through the fields recording birds for the CBC but always keep my eye open for plants and I was pleased to find three very healthy 'bushes' of FIELD WOUNDWORT in full flower among the stubble of last year's Sweetcorn crop in the shoreline fields. In the same fields Sun Spurge was in very good health and near it two clumps of WILD CARROT still had some white flowers.

SAT 13 MAR

Emerging from the carpark onto the Main Avenue at Stansted this morning I had only gone a short distance before I was drawn into the trees south of the Avenue to see a Treecreeper on a dead tree, and below this tree was a single BLUEBELL IN FLOWER. This was clearly an oddity but a fascinating sight. A little later, using my permit to walk in Lyels Wood, I found the expected ground carpet of Wood Anemone leaves, and in two places came on plants in flower (20 in the first case and up to 100 in the second) so I feel I can declare the Wood Anemone season well and truly open after the initial phase of odd scattered plants.

I recently picked up a new Forestry Commission leaflet on the 'Forest of Bere' and was delighted to find that two major areas of woodland had been opened up to public access since the days when dashed about in a car exploring Hampshire. One is Botley Woods, where Nightingales, Adders and many butterfly species abound but where I was always aware of a strict 'keep to the public paths' rule, and the other is Creech Woods, where the woodland west of the road was strictly out of bounds to the public. It seems that both are now open to the public and Richard Hallett has given me a good reason for exploring the west of Creech Woods where he was today and found WILD DAFFODILS. I remember seeing plenty of these in the West Walk Woods (on the northern fringe of the Rookesbury land), and in the western outlier of the Botley Woods near the main road at Curbridge, so it is good to know that we have another site for them in the Forest of Bere (though none of these can hold a candle to the mass which grow in the Sussex West Dean Woods).

Rosemary Webb tells me that the Wild Daffodils at West Dean Woods are having a poor year with many blind plants after a tremendous show last year. She was there today and is the first to tell me of seeing WHITE SWEET VIOLETS and the second (after Ros Norton) to spot GROUND IVY in flower, both at the West Dean Woods

FRI 12 MAR

The BUTTERBUR colony in Brook Meadow at Emsworth now has 153 flower spikes according to Brian Fellows who made a count today – this number is probably near the peak for this colony. Less good news from Brian was that some of the Tree Mallow plants by the Slipper Mill seem to be dead and others look as if they might be dying – hopefully life will return to some if not all these plants as the spring progresses, but only time will tell.

More WOOD ANEMONES have been spotted by Christoph Harwood in the Hambleton area last Saturday. Not many are out so far but hopefully things will be different by the beginning of April. While looking for them keep your eyes open for the smaller white flowers of Wood Sorrel that I am already looking for as more and more fresh leaves sprout under the trees.

THU 11 MAR

In Havant Thicket today I came on the first LARCH showing a green fringe to all its branches as fresh leaves emerged so I went for a closer look at its old cones to determine that it was a Japanese Larch and in so doing made a personal discovery about its flowers. I am familiar with the lovely 'Larch Roses' that are the female flowers which turn into the cones and I thought that the small white/green flowers that I could see on this tree were the young stages of the Larch Roses, but as I gathered a couple of sample cones I found these small flowers were shedding visible clouds of pollen and realised that they must be the male flowers. (Male Yew trees are also still shedding pollen). Unlike the Larches which have male and female flowers on the same tree Willow trees are always of one sex or the other and now is the time to learn how to address a particular tree by checking the catkins. In the familiar Sallow, Goat Willow or 'Pussy Willow' the male catkins are the ones now turning golden, and the female trees have longer, slimmer, green catkins.

WED 10 MAR

At least one WOOD ANEMONE was flowering in the Sussex part of the Hollybank Woods today when Brian Fellows was exploring Longcopse Hill. This is the third site where they have been seen so far.

TUE 9 MAR

Both COMMON VETCH and HAIRY TARE were in flower at Hayling West Town station today, and beside the Ferry Road due south of the Kench DANISH SCURVYGRASS was flowering (more of it seen south of the Golf Course). Turning south from Ferry Road towards Gunner Point I counted at least 8 plants of Eastern Rocket in flower were I had seen just one bud on my previous visit. Returning via Daw Lane I at last found my first COMMON DOG VIOLETS in flower (just two clumps).

MON 8 MAR

As well as the SWEET VIOLETS that have been flowering widely since mid-January we should now be seeing EARLY DOG VIOLET in woodland and HAIRY VIOLET on the chalk downs. I have not yet seen either of the latter two species but I guess that an e-mail today from Mark Litjens saying that he has

noticed a good number of flowering Violets could well refer to the Early Dog species, while a note in John Goodspeed's weekly poster of "Dog Violets beginning to decorate Portsdown" could refer to the Hairy one. Scent will identify the Sweet Violet in some cases but is not infallible, and the flowers are almost as likely to be white as violet – with this species look for the flower stems arising from the rootstock (not from the leaf stalks). To start distinguishing the common species first check the leaves and leaf stems for hairs or down – the two Dog Violets are hairless, Sweet and Hairy are both hairy with hairs that stick out straight on Hairy but are small, pressed against the leaf (or just downy) in Sweet. To distinguish the Early from Common Dog look at the spur sticking out behind the flower itself. In the Early Dog this spur should be straight and darker blue than the rest of the flower, in the Common Dog the spur is curved up and paler than the flowers. Also – don't rely on these short cut tips – do get a good flower book and use the keys.

INSECTS:

SUN 14 MAR

More sunshine brought out more butterflies this morning. A male BRIMSTONE flew through over my lawn and a SMALL TORTOISESHELL was on Aubretia in Tony Gutteridge's garden. At Warblington I suspect that I also saw a PEACOCK though it was not much more of a flash seen from the corner of my eye before it disappeared over a hedge.

Kevin Stouse's party walking the South Moors area today saw SMALL TORTOISESHELL, PEACOCK and COMMA butterflies.

SAT 13 MAR

Male BRIMSTONES were out today in force at Havant Thicket, Stansted, Creech Woods (Denmead), Bentley Wood (near Salisbury), Whiteley Pastures (Fareham) and West Dean Woods in Sussex (where a single RED ADMIRAL was also seen). The Evening Class group took their morning walk around Havant Thicket and reckon they saw 20 Brimstone, most of them along the south of the western edge of the Thicket where it borders Blendworth Common and a good number of Alder Buckthorn can be found along the peripheral track. In Stansted I saw at least seven male Brimstone, with three together at the western end of the Rough Avenue (above Drews Farm) which is one of the butterfly hotspots of the Forest. On the east side of the road a single Brimstone seemed to precede me for nearly 1 km, causing me to wonder about their strategy for searching for females. The other butterflies seemed to stay within a limited area, but that may have been because they detected limits to the likely habitat in which females might be found - in the east forest the habitat is more uniform and the butterfly just kept on flying.

At Bentley Wood Mark Litjens saw a dozen BRIMSTONE and then saw another four in Whiteley Pastures on the southern edge of the Botley Woods. More butterflies were seen by Richard Hallett in the Denmead area – he had the obligatory BRIMSTONE in Creech Woods and on returning home found the only COMMA of the day in his garden. In the Denvilles area of Havant Kevin Stouse added a fourth species for the day with SMALL TORTOISESHELL in his garden.

Rosemary Webb was at West Dean Woods and watched a PEACOCK butterfly sunning itself on the ground for some time, making a fifth species to emerge today

In my garden at midday the first of the year's Hoverflies (a DRONE FLY) was on the wing and my resident Bumblebee (*B. lucorum*) was still present.

FRI 12 MAR

A message from John Goodspeed today gives news of further stirrings in the insect world. On Portsdown this week he found both the tiny 22 Spot Ladybird (black spots on a yellow base) and a Hawthorn Shield Bug. Ladybirds hibernate in large numbers, but we rarely see them until they emerge and start flying about. The conservation work on Portsdown could well have disturbed both insects from a well deserved slumber but it is just as likely at this time of year that nature had called them out already.

THU 11 MAR

A female bumblebee (*Bombus lucorum*) was in my garden today, first seen feeding on Rosemary flowers then seemingly prospecting for a nest site in the roots of long rough grass. I have yet to come on a flowering Pussy Willow covered with a humming horde of insects of various species, but the increasing frequency with which I come on Willows in flower and the rising temperature mean that that day cannot be far off.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 14 MAR

Along with the rest of creation FOXES are enjoying the spring sunshine. When I was near Langstone Pond this morning and counting the Teal in the Wade Court wet meadow, my binoculars showed me two

beautiful Foxes in their glossy red spring coats lying out in the sun at the foot of an oak tree, then a third Fox at the far end of the same field. Vixens are now giving birth to litters (peak time for this is said to be mid-March) and so when can expect more hungry hunting foxes as well as 'idle gentlemen'. I may have seen this aspect when I was in the Warblington marsh field earlier in the morning and disturbed a Snipe from reeds not more than five yards ahead of me - as the Snipe shot off the disappointed face of a Fox came up from the reeds not more than a yard from the Snipe and that Fox was not in the marsh for sunbathing.

News on Radio Solent today of OTTERS on the River Avon near Salisbury caught my ear. It seems that a small natural population managed to survive here and is now being supplemented with introductions. Could these be the creators of Brian Clarke's mystery piles of snail shells? (See Feb 24)

SAT 13 MAR

Kevin Stouse, aided by warm sunlight, performed miracles in his garden today, bringing life back to several colourless and motionless NEWTS which he accidentally uncovered in his compost heap. He tells me that within ten minutes in the sun these lifeless bodies had regained their colour and the use of their muscles and were able to join the others which emerged from the compost as 'walking wounded' (hopefully uninjured). Seeing life restored to these creatures really made Kevin's day.

WED 10 MAR

The regular work party on Portsdown Hill today were joined at their coffee break by a COMMON LIZARD that was only 1.5 inches long (a normal adult is about 6 inches long), so I assume this was one of last year's young that has survived its first winter and can expect to live for up to six years. The party were working on the south facing brow of the hill below Sir James Callaghan Road just west of the hilltop roundabout.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 09 MAR 1 - 7

BIRDS:

SUN 7 MAR

SISKIN have been seen in small numbers this winter by Sonia Bolton around her garden at Stansted and a chance encounter with Sonia this morning brought about a viewing of the corpse of one female Siskin killed by her cat - the viewing was in two parts, first the undamaged but bodiless head, then the rather chewed body. While I was there a regular Marsh Tit was at the nut feeder and a little later I heard one singing from Lordington Copse. Earlier on my outing I had watched a male Sparrowhawk dash down the driveway to Hollybank House at Emsworth and apparently go to rest in a Yew tree beside the drive, and before that I had heard a strange song coming from a Lawson's Cypress in Denvilles - I assume it was a form of Blackcap subsong but I suppose it could have been some escaped cage bird.

In Petersfield Robert Eadie has had SISKIN visiting his garden feeder regularly since Feb 26 - he says that he has never seen more than three at a time (two females and a male) but they are still there today. In a normal year I would have expected several such reports, whether or not the gardens have the peanuts in the red net bags that are said to be favoured by Siskin.

Brian Fellows news today is of being woken for the first time this year by a loud dawn chorus from three Blackbirds which struck up together at 6am and fell silent just ten minutes later. Later in the day he watched a GREENSHANK in one of its feeding frenzies in what he calls the 'town channel' - I guess the bird was in the harbour - and he noticed that the Swan with the large yellow plastic ring marked "UYD" on its left lag and a metal ring marked "X287" on its right leg was still on Emsworth Mill Pond (Brian is awaiting news of its origin from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust).

Brian also reported a second visit to his garden by a party of Collared Dove - where he normally has just two regular Doves he reported an influx of 13 recently and this week again had an unexpected visit from a party of 10 which I think to be unusual for a garden in the town centre.

The Stansted SWAN pair were this morning on Brickkiln Pond with one bird seemingly nest building on the north side of the pond in full view from the road - it was in a thick clump of vegetation, apparently sitting and certainly reaching out to collect pieces of vegetation and placing them around its body. Along the stream joining this pond to Aldsworth Pond there was the expected line of Canada Geese but they seemed four short of the number last seen there and with no Emperor in sight so maybe the small breakaway group had once more flown back to Emsworth. I did not spend time counting the other birds on Aldsworth Pond but saw at least three Gadwall and perhaps 20 Tufted Duck.

SAT 6 MAR

A phone call from Ron Cole came at dusk today to announce that he had just seen a BARN OWL float past the windows of his house which overlook the large central North Hayling fields from Northney on Hayling. Only yesterday Ron had been told by a neighbour, who is knowledgeable about birds and was brought up in the west country, that he (the neighbour) had recently seen a Barn Owl and heard the call of a BUZZARD (backing up Ron's recent sighting of a Buzzard like raptor flying over his garden – see Feb 26)

The 'Evening Class' group held their Saturday outing at Nutbourne today, logging an excellent total of 50 bird species with a WATER RAIL feeding openly in the wet meadow south of Farm Lane being top of the bill. Three Snipe were also in the meadow and further south 12 Knot were seen on the mud off Thornham Point. Brian Fellows comments on the fact that Water Rails are regular winter visitors to this country from the marshes of Sweden, Poland and other parts of Europe which are subject to lengthy winter frost. At this time of year these birds will start to move back and we have a second opportunity to see them in the open as they touch down to feed in places that are strange to them and where they have not learnt to use the available cover (the first being when our English marshes freeze and there is snow on the ground, making the secretive Rails the more visible as they forage wherever they can). Have a look at Brian Fellows website for more detail.

Cycling past an Emsworth bus stop today I saw Ros Norton waiting for a bus to take her home at the end of a day's ramble, and before the bus arrived she told me that yesterday she had seen four GOOSANDER (two pairs) on the Petersfield Heath Pond. These are presumably the same Goosander reported there by Robert Eadie on Feb 25 (he had seen three Goosander and one Kittiwake on that day).

My news today is of a SPARROWHAWK taking a Collared Dove in my garden at breakfast time – nothing particularly unusual about that, but the immediate reaction of seven Crows and two Magpies which struck up a deafening chorus of abuse from the tree above the spot to which the hawk took its kill was something to hear. Later in the day, at Thornham Point, I heard the very first beginnings of Meadow Pipit song and even a chirp from a male Reed Bunting which I might generously describe as the beginnings of its song.

Barry Collins made a further dawn Egret count today, coming up with a total of 105 leaving the roost.

FRI 5 MAR

The last message received by me this evening before uploading the news to my website is from Ian Calderwood and brings the news we have all been waiting for – confirmed breeding of Little Egret in Hampshire. Ian tells me that his lips have been sealed up to now but he has just received permission to release what he knows – which is that on June 4th last summer one of the nests in the Heronry at RNAD Frater (the Naval Armaments depot on the west shore of Portsmouth Harbour) was seen to have a pair of Egrets with a juvenile, and a second pair of Egrets were nearby but the trees are so dense there that it was impossible to see if they also had a nest. This juvenile is presumably the one which attracted much comment at Farlington Marshes in the summer and was said to look so young that it could not have come from far away. Ian and his Frater Conservation Group have checked the Heronry last weekend but there were no Egrets to be seen then. If anyone else fancies their chances of getting a peek at the birds in this Heronry my advice to them is to not even think about it – security is extremely tight at this very sensitive military site and I doubt that even James Bond would have a chance of getting in, let alone finding the nests.

Both the RING BILLED GULL and the Sinensis Cormorant were seen at Broadmarsh today but I missed both by spending time looking at a look-alike for the Ring-billed gull (which must have been a second winter Common Gull – it had a yellow bill with a broad but faint sub-terminal band, and seemed to have a darker mantle and less rounded head than a Common Gull perched near it, but the head was pure white and I guess the bill band should have been much bolder on the real bird). The birders who saw the Ring-billed closely off the slipway told me that SAND MARTINS have already been seen at Dungeness last week-end. On the Budds Farm pools one Sandpiper was present but being distant and motionless I could not be sure which it was (all I could see was the reflection of the white underside as it stood at the waters edge). 7 Shoveler, 17 Tufted Duck, 10 Mallard, 3 Little Grebe and a few Teal were present and at least one Chiffchaff was calling from the Southmoor Lane hedge (near a singing Goldcrest) to disprove the theory that all the Chiffchaff have left though there do seem to be many fewer along the Brockhampton stream.

Birders searching for spring migrants down the Brockhampton stream in April may be disappointed as I see that Havant Borough plan to close the path down the stream and along to Budds Mound for ten weeks from April 6th. When this was done recently while the sea defences at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream were being built there was a physical barrier put across the path at the bridge over the stream – I hope that will not be the case this time, and that the closure will be a legal one only to absolve the Borough from claims by anyone unlucky enough to suffer injury from the works which will be on a short section of the

seawall at the foot of the steps coming down from Budds Mound to the outfall pipe. Brian Fellows walked the lower Ems valley today, finding 4 Egrets in a flooded field near Lumley Mill but not coming on either Green Sandpiper or even Grey Wagtail. An estimate of 200+ Woodpigeon was down on recent observations so maybe the winter flocks are thinning. A Jay was an unusual bird at Lumley but other common birds were as expected with a burst of Blackbird subsong for colour. My own birding today included a visit to Aldsworth Pond where the Emperor Goose is with 25 Canada Geese (most of them in the little stream connecting Brick-kiln pond to Aldsworth Pond, and only visible from the road along the south of the 'Triangle Wood' south east of Brick-kiln pond). On Aldsworth Pond five Gadwall, two male Shoveler, two Dabchick and up to 20 Tufted Duck plus Coot, Moorhen and Mallard were present and I'm pretty certain I saw the back end of a Water Rail (I had a distinct impression of brown as it disappeared) coming out of the water-cress beds visible from the road to Sindles Farm. As the Emperor has been seen alternately at Aldsworth and Emsworth ponds recently I cycled straight from Aldsworth to Emsworth to see if there might be evidence of two separate Emperors (very unlikely) but the only unusual bird on Emsworth Mill Pond was the Black Swan (all black plumage with red bill having a diagonal white bar near the bill tip – is this natural or an 'owner's mark?'). On other item worth a mention was that I heard at least five different Blackbirds singing during the course of the day. Theo Roberts rang me this morning to tell me about the Toads in his pond (see Other Wildlife page) but also told me that he still has a dozen BLACKCAP in his garden (eight of them colour ringed by himself), and that the Blackcap have been giving strong subsong for some time. Other news included the absence of the Great Spotted Woodpecker which he expected to nest in the garden, and coupling this with news of a Sparrowhawk taking a Great Spotted Woodpecker from Martin Baggs garden at Farlington he fears that the local Sparrowhawks have perhaps acquired a taste for Woodpecker as they have for his semi-tame Fantail Pigeons. In the course of conversation about spring migrants Theo told me he once had a Willow Warbler make two nests in his garden both two or three feet off the ground to disprove the theory that this species is always a ground nester.

THU 4 MAR

Barry Collins started a dawn count of Egrets leaving the Thorney roost this morning but momentarily lost concentration on counting (the total was around 100) as he realised one of the birds leaving was a SPOONBILL. I understand one has been seen at Bembridge recently and I guess this could be that bird. Barry also tells me that the two LONG TAILED DUCK are still present in the Thorney channel in the area from Stanbury Point north to Thornham Point.

Crow sized BLACK WOODPECKERS may soon invade Britain in the same way that Collared Doves did in the 1950s (if they do the pet shops should do a brisk trade in selling extra strong nut feeders guaranteed Black Woodpecker proof as they now do with Squirrel proof ones). I quote this news from Chris Mead's bird news in the latest issue of BRITISH WILDLIFE which arrived today (and he quotes it from Birding World) It seems the birds are relentlessly moving west on the continent, and that there have been many sightings in Britain – all rejected as escaped 'pets' (which reminds me of the dragonfly species about which we were told in Peter Allen's talk at Havant Arts Centre on Wednesday evening – because the first man to write authoritatively on dragonfly habitat preferences at the start of this century declared that one species only bred in acid water many reported sightings of it on non-acid waters from all over the country were rejected as 'impossible' until a modern authority found a large colony of them breeding happily in a chalk pit pool). If these giant woodpeckers do arrive we can expect more summer sightings of Goldeneye, it seems, as the Goldeneye is a tree nesting duck and the Black Woodpecker is the chief creator of its nest holes. Another item in Chris Mead's news is confirmation of the scarcity of Siskin this winter though in the same paragraph he also comments on the good numbers of Brambling in gardens this winter – that may be so in Norfolk ...

Brian Fellows found the Black Swan still at Emsworth Mill Pond which was once more full of water (the sluice gate has once more been closed it seems).

WED 3 MAR

My comments on the lack of SISKIN last Sunday have drawn news from Donald Hobern of just six of these birds feeding in Alders at IBM Hursley Park near Winchester on Feb 25th. Is that really all there are in south Hampshire at present?

Gale force winds yesterday were abating a bit today when Brian Fellows scoured the Warblington area for inland feeding Brent. He did find 70 on the large field south of the path from Warblington Church to Emsworth. The field north of the path also had its birds – more than 30 Pied Wagtail were working the stubble in search of insects and a dozen Redwing with two Mistle Thrush were after similar food but the presence of an Egret here makes me wonder if there might have been larger prey such as Frogs moving towards the watercress beds just across the farm track at the north west corner of this field. Half a dozen

Egrets were in the nearby field adjoining the farmhouse on Church Lane (where a flock of up to 15 has been regularly present around the cattle through this winter)

At tonight's Wildlife Trust meeting in Havant Arts Centre Tony Gutteridge told me how he had just seen the now rare sight of two pairs of LAPWING making their breeding displays and calls over the Stansted East Park fields, and John Goodspeed passed on a report from a stranger of four BUZZARD recently seen over Boarhunt to the north west of Portsdown

TUE 2 MAR

The harbour water and shoreline were not the easiest places for Brent to feed as gale force winds churned the normally sheltered harbour water and the presence of 250 Brent on the Golf Course beside Portsmouth's Eastern Road (where Brian Fellows has not recorded them previously this winter) as well as on the more regularly used grassland (680 birds on the Milton Campus shore fields, 100 on the Farlington Playing Fields, and 80 on Portsmouth Sixth Form College field) was to be expected – no doubt there were a thousand or more on Farlington Marshes. Brian found 62 Swans still on the Southsea Canoe Lake with 19 Mallard and a single Tufted Duck, and at Baffins Pond he found the Pochard had all disappeared and the Shoveler were down to 4 with just 25 Tufted Duck to be seen. Baffins also had 4 Swans and 134 Mallard with the other regulars, though Canada Geese were down to just 18.

MON 1 MAR

When David Parker visited the Elmley nature reserve in north Kent last November he enjoyed Merlin, Peregrine, Hen and Marsh Harrier and 3 Short Eared Owls, and a more recent visit by Chris Slade produced a 'full house' of raptors (including Rought Legged Buzzard) and an unusual collection of four Swan species (all three wild species plus Black). A visit by the Havant evening class group yesterday found few visible raptors (mainly on account of gale force winds) but was nevertheless rewarding with the sight of over 50 AVOCET and a singing CORN BUNTING. One MARSH HARRIER was seen briefly as was a LITTLE OWL, and the day list had 43 species on it when they left – one species on the list which they are unlikely to see locally was GREYLAG GOOSE. Back in Forestside David now gets Nuthatch on his bird feeder, and a note from Tony Gutteridge today tells me that he too has heard these birds in the Wade Court area recently.

Emsworth Mill Pond Swans were down to 72 today when Brian Fellows made his rounds and the Black Swan was still there with seven Merganser sheltering from the stormy sea – I have no idea as to where the Black Swan came from and my comment about the Dawlish herd was not intended as a source for this visitor, I'm sure there are other collections nearer home that it might have escaped from, for example the birds on the Trout Farm pools at Brook Farm half way between Southbourne and Hambrook on the north side of the railway which I suspect could have been the source of some of our Bar Headed Goose sightings .. I doubt the birds there are properly ringed and formally registered. I also think it unlikely that this is the same bird that was on the Mill Pond five years ago – if so where has it been in the meantime. On the Slipper Mill Pond one COOT NEST is now complete with the bird sitting and a second, plus a Moorhen's, nest are in the building stage.

The long established KINGFISHER nest site conveniently visible from the Wayfarers Way path as it passes Bedhampton Water Works was probably not used last year when a landslip piled earth against the 'cliff face' which gives the birds a feeling of security against intruders such as weasels and snakes. Further landslips and a strong current to scour away the debris has restored the conditions which the birds like and today I had the impression that they had been making three separate trial borings into the cliff face. I did not see a Kingfisher there today but did notice their 'white paint' splattered droppings close by the bridge from Langstone Mill Lane onto the South Moors, and had news of a Kingfisher seen by Tony Gutteridge at Langstone Pond on Sat (Feb 27)

Budds Farm Pools, which I visited this evening, were busier than they have been recently. 26 Tufted Duck, 15 Teal, 13 Mallard, 8 Shoveler and 1 Pochard were all present and I also saw a single Canada Goose, 3 Little Grebe and 5 Coot there. Southern Water are kindly piping water into the two remaining pools to keep up the level and hopefully bring in extra nutriment. Over the nearby South Moors I thought I heard the beginnings of Meadow Pipit song, but the wind was strong and the sky darkening so there was little encouragement for the bird to start its parachuting.

Tony Gutteridge has just given me the results for the Warblington CBC updated with last year's info (the BTO look at our record of the birds there during the breeding season and decide how many breeding territories were being held). Of the 61 species believed to have bred there over the years since the census started in 1977 we have lost 6 species as breeders on the plot and it may be of interest to list these. Lapwing have not bred for 12 years (in total 43 pairs bred in the years before they abandoned us). Tree Sparrows have not bred for 11 years (7 breeding territories in earlier years). Red Legged Partridge not bred for 9 years (21 previous territories). Corn Bunting not for 7 years (51 previous). Turtle Dove not for

7 years (23 previous) and Grey Partridge not for 2 years with 15 previous pairs on territory. Although Skylark have not vanished as breeders we now have 12 or 13 singing males (probably no young) whereas we used to have over 30 singing males in the 1970s and the Blackbird pairs have halved from 94 to around 40. Yellowhammer and Reed Bunting numbers have also declined. Sparrowhawk, Robin, Crow, Rook and Magpie have increased in numbers but do not add much quality to the local bird watching.

PLANTS:

SUN 7 MAR

My travels today took me along Woodlands Lane from Stansted to Walderton, giving me a chance to see the Green Hellebore flowers which Tony Gutteridge saw a week ago. Heading downhill into Walderton and then south along the road by the pumping station I was pleased to see that someone has attempted to repair the damage done to the rare 'Monophylla' Ash trees which last year seemed doomed to die from very extensive bark nibbling by horses – the wounds have now been covered with some black substance which could save them. These trees were brought to my attention by Michael Prior (head forester at Stansted) but I am not certain if they are the 'Monophylla' variety of the Common Ash or the 'Veltheimii' variety of the Narrow Leaved Ash which I see is also listed by Alan Mitchell as *Fraxinus angustifolia monophylla*. Looking at Stace after the event I see I should have looked at the winter buds – on Common Ash these are black, but on the Narrow Leaved species they are brown.

Further down the Ems valley from Walderton I stopped at the Racton road junction to check out the BUTTERBUR colony, finding only 20 flowerheads and those with difficulty as many are hardly raising their heads above ground and those which have done so have been trampled or run over by cars. On the north east side of the road junction the plants normally do much better along the edge of the water filled ditch but I could see none there. This is in great contrast to the Hampshire colony in Brook Meadow at Emsworth where Brian Fellows counted 79 flowerheads on Feb 24 and 115 on Mar 5 (and I'm sure there will be more).

The best find came as I headed home up the single track road from Racton to Aldsworth – at the brow of the hill many plants of GREATER STITCHWORT were in flower as if we were in April.

SAT 6 MAR

Ros Norton found the first GROUND IVY flowers today beside Park Lane which runs from Stansted Groves to Racton Folly. My only find of some interest was ALEXANDERS starting to flower along Thornham Lane near the Thorney sewage works (I saw my first flowers of this plant on Hayling a week ago)

FRI 5 MAR

The first two WOOD ANEMONE buds were about to open when I found them in the little copse by Whichers Gate Road at Rowlands Castle this morning (this copse is the Havant end of the bridleway from Rowlands Castle village green and later in the year will have Common Cow-wheat). Later in the morning I came on a bank of BARREN STRAWBERRY flowers at Forestside

WED 3 MAR

GREEN HELLEBORE has started to flower along the north side of Woodlands Lane at the brow of the hill up from Walderton Village as it heads for Stansted House according to Tony Gutteridge.

When I was plant hunting on South Hayling last Saturday I found what I thought was a tatty plant of Canadian Fleabane on the north side of Ferry Road outside the Hayling Health Society 'village' but on checking an e-mail which Pete Selby recently sent me describing his finds in this area I see he recorded a find of *CONYZA SUMATRENSIS* or GUERNSEY FLEABANE. The specimen which I saw was in no fit condition to be questioned by an amateur about its identity, but I will certainly be keeping an eye open for this plant when it is feeling better and showing more in the way of flowers and flowerheads (As far as I can remember the plant was rather hidden by overhanging vegetation, very close to the fence and just west of a phone box so it may need a careful sweep along the roadside to re-find it).

INSECTS:

SUN 7 MAR

Clearing bramble and other dead vegetation from my garden today I noticed a glint of bright yellow among some dead leaves and on closer inspection found a Queen WASP wrapped around in a dead leaf in a style reminiscent of the food presentation to be seen on the TV Masterchef programmes. I could not say if the insect was alive or dead – it looked healthy but was as motionless as it would be if dead so I placed it in a sheltered spot to give it a chance of survival. Does anyone know where wasps normally hibernate – I would have assumed they would be in garden sheds hidden in cracks in the wood work, or maybe in holes in a dry bank.

FRI 5 MAR

Mark Litjens tells me that a friend of his saw a BRIMSTONE on the wing this morning somewhere in the Sowley Pond area near Lymington. In the British Wildlife mag which I received this week the Butterfly news section contributed by Nick Bowles of Butterfly Conservation shows the same concern that I have expressed for the SMALL TORTOISESHELL – it is now ‘official’ that numbers of this species at the end of last year were far lower than normal and Nick says “There can be little doubt that a recovery in their numbers demands a spring with settled weather when it gets under way” So I hope no one reports any Tortoiseshell on the wing before spring is fully sprung and that the weather is kind to the butterflies at least until they have mated and laid their eggs.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 6 MAR

I would not normally report a dead FOX by the roadside but this afternoon I cycled through the Emsworth Marina and out on its approach road to the main Thorney Road. At the west end of the approach road, north side, I recently saw a live Fox openly sunning itself within 50 yards of the road, and noticed movements of a second Fox in the bramble bush behind the first Fox. Today I looked there in vain, and on reaching the main road and turning right I again saw a Fox, seemingly undamaged lying on the roadside grass but this time its lack of concern for the world about it was absolute.

FRI 5 MAR

Both male and female TOADS had arrived in Theo Roberts Cosham garden pond last Sunday (Feb 28) and immediately paired but for the past five days the males have clung to the females in vain with no sign of any spawn appearing – all in good time, we hope.

THU 4 MAR

In the issue of BRITISH WILDLIFE which arrived today there is a most interesting article by Sue and Roy Eden who have been studying DORMICE in Dorset and conclude that these creatures are not nearly as dependent on woodland and Hazel as we are accustomed to think. They have found Dormice in coastal scrub and along the hedgerows lining old railtracks far from true woodland and they say “Our survey work has shown that Dormice can manage on diets that do not include nuts and can manage in areas where there are few trees. Bramble may be the key species in many areas as it has such a long flowering and fruiting season.”

Driving from Havant towards Funtington Mike Collins noted a dead BADGER by the roadside near Marlpit Lane (south of Racton Park Wood) and Mike tells me that over the past year he has seen three other Badger corpses on his journeys from Havant to Goodwood and back. Another message this week came from someone who knows two local train drivers who regularly see Deer, Badgers and other animals killed by trains, particularly in the Fareham to Southampton area.

MON 1 MAR

Both Frogs and Toads were moving across the Forestside Road through Stansted Forest last night when David Parker drove home along it.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 08: FEB 22 - 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 FEB

Kevin Stouse had sunny but windy weather for his walk to Farlington Marshes today and found one Avocet still on the lake (with a Stonechat nearby). Bob Chapman told them that the American Wigeon was still present on the scrape but Kevin’s party were unable to see it. They did however spot a Black Tailed Godwit in summer plumage and one Spotted Redshank plus two pairs of Gadwall (a few years ago these

would have been a rarity at Farlington Marshe but they are now fairly regular winter visitors). Best bird of the day was a Merlin which seemed to have just caught a small bird and was then harried to the ground by two Crows which appeared to steal and eat its prey leaving the Merlin to fly off with an empty stomach. Coming back via Chalk Dock the party saw both Knot and Dunlin at close quarters and were able to compare the two species at leisure. Three Egrets and several Merganser and Goldeneye were seen but only one Great Crested Grebe. Numbers of Great Crested Grebe seem to have been very low in Langstone Harbour this winter but I see that numbers do vary greatly from year to year and month to month. In most years around 150 can be expected in Langstone Harbour in November or December but this can drop to below 20 in January or February when the birds move to the sea off Hill Head and Brownwich (flocks of 200 or more assemble there in January/February but I see that in one recent year a count of 180 in one month had dropped to just 3 in the next month for no apparent reason)

Brian Fellows is considering a 'save our gasholder' campaign for Emsworth in the light of rumours that it may be dismantled – he thinks that it is not only an essential part of the Emsworth scene but that without it the Chiffchaff which has spent the winter in the shelter of its lee, and was singing there today, may abandon the town. With the tide up the Mill Pond was full this morning and some 82 Swans were on the water with the Black Swan out on the harbour. (I heard today that Dawlish on the South Devon coast has a large resident herd of feral Black Swans)

Even in areas where winter Siskin are a rarity there is normally a good chance of seeing them at garden nut-feeders in February as they re-fuel on their way north. This winter I have not seen or heard of any flocks in local woodland during the winter, nor of any garden visitors, but today someone from Dorset told me he had seen one male and one female in his garden during the past week so keep your eyes open. I have heard of plenty of winter Blackcap and Chiffchaff, and this week heard of another male Blackcap in a Northney garden on Hayling (and of a singing Corn Bunting heard from the car as my visitor from Dorset drove here today)

SAT 27 FEB

Corn Bunting have been seen at the Thorney Great Deeps this winter by Barry Collins but he told me today that the places where they would normally hold territory on Thorney are currently much disturbed by the work to remove concrete from the airfield runways and none have been seen or heard there yet. On a more positive note he said the two LONG TAILED DUCK were still in the Thorney Channel and he had seen them recently off Stanbury Point, and that a recent dawn count of Egrets leaving the roost had given a total of 106 birds.

My morning outing was via Langstone and Hayling Oysterbeds to Gunner Point and back. With the tide up I found over 70 Teal still in the Wade Court wet meadow and the Tufted Duck pair on the Langstone Pond with the Swan pair on the sea and what I am pretty certain was a second winter Med Gull resting on the sea and refusing to take off to confirm its identity. In the distance 20 Shelduck flew from the Northney marina high towards the Warblington shore where the birds suddenly dropped vertically out of the sky onto the water. Brent were present in large flocks all round the shore here and at the Oysterbeds and were showing signs of thinking about migration – lots of noisy chattering and much flying hither and thither for no apparent reason. In the north pool of the Oysterbeds I thought I was looking at the hybrid Brent/Brant when I saw a bird with much whiter flanks than the others around it but scanning the whole flock I picked out two others that were equally white on the flanks. On Sinah GP a pair of Canada Geese at the west end were accompanied by 8 Pochard and 17 Tufties, and the Swan pair were back on the east end with the single Embden Goose in tow. Coming back to Langstone bridge a flock of 50 Black Tailed Godwit were feeding avidly on the mud of 'Texaco bay' between the garage and the coastal path – maybe these were birds already on the move east and north.

In Emsworth Brian Fellows today found the Swan pair back on Peter Pond. This time last year one of the then resident pair was killed in a road accident and there was a prolonged drama of re-pairing and an initial failed nest before the current pair settled down and raised the brood of three (including the one 'Polish' cygnet that was white plumaged as a cygnet) that is probably still among the 82 birds on the Mill Pond. I hope they have better luck this season. Bad luck also hit the Thorney Little Deeps pair last year – they are normally the first to nest and to hatch cygnets in our area but they failed to hatch any young last spring – its worth keeping an eye on them now to see when they start nesting.

FRI 26 FEB

CORN BUNTING seem to have vanished from the face of the earth this winter as far as many birders are concerned but a message from Mike Collins tonight gives me fresh hope of seeing and hearing them. Mike lives in Havant and works at Goodwood, driving there via Funtington and the minor road to West

Stoke (where the southern carpark for Kingley Vale is found) and on east to Mid and East Lavant villages. Mike says .. “ on Wednesday (Feb 24) on my way to work at Goodwood I saw and heard my first Corn Bunting singing this year. This was on the road between West Stoke and Lavant School (before reaching the main road). For the past two weeks I have noticed them starting to occupy their singing posts, but this was the first day I stopped to listen for their song.” I suspect that Barry Collins may also be hearing them on Thorney Island where he had five singing males left last summer but I have not spoken to him recently. Mike Collins (no relation to Barry) also tells me that in recent years he has seen Barn Owl from the same stretch of road, but no luck so far this winter.

A BLACK SWAN was seen in Emsworth Mill pond this morning by Brian Fellows, who tells me that the sluice gates have now been open for over a week, leaving the pond as a muddy part of the upper shore with the Emsworth West Brook flowing through it to the harbour. The Mill Pond sluice gates are controlled by Havant Borough and are opened once a month to flush out the water which soon refills with fresh water from the West Brook as soon as they are closed. It could be that the gates have a mechanical failure which has prevented them from being closed this time, but my guess is that it is a planned operation in connection with improvements to the surrounding area. I suppose (but do not believe) it has been done to discourage the Swans from flocking here, but if that is the case it is succeeding as only 24 Swans remained in the empty pond, with a further 32 on the harbour water outside.

Brian Fellows reminds us that a Black Swan was resident on the pond from Sept 92 to Feb 93.. The resident of those years had been taken to Brent Lodge Bird Hospital, and when it was considered fit and well a man who lived in Bridgefoot Path overlooking the Emsworth Pond offered to look after it and took it to Emsworth. During its six month stay at Emsworth it more than once flew from there to Gosport Cockle Pond and its guardian had to motor down there and persuade the Swan to get into his vintage Austin Seven for the drive home to Emsworth. On other occasions the Swan returned from its excursions on its own wings and it was more than once seen flying east over Farlington Marshes. Maybe this is the same bird which has just returned from a visit to its relatives in Australia.

If you want to know more about Emsworth and its birds do put Brian Fellows own website on your list of Favourites – he has only been working on it for a few months and I would be the first to admit that its layout and presentation is way above that of my own. The address is in my Links section in the What’s New page.

A phone call from Ron Cole this morning asked if I knew of any large brown raptors seen in the Northney area of Hayling recently – yesterday he had glimpsed a large bird fly past his window and was just in time to get a glimpse of what might have been a BUZZARD perched in a nearby tree before it flew out of sight. My guess was that it might have been some escaped captive raptor, though I suppose one of the Stansted Buzzards could have taken a day trip to Hayling. Another less likely possibility (as I’m sure Ron would not have confused it with a Buzzard) would be that it was one of the Tawny Owls which held territory in the fields west of Northney Farm (under the Rookery) last spring alongside a pair of Little Owls.

THU 25 FEB

A message from Robert Eadie tells me of a KITTIWAKE and 3 GOOSANDER as being still present on the Petersfield Heath Lake this afternoon. I guess that the presence of a Kittiwake inland here will have been on Birdline but this is the first I have heard of these birds at Petersfield. Perhaps the Kittiwake is one of the birds which arrived in the Thames valley on Feb 7th (when Jonathan Hutchings Guildford area website reported a major influx of them). I am not so surprised at the presence of the Goosander – I don’t know if they have been seen on this pond before but each year the number wintering in Hampshire seems to increase, especially on ponds in the north of the county.

John Goodspeed walked around Gunner Point on Hayling this afternoon and saw just two SANDERLING on the sands at low tide, then had good views of the GUILLEMOT in the harbour entrance (he comments that it is a much cleaner bird than one he saw last winter). He also mentions the white Goose on Sinah Gravel Pit lake, and if anyone else is not familiar with this bird it is I think a domestic species called an EMBDEN GOOSE and has an interesting history. There is a long standing conflict here (as elsewhere) between fishermen and Swans which come swimming towards them in the hope of food and then get tangled with their lines. More than five years ago the Langstone Wildfowlers who manage the water in association with the anglers came up with a scheme that they thought would help with this problem and took the eggs from under the Swans which used to nest on the most obvious island at the east end, replacing them with Goose eggs from which four of these white Embden Geese hatched. The geese swam around behind their ‘parents’ but remained on the pond when the Swans flew off. Phase two of this operation seems to have been to pile old oil drums and other material on the Swan’s nest island to

discourage them from nesting. At first the Swans squeezed in a nest among the rubbish but I think they may now have abandoned the site, and over the years the number of Geese has dwindled to just one. The Geese were certainly less aggressive than the Swans but it seems that in future neither will be seen on the lake (plenty of Canada Geese and Brent still show up there).

Heather Mills today saw a BLACK SWAN off Kendall's Wharf in the north of Langstone Harbour (see Feb 26) – possibly the same wandering minstrel which had been on Stansted Brick-kiln pond on Jan 10. Brian Fellows today found a pair of Swans back on Aldsworth Pond where they used to nest regularly on the western of the two islands – I'm pretty sure it is now too overgrown for them. These may be the birds which now nest on the Stansted nature reserve lake out of sight behind Brick-kiln pond but have not yet fully settled down to nesting duties. With them a male SHOVELER was new on the pond and the number of Tufted Duck had risen to 28 with the other residents (including at least 10 of the dozen Gadwall) still present. Brian did not see the Emperor but it was probably with the Canada Geese in the field west of the pond (that is the only place I have seen it and it can easily be hidden in the long grass). Newcomers to this pond will find that only part of it can be seen from the roadside where most of the water flows out over a wooden sluice. To get a fuller idea of what is on the pond you have to walk east to the track leading up to Sindles Farm and go up that until you are level with the old watercress beds, stopping at various points to see different parts of the main pond. To see the geese in the field to the west you have to be brave and walk along the road to the east to look into the field though you can get a good view more safely by driving to the first road junction west of the pond, turning right into that road and immediately parking, then walk back to look down the field from the bend in the main road. Blackbird evensong is now regular and widespread – late this afternoon I happened to be chatting to a friend outside the Havant Tesco store when one struck up loudly from a Buddleia bush beside us as I was on my way home from a walk over Langstone South Moors where Goldcrest was singing loudly and persistently from the conifers along Southmoor Lane.

WED 24 FEB

Late this morning I happened to be passing the Bedhampton Mill Pond and heard Kingfisher noises which eventually led my eyes to a tree overhanging the east end of the pool on its north side and on a low branch there was a brilliantly plumaged bird with a largish fish in its bill. After the usual bashing of the fish against the branch it was swallowed and the bird flew over the bank to the Hermitage Stream close to the traditional nest site. While the Kingfisher had the fish in its bill I could still hear the shrill calls that first attracted my attention but I could not detect another bird though I suspect the mate was nearby. Overhead a GREENFINCH was singing from its aerial display flight (first heard yesterday). A phone call from Richard Barker told me that yesterday he had clearly seen a female LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER in trees by the Langbrook Stream opposite the house in Langbrook Close (only just downstream from the Xyratex approach road). On the South Moors he had also come on a flock of 22 MEADOW PIPIT confirming my feeling that these birds are now on the move north (I saw about a dozen there yesterday). Today Brian Fellows walked the lower Ems valley finding 6 REDWING (the first he has seen there this winter), 4 Egrets (the most he has seen there this winter) and a Green Sandpiper. He found three Crows nests being built (and saw the Crows at work) and counted 23 Robins, 27 Blackbirds (some in subsong) and 4 Song Thrush in full song, with the winter flock of 300 Woodpigeon still filling the trees. Most excitingly he saw signs of courtship among the Egrets.

TUE 23 FEB

Brian toured Portsmouth and Southsea today, finding just one PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle and a GUILLEMOT at Eastney. In Brian's words "Sitting in the car overlooking the harbour entrance I obtained several excellent views of a very handsome winter plumaged GUILLEMOT. Its white foreneck and sides of the face stood out very clearly from the dark plumage of its upperparts. Its white underparts showed well as it dived. I watched it for about 30 minutes while it continually dived. I was surprised at how far it travelled under the water and I completely lost it several times. This could be the same bird that was reported last week off the Outdoor Centre near Kendall's Wharf. Also in the same vicinity a COMMON SEAL popped its head up occasionally, hopefully not weighing-up the Guillemot as potential playmate." (Does he mean playmate or meal?) 5 Swans were on Baffins Pond where there are normally 2 at the most (though Brian remembers 50 Swans regularly on that pond in the 1980s) and there were 65 Swans on the Canoe Lake. Brent Geese were enjoying academic grass with 280 on the Milton Campus field, 300 at Portsmouth Sixth Form College and 100 on St John's College playing fields.

I took an afternoon walk down the Billy Line to Langstone and came back up the Langbrook stream from the South Moors, starting with my first GREY WAGTAIL SONG of the year from the bird that seems established on the small pool immediately north of the East Street bridge and ending with a KINGFISHER flying up the Langbrook from the gap between the Mallards housing and the Brookmead Way houses – I last saw the bird flying under the Xyratex approach road bridge. The only other items of interest were my first GREENFINCH DISPLAY FLIGHT and the first small flock of a dozen Meadow Pipts at the South Moors

MON 22 FEB

David Parker has recently moved house from Bedhampton to Forestside and has been favourably impressed by the better quality of garden birds that he now sees – his nut feeder attracts Coal Tits but he has not yet seen a Blue Tit on it, his lawn has a Green Woodpecker but no sign of Starling or House Sparrow, and best of all he has not yet seen a Magpie.

COOT were starting nestbuilding on two of the Emsworth Slipper Mill pond rafts when Brian Fellows was there today, and despite the Town Mill Pond sluice remaining open for longer than usual there were still 83 Swans in the pool area with four more in the harbour. With no water in the Mill Pond Brian could see that one of the Swans had a plastic leg ring with the letters “UYD” on it – he hopes to find out the origin of the bird from the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust. Despite my sighting of the EMPEROR GOOSE at Aldsworth Pond yesterday it was back at Emsworth today with 6 Canada Geese.

At least one Egret is as far inland as Old Alresford where it was seen by Maragaet Baggs recently, and in the Soberton/Droxford area Nigel Johnson has counted up to nine of them. Another item from the evening class is a report of 6 Jays together in a Rowlands Castle garden close to Havant Thicket.

PLANTS:

SAT 27 FEB

This morning I found the MUSK STORKSBILL which Pete Selby had recently located flowering outside 164 Seafront facing the south Hayling beach. The house is just east of Chichester Avenue and the plants are in a strip of weedy grass between its front wall and the pavement. The leaves of the Storks-bill are the most prominent part of the vegetation and have little resemblance to the ground hugging, curly leaves of Common Storks-bill - these are held above the grass on long petioles and have broad flat blades subdivided into large pinnules looking somewhat like those of Wild Parsnip. Two plants had flower heads but these were short stemmed and the flowers could have been overlooked among the many flowers of Red Deadnettle that were in the grass. At the west end of the shore road, outside the Hayling Health Society ‘village’ west of the Kench, I found the first bank of flowering COMMON WHITLOWGRASS (like a forest of minaturised Snowdrops) and creamy yellow flowers on the much larger plants of ALEXANDERS. COMMON STORKSBILL and COMMON FUMITORY were also in flower here and on the south side of the road, right on the bend into the bus turnaround and entrance to the shore carpark, a bright yellow opening bud could be seen on the first of the EASTERN ROCKET plants that are abundant here. On my way home I looked in Daw Lane for early dog-violets but found none, though the bright red catkins were opening on the tall HYBRID BLACK POPLARS marking the field edges of what were until this year apple orchards.

THU 25 FEB

While waiting for an MoT to be completed on my car I walked south from Havant down the Langbrook stream, across the South Moors and back via Southmoor Lane. On Brockhampton Lane I saw my very first new flowers on IVY LEAVED TOADFLAX and more flowers on the equally abundant YELLOW CORYDALIS which has also just started to flower. On the Budds Farm side of Southmoor Lane one plant of HEDGEROW CRANESBILL was covered with flowers (last winter many plants flowered here from December until the summer) near to the Cow Parsley which has been in flower here for some time. Further down Southmoor Lane the Cherry Plum trees were probably at the peak of their blossom and even from a distance the leaves were becoming noticeable. In the Langbrook stream the Water Crowfoot flowers that I first saw last Tuesday were in much the same condition., and back by Tesco a single flower of Creeping Buttercup could be seen near the plant of Greater Celandine which now has flower buds.

WED 24 FEB

BUTTERBUR is daily becoming more noticeable both in Emsworth, where Brian Fellows found 69 flower spikes today against the 33 which I found last Saturday, and by the Langbrook Stream at Langstone where the introduced female plants can now be seen to be very different to the males at Emsworth. The male flower heads remain as compact ‘hand grenades’ whereas the females are now becoming tall spike with well spaced flowers in the edge of the Langbrook stream. Also in the Langstone area I have seen

several more Black thorn bushes starting to flower and yesterday on the South Moors found a bush of Duke of Argyll's tealplant had opened most of its leaves.

TUE 23 FEB

STREAM WATER CROWFOOT was starting to flower in the Langbrook between the A27 and the Xyratex approach road today.

MON 22 FEB

Pete Selby (Hampshire co-ordinator of the national Atlas2000 plant survey) visited South Hayling over the weekend in search of the grass *Poa infirma* (see Feb 7 for more about this rarity) and found it at eight sheltered sites along the coast road. At one of them (near the Hayling Ferry) he also found Green Field Speedwell, but the one which most interests me is on the north side of the Seafront Road (I think close to its junction with Chichester Avenue) where MUSK STORKSBILL was flowering outside 164 Seafront. Pete found that all the *Poa infirma* sites were on south facing, sheltered, disturbed areas of gravelly soil and not only were the plants all of a yellowy tinge but their spikelets were minute and needed a hand lens even to detect them

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 26 FEB

No one has yet come up with an answer to Brian Clarke's question about the origin of piles of broken SNAIL SHELLS which he recently noticed at the foot of Willow trees along the banks of the Hampshire Avon (see Feb 24) but Brian has sent me a further message in which he says .. "interesting hypothesis about the floodwater, but I do not recall flood debris around the trees and on reflection doubt if that part of the bank would have been under water. Most of the snail shells were on the river side of the tree trunk. And there were hundreds and hundreds of them - maybe thousands. I had not thought of mink - but I did see a mink a mile or so upstream that same day." I'm sure someone can supply an explanation - my suggestions are pure guesswork.

On a less serious note I have had a message from Kevin Stouse, who recently moved from IBM to another well known company whose success or failure in overcoming the Millennium Bug is of concern to us all (I dare not pass on its name in case their attitude towards the problem revealed in his message causes you to break out in a cold sweat and flee the country). Kevin says ... "We are proud to report that we have completed the "Y-to-K" date change mission, and have now implemented all changes to all programs and all data to reflect the required new standards for month names (Januark, Februark, March, April, Mak, June, Julk, August, September, October, November, December) and days of the week (Sundak, Mondak, Tuesdak, Wednesdak Thursdak, Fridak, Saturdak.)" To find out more join Kevin on his walk from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes this coming Sunday. Although that is the last day of the month you might still be in time to get the job of captain of the Februark which will hopefully save the animals from the doom about to overtake mankind.

WED 24 FEB

We are all familiar with the stone 'anvils' used by Song Thrushes to open their meals, and with the collections of broken shell that can gather around them, but I was asked today if I could explain the presence of much larger piles of broken snail shells which Brian Clarke noticed recently on the banks of the Hampshire Avon. He came on the first pile close against the base of the trunk of a pollard Willow on the river bank, then found similar piles at the base of several other Willows nearby. Could these be places where Mink enjoy a snail dinner? My guess is that the piles have a human origin, but for what purpose? I didn't ask Brian if the shells were on the upstream side of the trunks which might indicate deposition by flood water. Do you know the answer?

TUE 23 FEB

While watching a Guillemot in the Langstone Harbour entrance from the Eastney side today Brian Fellows saw a Common Seal nearby and hoped it would not eat the Guillemot - which it did not while he was there.

FEB 15 - 21

BIRDS:

SUN 21 FEB

Ian Calderwood this evening sent me this message recording a very eventful afternoon at Titchfield Haven today. He says "During a quick stroll around Titchfield Haven I was fortunate to be there at the time a juvenile unringed RINGED TEAL was showing well, by the bridge. At the same time a male MERLIN flew into the bush opposite us. A FIRECREST was singing between the information centre and the Suffern hide and someone reported a GARGANEY from the Meadow hide, I did go and look but I couldn't find it!" My only problem is that I can't find a reference to Ringed Teal in any of my books – can anyone enlighten me?

Brian Fellows notes for today include a sighting of Sparrowhawk in Stansted Forest and the following account of what he saw in his garden this morning. He says "I was watching a male Collared Dove chasing a female Collared Dove and attempting to copulate when across the garden rushed a Sparrowhawk, no doubt hoping to take one of the Collared Doves, while otherwise occupied. The Sparrowhawk failed to make a kill, but I was treated to a superb display of flying as the Sparrowhawk was itself constantly mobbed and harried for a couple of minutes by the local Carrion Crow pair, before it flew off northwards." This went a long way to make up for what he calls a 'quiet week in the garden' This morning I was back at the Stansted Groves and this time had a clear, close up view of the FIRECREST through my bins – enjoying the bright moss green on the body and the vivid white eye-stripe (a great contrast to see this jewel after moments before watching a drab Goldcrest hovering in front of a Holly bush in a very good imitation of Firecrest behaviour. On both previous occasions Alistair had seen it in the first section of Park Lane between the road and the stile into the Groves – this morning it was more than 100 yards along the second section of the lane, after passing the point where there is standing water across the path, and the bird was in the southern hedge opposite the sawn off trunk of a large tree that must have fallen across the path and been cleared. The Swan pair were on Brick Kiln pond (yesterday they were on the inner pond, hidden from the road) and the Emperor goose was in the field west of Aldsworth Pond with about ten Canadas. On the pond there were at least 12 Gadwall and 22 Tufted Duck with Coot, Moorhen and Dabchick.

SAT 20 FEB

The Evening Class group walk this morning was around Budds Farm, Brockhampton stream and the South Moors. The GREEN & COMMON SANDPIPER were both in the sewage farm pools, and surprisingly they also saw two GREEN SANDPIPER in the South Moors Tamarisk Pool. Even more surprisingly they could find no Chiffchaff in the area, but on the Budds Farm shore was a colour ringed BLACK TAILED GODWIT (yellow over green) and a metal ringed Rock Pipit (my guess would be that was also ringed by Pott Potts within Budds Farm in a recent winter). The weather was good and full song from a Skylark over Budds Mound added to the feeling of spring – they were just one day too early for the Meadow Pipit first song which I heard over the South Moors on Feb 20 in 1998. Goldcrest, Goldeneye and Merganser were all on a list of 49 species seen during this outing.

Chichester Harbour WeBS count took place this afternoon and Brian found a Shoveler and 5 Gadwall on the sea in his south east Hayling sector – besides these unexpected birds things were much as usual for the time of year although Brent Geese numbers were low (only 310 in total). The feral Pink-Footed Goose was still on Tournurbury Farm pond.

My morning round took me (courtesy of a permit from Michael Prior) through the Stansted Nature Reserve where I put up a WOODCOCK from the pond edge and also through the restricted access Lyels Wood where I heard my first Yellowhammer song and listened to the reciprocal drumming of two Great Spotted Woodpeckers with new understanding in the light of Brian Fellows description of how male and female of a pair will drum to each other – had the second bird drumming close by been a rival male I am pretty sure that the naturally aggressive woodpeckers would have been at each other in a very short time. I had parked at the west end of Park Lane south of Stansted Groves and on my return I heard both Marsh Tit and Goldcrest song but had no sight of the FIRECREST seen there on Thursday (Feb 18) by Alistair Martin. Later in the day a phone call from Alistair told me that he had arrived there as I was leaving and had not only seen the Firecrest again but also a pair of BUZZARD over that area – and on the subject of raptors, although I cannot reveal the location, I had another phone call from 'a reliable source' during the week to say that it seems that the English Nature programme of releasing Spanish Red Kites in southern England has brought a pair within reasonable distance of Havant – along with that news came the more surprising news that a sheep carcass which was probably put out to encourage the Kites to stay has also attracted a Raven (though I doubt that will stay), plus further news of a female Black Redstart seen in the same area this week.

In the afternoon I cycled to Thornham Point in the hope of seeing the two Long Tailed Duck which had been in the Thorney Channel last Monday (Feb 15). The tide was high and the visibility was excellent and I spent some time watching a flotilla of 20 Merganser which have started their spring courtship water chases and head bobbing but I had no luck with the Long Tailed Duck. Coming back down Thornham Lane I found two birders with their scopes trained on the field south of the sewage works where they had just seen a Water Rail, and on the Slipper Mill pond the four Danchick were in courtship mode – at one point three were flying line astern across the water like Mallard drakes after a duck, and when they landed the leading two swam together and seemed to be touching beaks – I was half expecting some neck-bobbing but none followed. Highspot of the afternoon was at Peter Pond on the way out (about 3.30pm) when I picked out the black heads of two second winter MED GULLS – both had long black outer webs to their primaries and had drab purple coloured bills and legs but the black head caps came well down the back of the neck and they had white crescents around the rear of their eyes (giving them an extra evil look). One of them was very distinctive in having a large white area around the base of the bill, and in flight both had the bull-necked, stiff winged look of their species.

FRI 19 FEB

The GREEN SANDPIPER was this morning in the Wade Court meadow pool which is beginning to dry out and the Teal may well have started to move off to their nesting areas as there were none in the meadow and less than 40 on the shore. The pair of Tufted Duck could not be seen on Langstone Pond where both Swans were waiting to be fed. Some 40 Shelduck and 30 Wigeon were still on the sea between Langstone and Pook Lane but my most interesting sighting was a flock of around 30 REDWING moving west across the fields north of Warblington Castle. There were only seven Egret in the ‘farmhouse field’ with the cattle today but Barry Collins has seen 15 in this field recently.

Chris Slade told me that yesterday he had been at the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at high tide and had seen a strange wader on the shore which was slighter larger and longer billed than a Dunlin and the bill was slightly downcurved. He was able to get quite close before it flew off showing a white rump and he is convinced that it was a CURLEW SANDPIPER. “Birds of Hampshire” has no more than half a dozen records of wintering birds and says that no more than ten birds are likely to winter in Britain in any year so this is a good record, and it is backed up by the very late sighting of four at Budds Farm Pools on Nov 12 by John Gowen (and by another unknown birder around the same date). Chris also saw both Common and Green Sandpiper at Budds Farm pools yesterday.

Another good sighting by Chris Slade in the past few days was of a pair of KINGFISHER seen together on the Brockhampton stream, and of a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER seen by him in hedgerow trees in the Fursey Golf Course along the east side of Creech Woods when he was playing golf there recently (and ticked all three woodpeckers in one round). In the New Forest recently he found two Great Grey Shrike – one at Beaulieu Road and the other near Ocknell Pond (south end of the old Stoney Cross airfield) – and counted 24 Bewick’s Swan at Ibsley. A recent visit to the Isle of Sheppey gave him four Swan species in a day (including Whooper and Black) and a full house of raptors including Rough Legged Buzzard – on the water there was a ‘flock’ of Red Throated Diver.

John Goodspeed tells me of an unexpected sighting of GREEN SANDPIPER in the middle of Leigh Park this morning – he was visiting a pilot section of the Hermitage Stream restoration scheme where the stream runs past Corhampton Crescent just south of Purbrook Way when the bird got up. Earlier in the week, he tells me, a GUILLEMOT was seen off the Portsmouth Schools Outdoor Centre by Kendalls Wharf west of Farlington Marshes.

Brian Fellows walked the north east Thorney shore from Thornham Point to the Great Deeps hoping for a sight of the two male Long Tailed Duck which Barry Collins saw in the Thorney Channel last Monday but he had no luck today. South of the fence he could see a good total of 82 Shelduck on the mud north of Stanbury Point along with 14 Black Tailed Godwit and a mass of Dunlin, and in the channel he picked out 8 Goldeneye, 10 Merganser, 3 Great Crested Grebe and 3 Dabchick. Alistair Martin tells me that two or three Short Eared Owl can still be seen in this area (around the Great Deeps east end) and that when he and several other birders were looking for them on Wednesday evening a passer by assured them that the owls had been there the previous evening.

THU 18 FEB

This morning a renewed effort was made to observe movements of waders between Langstone and Chichester Harbours and it proved very much more successful than the attempt on Feb 1. With Pete Durnell on the Hayling Coastal Path a little south of Daw Lane and Barry Collins a little further north of him, and Anne de Potier, John Badley, Bill Woodburn and myself positioned on the landward side of the Verner Common/Mill Rythe area, and using radios to pass on info about movements, we were able to record at least 1500 birds going from the mud on the West Hayling shore eastward across the island to

some Chichester Harbour high tide roost. The majority of these were Grey Plover and Bar Tailed Godwit but a substantial number of Knot and a few Dunlin and (possibly) Turnstone were seen to move. Most of the birds flew due east high over the 'waist' of Hayling and we were unable to tell if they went to the Gutner Point or the Pilsley roost areas (or elsewhere) and some (mainly Bar Tails) headed north east over Northney to an unknown destination. While these observations go a long way to explaining the difference in numbers between low and high tide counts in Chichester Harbour (which should not occur if all birds roosting in Chichester also fed in that harbour) this one day's observation does nothing to establish a pattern of inter-harbour movements (all we know is that substantial movements can occur) but I would presume to guess that birds which 'look on Chichester Harbour as their winter home' may well go foraging elsewhere (on the principle that the other man's grass is always greener) and then return, from wherever they may find themselves when the tide comes up, to their known and trusted high tide roost.

One other factor influencing the wader movements between the harbours must be changes in the desirability (in the bird's eyes) of different feeding areas around the harbour and this winter I believe we are seeing both Bar Tailed Godwit and Knot preferring areas well north of those that a year ago I would have regarded as typical. In the past I only expected to see large numbers of Bar Tailed Godwit on the sands in the south of the harbours, and expected to find a large (several hundred) roost of them in the Kench at most high tides. Similarly with Knot – they seemed to have a favoured feeding area north of Sinah Warren and also to roost in the Kench (I know there were other feeding areas in the north west of Langstone Harbour). Both species seem to have deserted that Kench roost and feeding area and this winter are being seen around North Hayling in good numbers. Last winter we noticed small numbers of Bar Tailed Godwit on the mud off Budds Farm so the move north is not new this winter.

Two MED GULLS were seen off the Hayling west shore during yesterday's exercise and John Badley commented that he expects the gulls that will nest this year to start returning to the Langstone Harbour islands at the end of February, reminding me that in just two weeks time we will be looking for the first Wheatear and Sandwich Tern along the shore. Meanwhile, on Verner Common this morning, a flock of around 30 SKYLARK arrived from the south west to join a good number already present, one of which hung high over our heads in full song. A flock of 20 LINNET got up as we approached and the rough grass on the east side of Verner Common was alive with Lapwing and Golden Plover by the hundred. The small wood on the north side of Mill Rythe Lane could be seen to have a small number of Rooks nests which I was not previously aware of.

Today's biggest surprise for me was to be shown a BLACK BRANT in the north pool of the Hayling Oysterbeds and to be told that Jason Crook has seen it there (and feeding off the South Moors) regularly during this and the previous winter. Today it was with a small flock of about 30 Brent and its white flanks and deeper neck collar made it easy to pick out when scanning the flock carefully, but its flanks are not as eye-catchingly white as were those on the one I saw off the South Moors on 2 April 98 – I commented on the 'persil white' of that bird's flanks. The current bird is thought to be a hybrid with normal Brent and I described its flanks as being 'zebra striped'. (I understand the Wittering Brant is still present there). Also in the Oysterbeds 'lagoon' today there were at least 22 Merganser (one male starting to display) and a dozen Goldeneye

News from Barry Collins was of 2 LONG TAILED DUCKS which he had seen amongst a string of buoys in the Thorney Channel east of Thornham Point last Monday (Feb 15) and a MED GULL which he had found in Emsworth Slipper Mill pond on Wednesday (Feb 17). His EGRET roost count for early February was down to 'only 97'.

Rather more distant, but spectacular, news arrived from Paul Boulton this evening – he works in London and had been able to get to Hounslow Heath during the day to hear and see a SINGING SERIN in a Hawthorn tree – and he passes on his grateful thanks to the birders how let him have a close up view through their telescopes.

Brian Fellows found the Emsworth Mill Pond was having its monthly emptying today, attracting a Little Egret in to search the muddy bottom for food but reducing the Swan numbers to 75 (plus 9 in the harbour). Continuing his walk down the west shore of Thorney to the Great Deeps he found the Swan pair back on the Little Deeps (this pair are normally the earliest to nest and hatch their young but last spring they failed to hatch any for reasons unknown) and then enjoyed a flying display by hundreds of Lapwing plus a single Greenshank.

Alistair Martin visited Stansted Groves today and had many close views of a FIRECREST in the section of Park Lane starting at the road and ending where the footpath continues into the Groves and Park Lane makes a right angled bend to head for Racton. Also around here he had a Treecreeper, Marsh Tit and male Bullfinch. Yesterday he had been at Aldworth Pond and confirms that the Emperor Goose was present then - surprising in that Brian Fellows also saw it on Emsworth Mill Pond that same day.

WED 17 FEB

A message from Mike Collins asks if I know about a WHITE BILLED DIVER in Portsmouth Harbour and the answer is no – but if you do know about it please share the news. The story so far is that a birder from Winchester went to Norfolk and was asked by someone he met there if he knew about this diver – that’s all I know.

More reliable info comes from Les Hatton of the North East Fife Ranger Service who has put on the web recent news of birds at Outhead on the Fife coast where, despite the tideline having frozen and the waders having difficulty in feeding, out on the water there is music in the air – he writes “At Outhead, at the tip of the West Sands, the open waters of the outer bay are now often noisy with the seductive crooning of male Eiders. Resplendent in their breeding plumage the males may be seen swimming around the brown females, going through an increasingly elaborate display repertoire as they try to outcompete each other. Although much less common within the estuary the even noisier Long-tailed Duck can be heard. It is difficult to describe the bizarre calls; descriptions have included the 'distant sound of bagpipes' and the 'baying of hounds'. Its range of vocalisations (primarily made by the male) has earned it various names such as Old Squaw, Old Injun, Old Wife, Noisy Duck, Hound Duck, and the Organ Duck. In addition to its range of calls, the male also attempts to impress itself on the females by undergoing energetic little display flights (described in the literature as parachute displays). This tends to make them quite obvious from a distance, so despite their relatively low numbers in the estuary they should be fairly easy to find.” Barry Collins adds two more interesting names for this species – “Pheasant” and “Coal and Candle-light”

Down here on the south coast I hear that the Arundel Wildfowl Refuge also had superb male Eider on show last Sunday when a local party visited there – unusually the males far outnumbered the females but despite the inevitable competition between males none were heard crooning.

A CHIFFCHAFF was singing in the ivy covered tree beside the Emsworth gasworks when Brian Fellows passed today (the bird has been based here through the winter but this is the first time Brian has heard it sing). His main news is that the Swan herd on the Town Mill Pond is still increasing with an incredible 96 birds today. Two female Mergansers had flown in as had the Emperor Goose which must have returned from Aldsworth Pond (where I last saw it on Feb 11) – it seems to have come back on its own as it was with four Canada Geese that were not (I think) part of the two dozen that flew to Aldsworth with the Emperor.

TUE 16 FEB

Brian Fellows was in Portsmouth today where an adult MED GULL stood out clearly from a flock of 200 Black Headed Gulls – its jet black head and blood red bill being immediately eye-catching. The bird was not at the Canoe Lake but on the grass south of Tangier Road set aside by Portsmouth City to compensate Brent Geese for loss of grass when the new school was built recently on Dundas Meadows – I don’t think any Brent have accepted the invitation to feed there yet but it is worth checking if only to see a sight like this (and Tangier Road sounds as if it might attract Bob Hope to restart the ‘road’ series of films – “Road to Baffins Pond” would be a surefire box office success). No Purple Sandpiper were to be seen at Southsea Castle (the tide was high) and no Med Gull on the Canoe Lake where there are still 64 Swans. Baffins Pond had only 12 Shoveler following the massive count of 38 there recently and the Mute Swan pair were not to be seen but otherwise things were much as usual with 48 Tufted Duck and 2 Pochard among the regular wildfowl. With half term in progress there was increased activity on the city playing fields and open spaces and the only flock of Brent seen on land was one of around 400 on the St John’s College playing fields north of Farlington Marshes.

Following the increased earth moving/road building work at Budds Farm pools yesterday I today asked Southern Water what was going on. The project engineer who spoke to me assured me that all three pools would be retained for the birds, with the ‘nature reserve’ being managed by Southern Water (not one of the conservation agencies), but that the eastern pool area was currently needed as a ‘base camp’ for the contractors who will soon be in site to carry out the construction of the new processing plant. I had noticed that heavy duty plastic sheeting had been laid under the new earth mountain, and this is to keep the new material separate from the original bed of the pool. When the contractors have finished (probably not this year) the earth and plastic sheeting will be removed and the pool will re-appear. The roadway along the southern edge is equally ‘temporary’ and is needed to enable the contractors to get from the camp to their place of work.

MON 15 FEB

An all time record of 86 SWANS were on Emsworth Mill Pond for Brian to count today (I hope there were fewer people feeding them than there were when I had to count them on Saturday for the WeBS Low Tide count – trying to count a close packed forest of Swans necks which all dip and seemingly intertwine each

time you get half way through a bunch is frustrating). The pressure for living room there seems to have reached the pitch at which there was no room left for a single Moorhen which Brian found surprisingly out on the harbour water. On the Slipper Mill Pond five Little Grebe were also a record count and a grey headed, white thighed, Cormorant was probably of the continental race. Brian has sent me a picture and new information from BWP which says that the continental (sinensis) birds are generally a little smaller than our (carbo) race and have smaller bills – it also says that the continental birds have a greenish tinge to their plumage where ours tend to have a purple sheen (but the light will have a great part to play in what you see in that respect). BWP does not comment, seemingly, on the extent of the yellow area around the bill which Tony Gutteridge told me (see Sunday 7 Feb) is the critical factor according to the expert whom he heard talk on the subject.

Christoph Harwood was at Old Winchester Hill last Saturday (Feb 13) and had a brief view of the RED KITE, his sighting being confirmed by others who saw it there, so it is still (in Mick Finnemore's words) 'hanging about'. On Sunday he was with a working party on Catherington Down and heard YELLOWHAMMER SONG there – in addition to Brian Fellows first hearing of this song last Thursday (Feb 11) I see from John Goodspeed's poster that he heard one beginning to practise its song rather badly on Portsdown Hill also on Feb 11. Christoph was very pleased to have a personal visit from Goldcrest in his East Meon garden and these too should now be singing (I have heard their song twice this year but they have not got into their stride yet)

One GREEN SANDPIPER was in the Hermitage Stream just above the Bedhampton Waterworks entrance despite the low level of water (much of the concrete base was dry but there were large shallow puddles left) and when I got to Budds Farm I found another (could be the same) on the central pool with the COMMON SANDPIPER alongside it. At least three huge earthmoving lorries and a bulldozer were working on the eastern pool (now nine tenths earth mound) and other vehicles were using the bread roadway that has been created around the south side of the pools, but the Sandpipers showed no signs of disturbance. On the west pool there were 19 Mallard, 8 Tufted Duck, 2 Teal, 2 Coot and a Moorhen – that was the sum of bird life there this afternoon. On my way home I saw the stone EAGLE OWL on the roof of the Apollo Fire Detector building (half way along, above the visitors carpark entrance tunnel as you look north from Brookside Road) and heard a noisy CHIFFCHAFF in a Buddleia bush above the Langbrook stream just below Solent Road (alongside Tesco)

PLANTS:

SUN 21 FEB

This morning I made pilgrimage to Catherington Lith to worship the plants of ABRAHAM, ISAAC & JACOB which John Vigay told me of last year (long after they had ceased to flower). These plants are close relatives of Lungwort and today some four plants in one cluster were starting to flower (I was a little concerned that I could not see any other plants – there were twenty or more last year in several different scattered clusters). I saw long stalked, clear green leaves and multiple bristly flower heads with their light purple flowers. Behind the plants was a large clump of Harts Tongue fern, and I walked over to this clump in the hope of seeing more plants behind it, which I did, but these were a great surprise - very beautiful ALPINE SQUILLS at their very best, each with a raceme of long stalked bright blue flowers between two keeled leaves.

SAT 20 FEB

The BUTTERBUR plants in Brook Meadow at Emsworth are flourishing with at least 33 flowering spikes this afternoon, but they must be one of least eye-catching flowers. Even when you know where they should be you have to look hard to find them and anyone not familiar with them would probably think they were about as interesting as the first stirrings of Rhubarb emerging from the ground. One or two leaves were beginning to emerge around the flowers and these will in a couple of months be giant leaves that no one can miss.

THU 18 FEB

COLTSFOOT was flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds today and will hopefully soon be as general as the Lesser Celandines which opened their first eye on Jan 1 and are only now flowering en masse. I did not see my first Coltsfoot until last Saturday (Feb 13) but Barry Collins told me today that he had seen some flowering by the Thorney Deeps in January this year. Also this morning I found the first flowers opening on the BLACKTHORN above the Hayling Billy track just north of the A27 and noted that on one branch of this tree leaves were also sprouting (just to prove that there is an exception to every rule - in this case the one saying you can distinguish Blackthorn by the fact that its flowers open before the leaves appear). On the Other Wildlife page I have today noted the availability of forms for recording Hares and also

Amphibians & Reptiles to assist with the Hampshire Biodiversity Action Plan. I also have a form for recording all colonies of GREEN WINGED ORCHIDS and will gladly pass on the details of the information required and what to do with it to anyone who asks.

FLY ORCHIDS are probably the most difficult of the common orchid species to locate in the immediate Havant area – the only place I have heard of them is in a small copse within the Portsdown Golf Course at the east end of the hill. Last night John Goodspeed told me that within the past week he had been with a work party of the Portsdown Conservation Volunteers in this copse and had come on what he believed were leaf rosettes of this orchid – so hopefully he or Richard Jones will be able to revisit the spot in May to check out the identity when the orchids are flowering

MON 15 FEB

Many ELDER bushes already have leaves well on the way to being open but I was surprised this afternoon to come on a bush at the Meyrick Road entrance into the Bedhampton Water Works on which I could see no sign of leaf buds opening yet several tiny flower panicles (of unopened flower buds) could be seen on it

INSECTS:

WED 17 FEB

People in Horndean, including members of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust Southdown Group, are making strenuous efforts to protect from development the open land west of the massive new Safeway store near the A3M, and in particular a small pond which has a very interesting and varied flora. It seems that their efforts have attracted attention from the media and I hear that the presence of nine dragonfly species, including the Ruddy Darter, has been reported in the Daily Telegraph and on Radio 4 today. I cannot at the moment vouch for the accuracy of the dragonfly list but I certainly hope the field and pond remain as natural open space.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 21 FEB

A quick look at the pool in the section of the Hayling Billy Trail immediately north of the East Streat bridge in Havant confirmed that local Frogs had heard the same call of nature as those in Leigh Park and Stansted (and no doubt everywhere across the south of England) which brought them all out last Thursday night to make their way to breeding ponds regardless of danger and death on the roads. Here in Havant just three large clumps of Frogspawn show that some had made it to this pool (which this year has its resident Grey Wagtail).

SAT 20 FEB

With news of Frogs on the move in the last couple of days I was not surprised to find two which had been run over in the road outside our house as I set out for Stansted this morning to check up on David Parker's news that Frogs and/or Toads were crossing the main road through Stansted Forest on Thursday night. David's driving skill is to be praised as in the section where he saw at least two dozen crossing the road I could find only one corpse when walking it this morning. This corpse, and two more in the lane to Stubbermere, were the shorter legged, dusty grey and warty skinned bodies of small male Toads (which I believe move earlier than the females to make sure of their place in the struggle for life).

FRI 19 FEB

Kevin Stouse was walking along St Albans Road in West Leigh today when he spotted at least half a dozen FROGS and a mass of FROGSPAWN in a garden pond

THU 18 FEB

David Parker was driving up the road through Stansted Forest at around 10pm this evening when he was subjected to an unexpected driving test, having to concentrate hard to avoid at least two dozen FROGS or TOADS in the section between Brick Kiln Pond and the road to the Stansted House visitors carpark (i.e. the section of road through the Groves). He did not stop to check their identity but thinks they were too small for Toads and must have been Frogs. I understand that the Toads do not normally move to water until March, and as the Frogs are only just starting to make themselves prominent I would think David's guess is right.

The HARE is now quite a rarity in our part of Hampshire/Sussex and this year I had only heard a vague report of one in the Finchdean/Forestside area until today when I received a note of one seen by Jim Berry sheltering on the north east edge of The Holt wood while he was recording birds there yesterday. This was timely as the Hare is one of the species being recorded in detail as part of Hampshire's Biodiversity Action Plan and only last night I was given a recording form on which everyone is invited to record all evidence for the occurrence and distribution of these animals (seen alive/dead/or just signs of their

presence such as droppings or fur). During this year we are asked to send the forms to Debbie Wicks at the Hampshire Wildlife Trust office but in other years or for other mammal species you should send your records to Mrs Debbie Jordan, Hampshire Mammal Recorder at 15 Raven Road, Hook RG27 9HH. Also as part of the Hampshire 'BAP' we are asked to record all observations of AMPHIBIANS & REPTILES. I have a separate form for recording these and can e-mail copies of this and the Hare form to you on request. I am interested in knowing about your observations as news for this website but sending the info to me is no substitute for sending it to Debbie Wicks at the Hampshire Wildlife Trust office. (I would hope that you could achieve both by e-mailing the info to HAMPSWT@CIX.COMPULINK.CO.UK for attention of Debbie Wicks with a copy to myself – presumably if the entries that would go on the form are recorded as lines in a text file with the columns separated by tabs they can be printed out at the Trust office to enable data entry into their system)

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999 **WEEK 06 FEB 8 - 14**

BIRDS:

SUN 14 FEB

This morning I cycled through north Emsworth and Woodmancote towards West Ashling, turning south on Newells Lane to return along the shore via Chidham and Prinsted. Coming to Emsworth I looked back over the green plain of the fields south of Southleigh Farm from the Southleigh/Horndean Road junction, seeing a flock of at least 250 Lapwing and 50 GOLDEN PLOVER feeding in the field (all moving with short jerky runs before something put them up). At a guess these are some of the Langstone shore birds getting their breakfast while the tide was high – this is the first time I have seen them here though I do not look at these fields often (and did not notice the distant birds from the road until I used my bins). If the Langstone Golden Plover do go north (and they can disappear in a very few moments as I found yesterday) this may explain why no movement was recorded for them in the Feb 1st exercise when Barry Collins was posted on the Northney Marina shore and estimated 2,500 Golden Plover were present but did not see them move away as the tide came in. At Woodmancote the roadside fields north of South Lane Farm had a small mixed flock of Fieldfare (25+) and Redwing (30+) and from nearby trees I heard the pleasant sound of REDWING SUBSONG for the first time this spring. ROOKS were back at the Hambrook House rookery as they are on the trees outside the Brookfield Hotel at Emsworth and no doubt elsewhere, but I have not yet seen any active nest re-building (nor the associated stealing of material from neighbours nests). On my way home I saw a pair of PINTAIL in the Bosham Channel while scanning the mixed wader roost in the roadside bay south of Eastfield Farm at Chidham and four more in Nutbourne Bay (almost empty of birds – just a dozen Teal and 19 Wigeon). In between I saw the Swan pair back on Chidmere Pond (with a Dabchick, 7 Mallard and single Coot and Moorhen) and the Ham Brook mouth marsh had single Egret and Heron with perhaps 40 Teal, 10 Moorhen and a noisy but unseen Water Rail in the reeds. In Prinsted Bay the sole bit of land above water had a Greenshank standing on it and the meadow to the east of the bay had a flock of over 350 Brent and 66 Black Tailed Godwit (with perhaps 60 Lapwing in the field to the north)

Brian Fellows visited Pulborough Brooks today and was not very impressed by the muddy paths and lack of close up birds though he did enjoy the bunch of 15 'black' Fallow Deer which escaped from Parham House almost exactly a year ago (Kevin Stouse's annual guided walk over Amberley Wild Brooks then noted these deer running north over the marshy ground and I heard that they had reached Pulborough but was not aware that they were still resident there). Today there were plenty of Teal and Wigeon but too distant to be appreciated without a telescope, and the main birding interest was on the notice board which listed recent sightings of SMEW as well as Firecrest, Merlin and Barn Owl. Brian's own Garden Bird report for the past week emphasises the amount of regular song from Robin, Dunnock, Song Thrush, Chaffinch, Green finch and Collared Dove, though the sight of the Tawny Owl on St James Church last night (seen from his garden) and a second visit by Little Egret perching in a neighbour's garden, were the most memorable items – he has also regularly seen low flying Swans over the garden as birds from the Mill Pond just south of his garden go north in search of nest sites. Outside his garden Brian has heard Yellowhammer song, and must have heard Wood Pigeon, Great Tit, Blue Tit, Coal Tit, Blackbird and Wren – I wonder if he will beat me to the first Treecreeper song this year?

SAT 13 FEB

Today's best birding was perhaps in Brian Fellows garden after dark this evening (time 22.15) when the hooting of a TAWNY OWL drew his attention to the floodlit belltower of St James Church in Emsworth.

Caught in the light, but not disturbed, it sat on the tower hooting for several minutes before flying off north east in the direction of the Ems valley and Westbourne.

There has to be a first time for everything, even with WeBS counts, and today the Hampshire High Tide counts came on the same day as the Chichester Harbour Low Tide counts so in the morning I visited the IBM Lake and in the afternoon worked the shore from Langstone Bridge to Emsworth. Neither Swans nor Great Crested Grebe were to be seen at IBM where the Canada Geese (22 present in total) were already starting to pair and separate from the flock so as to guard their nest sites. As well as the Coot it was more apparent that the Dabchick were feeling territorial though I only saw one of those high speed chases where the tiny birds run at incredible speed over the surface of the water in pursuit of an intruder. 11 Pochard and 16 Tufted Duck were present as was thus winter's first small flock of 11 Curlew attempting to pass the high tide feeding on the rough grass. Six Snipe got up from the islands flying off over the gull flock among which I noticed an increase in the number of Common Gulls (noticeable all along the coast – presumably birds are starting to move north for the spring).

In the afternoon the tide was very low and the sunshine had brought out an endless stream of walkers along the Warblington and Emsworth shore so all the birds were distant from the dry land but from Langstone bridge my telescope showed me one unusual feature for this part of the shore – a flock of 84 BAR TAILED GODWIT feeding along the muddy tideline (this confirmed my suspicion of their presence earlier in the week - see Tue 9 Feb). There were also 21 Black Tailed Godwit here, and normally they are the only species to feed on the mud, with the Bar Tails favouring the sandier shores at the harbour entrances. The GOLDEN PLOVER were present in force but the difficulty of counting the flocks was well illustrated by the difference between my first count of 'at least 350' birds strung out along the mud at the Warblington end of the visible shore, and my second count of 874 when they moved back to their normal resting spot south of the Wade Lane/Pook Lane shore (this mass of birds all managed to move the 500 yards from the first to the second place without my seeing a single bird in the air – though I was probably glued to my scope counting other birds when they moved). The vagaries of the birds behaviour was brought out today by the total absence of Knot and a count of just 34 Dunlin for the whole afternoon. I found 79 Shelduck and saw the single pair of Pintail off Emsworth Western Parade which I have seen there once before this winter, and on Emsworth Mill Pond counted 79 Swans showing that Brian Fellows count last Monday was not a one day wonder. When I got home several Blackbirds were singing their evening song at dusk.

Brian Fellows probably had a less disturbed low tide count off south east Hayling than I did on the Langstone/Emsworth shore though he too saw fewer species and smaller numbers than usual. His count of 88 Grey Plover is the only item which strikes me as being high (considering that these birds like to keep a good distance between each other when feeding), and 48 Curlew sounds fairly good, but a count of just 8 Knot and 18 Teal was definitely on the low side. As well as counting the shore birds Brian had an opportunity to check out the feral PINK-FOOT GOOSE on Tournerbury Farm pond and reports that it is now looking very handsome as it comes into adult plumage with dark brown head/neck and grey scaly back. On that pond the Swan pair were back in residence.

FRI 12 FEB

In The Holt wood (Rowlands Castle) this morning Brian Fellows and John Gowen made a very interesting observation of a FEMALE GREAT SPOTTED WOODPECKER DRUMMING (I assumed only the males made the noise). Brian says that this is well documented in BWP and that the female drum roll is normally shorter than that of the male and, as well as being a means of contact between the pair, may be a vital factor in the male recognising that the 'other bird in his territory' is a female, not an intruding male. I suppose this could be likened to the careful 'drumming' which a male spider has to perform on the web of a female if he is to have a chance of nipping and getting 'his bit' without being instantly eaten by the female.

The Langbrook KINGFISHER was perched on the bridge used by cattle and tractors to cross from Langstone Dairy Farm this afternoon but the highspot of my walk round the South Moors was my first sighting this year of a WATER RAIL in the new ditch carrying water around the east side of the Autoliv factory – the Rail was at the point where the ditch joins the old streamlet under the thin line of Elms and I saw the bird from the 'orchid meadow' side. I put up five Snipe from the channel winding west from the Tamarisk Pool and from the pool I put up two very noisy Green Sandpiper which flew round for several minutes and then seemed to pitch on the shore. On my way home at dusk two Blackbirds were singing – this is the time of year that I expect to hear the first song, and dusk is the time that I expect to hear it, but this year these birds have been beaten by the two that have been regularly singing just before dawn around my garden (plus a couple of daytime singers in Havant and at least one in Emsworth). Another 'first' in today's mild weather was a Chaffinch singing close to my garden (I've heard many in the woods and

fields by now, this was the first in the gardens).

The eastern pool at Budds Farm now has a huge earth mountain occupying more than half its area (but they may be leaving small areas that could still have water), and a new broad level track has been driven from Southmoor Lane along the base of Budds Mound to the shore end of the pools. There must be some plan behind all this work and I wish we could find out what it is. This evening there were only three Pochard, three Mallard and two Tufted Duck, all in the western pool.

THU 11 FEB

Brian Fellows was the first to hear YELLOWHAMMER SONG this year, hearing it today from a male in the lower Ems valley. Also seen on this route from Emsworth to Westbourne and back was a lone Fieldfare feeding with four Mistle Thrush in the large field north of the A27. Three Snipe were also seen in the field between Lumley Mill and the A27, while two Little Egret were in a flooded field south of Lumley Mill. Two Grey Wagtail were seen (not together) but no Green Sandpiper.

No special birds in the Stansted Groves and new 'Wood Pasture' area at the south end of the Ladies Walk (here I heard a few Redwing and watched a pair of Nuthatch working closely together on the same tree, and was very impressed by the ground cover clearance which is opening up the ground around the boles of the wonderful mature trees to create a pasture that should be heaven to discerning cattle – some are already grazing on open grassland nearby). On the way home I checked out Aldsworth Pond, seeing 21 Canada Geese (I guess there are actually 24 here) with the Emperor and counting 10 Gadwall with 21 Tufted Duck on the pond with Coot, Moorhen, Mallard and Dabchick. I think there were also 2 Teal and a small bird which flew across the outlet weir must have been a Chiffchaff

WED 10 FEB

This evening I heard that the new SUSSEX ORNITHOLOGICAL SOCIETY WEBSITE was available on the internet and so paid a quick visit. (link to it is now included in my links) Very nice looking layout but so far most of the pages are still 'under construction'. The two complete pages are a full list of all 382 bird species making up the current 'Sussex List' with the status of each species, and a list of the county's 'top lister' roll of honour – top of the list being John Cooper with 324 species. Basic information on how to join and how to obtain the latest Bird Report and one of the last few copies of 'Birds of Sussex' is there and hopefully this site will rapidly grow into its elegant clothes.

The only local news today is of a flock of 110+ REDWING which I watched this morning in a field on the east side of the Rowlands Castle/Horndean road – I was in The Holt which had nothing out of the ordinary in the way of birds (very large flocks of Woodpigeon can be seen in many fields, and one was singing strongly in my garden before breakfast this morning, but in these woods I only saw one of them – to make up for that I did meet a man who had just heard a Cuckoo though he did not feel sufficiently confident to write to The Times)

Chris Packham appeared on his last Birdwatch TV programme this evening in full Pompey FC gear and seemingly managed to score a goal with a STUFFED BRENT GOOSE AS THE GOAL-KEEPER (presumably this was to show that the geese do sometimes lose a match). I did wonder what conclusion he might put across to sum up his comments on the 'new stadium vs Brent geese' saga, and I think he did very well in saying that much as he loved football and supported Pompey the football club were not in the same internationally important league as the Brent and could therefore lose with no dis-honour.

The CHICHESTER HARBOUR Conservancy website currently carries a WILDLIFE REPORT covering the period Sept 97 to Aug 98 published by Anne de Potier at the end of last month. Two facts which caught my eye were her concern for falling numbers of Shelduck both in winter and summer (only 29 young were seen in the harbour last summer), and the success of having 5 singing Corn Bunting on Thorney Island. Another fact that I would like to pass on was the discovery, also on Thorney, by Botanists of a species called Foxtail Stonewort but so far I cannot discover what category to place this under – I thought I would find it in Stace's Flora but no luck.

Another piece of info from the Chichester Harbour website may give hope to those who think that many of our interesting harbour birds will vanish when we turn off the SEWAGE tap at Budds Farm. I read that a study into the source of the nitrates and phosphates that enrich the waters of Chichester Harbour and cause the Enteromorpha intestinalis and Ulva lactuca to flourish (before becoming stinking ankle deep masses of sludge on the tideline) has shown that 90% of these 'nutrients' come from the Solent waters outside the harbour. Maybe the sewage will taste better when it has been pumped at great expense from Eastney to Budds Farm and back again, then out in a long pipe into the Solent to flow back into the harbour (of course, the real problem will come when they get round to killing off the bacteria with ultra-violet treatment, but that seems unlikely to happen in my lifetime).

Jonathan Hutchings Guildford area birding website this evening carries news of a MAJOR INFLUX OF KITTIWAKE (plus one adult Little Gull) into the Thames Valley last Sunday (Feb 7th) – as far as I know

none have been seen along our coast. I also read that a flock of up to 200 SISKIN has been seen regularly during the past month in the Unstead sewage farm/rubbish dump area near Guildford and that there is, as usual, at least one Great Grey Shrike at Thursley.

Just in case you think you have come on an EAGLE OWL in Havant ON THE WAY TO BUDDS FARM be aware that Ian Calderwood recently spotted a very large owl on the roof of the Apollo Fire Detector building situated on the north east side of the roundabout at the north end of Southmoor lane leading to Budds Farm. I remember being similarly deceived by a lifelike stone owl on the roof of a building at the junction of North/East/West and South Street in Havant (the first building along East Street on the south side which used to be Ryan's Hardware store)

TUE 9 FEB

Baffins Pond (which you can now visit by proxy on Brian Fellows website – link included in my list) was host to a party of 38 SHOVELER when Brian visited today – a massive leap from the maximum of half a dozen that he would expect there. Although he has no idea where they came from (his guess is Russia) he tells me that up to 60 Shoveler have been seen at the pond in the past though not by him – this count seems to be the largest since 1977 when 39 were counted and 1976 when there were 44. I suspect that throughout Britain and on the continent most of the shallow sheltered waters where they would normally feed have frozen. At the Southsea Canoe Lake the record count of 66 Swans (Jan 26) had dropped to 57, and at Southsea Castle the Purple Sandpipers were all in hiding.

21 REDWING were back in the northern Wade Court pony field under the A27 embankment when I cycled to North Hayling this afternoon. South of Wade Court two Egrets were in the Yew tree and 20 Moorhen in the field below them (no Teal or other birds but the two Foxes had just been doing a walk-about). The two local birders who told me about the foxes had seen the Kingfisher by Langstone Mill and were enjoying the sight of 500 Golden Plover and 200 Lapwing in the sunlit sky when I met them. Around 60 Teal were in the seaward channel of the Lymbourne stream and there were hundreds of Dunlin everywhere at the water's edge with a good showing of Redshank and Oystercatcher but no more than 50 Brent with only half a dozen Shelduck. There were about half a dozen Black Tailed Godwit here off Langstone and further east I could make out a flock of 50 or more waders which I am pretty sure were Bar Tailed Godwit – I saw some fly in to join the flock and the only other possibility was Curlew but they would not form the tight bunch of birds that I saw at the tideline. I went on to the Northney shore where I saw a few more Shelduck off the old holiday camp but there were no more than 20 to be seen in the whole Langstone/Warblington/Northney shore and these birds seemed to be in pairs as if they were the birds that will stay here to breed rather than winter visitors.

HAYLING DAW LANE has had APPLE ORCHARDS belonging to Stoke Fruit Farm for as long as I can remember and I understand that Theo Roberts and others have in the past visited them to net and ring birds. Alas, it seems they will not do this again nor will winter flocks of Fieldfare come here as the fields under the tall lines of sheltering poplars no longer have any trees. New trees may be planted or we may see soft fruit or other crops – less likely I suppose we could see the long discussed Stoke bypass road running through them? All this is pure conjecture but I hope it is not the precursor of more loss of wildlife habitat to be soon joined (if this month's Hayling Islander is to be believed) by the urbanisation of the Hayling Coastal path (the paper says that 'County Council resistance to the cycleway is softening' and in another section we have renewed pleas for a public path around the Hayling east shore, increasing public pressure on the one part of Chichester Harbour where private lands maintains peace and quiet for wild creatures)

MON 8 FEB

Brian Fellows got round the Emsworth ponds before the rain and snow started to fall at midday and found a total of 76 SWANS on the Town Mill Pond with 3 more on the harbour close by – he says this is the highest number since last August when I see that a total of 94 were in Emsworth waters (though 10 of those were at Nore Barn). I wonder if they were fleeing hard weather to come? The only other bird of special interest was the regular Greenshank which this morning was in the bay between the Slipper Mill sluice gates and the Marina.

Maureen Coleman visited Verner Common to make her regular Brent Goose count this morning and was surprised to find 450 LAPWING that are not normally present there in such large numbers. They may have been birds from other parts of the harbour congregating there for some reason only known to themselves, but my guess is that they were arrivals from further north where the snow has fallen in a serious way. I remember hearing once that in Spain the Lapwing are called 'Snow Birds' because they only appear as advance warning of snow to come. Maureen also told me that Tim Timlick has recently seen a Great Northern Diver in Hayling Bay and she understood him to say that he had also seen large numbers of Sanderling on the shingle beach (presumably a high tide roost as occurs on the shingle at

Eastney)

Wigeon are worth a mention today not only because the 'collective noun' for them was one of the clues in Nick Girdler's Crossbar quiz on Radio Solent (his answer was a "Company" or a "Knob" of Wigeon – I have also heard of them as a 'Flight' of Wigeon) but also because they featured in a TV program on 'Spanish Flu' a few nights ago. In the program it was stated that wild duck (especially WIGEON) and also Cormorants were known to PLAY AN ESSENTIAL PART IN THE LIFE HISTORY OF THE FLU VIRUS (don't eat the droppings of either bird)

A message from Peter Morrison this morning told me that he had seen a MED GULL at the Broadmarsh slipway at noon yesterday – I am surprised that we have so few sightings of these birds around the harbour shores when John Badley tells us that 14 pairs were nesting on the islands last spring. I thought the birds tended to stay around for the winter, but maybe not – are they just sitting tight on the islands?

PLANTS:

SUN 14 FEB

Today's first for the year was to find a large male YEW in the churchyard at Chidham releasing its pollen – pulling gently at a branch overhanging the road I released a small yellow cloud that most people would not have noticed, but I have heard Richard Willianson describe how, on Kingley Vale at the end of February, a sudden wind can cause a thick mist to drift across the valley as millions of tiny pollen sacs burst open on the male yews. The only other plant to catch my eye was my first BLACKTHORN in full flower – as I cycled up the Emsworth inner relief road from Peter Pond to the roundabout I thought there was 'something different' about the white blossom covering a tree overhanging the pavement on the north side of the road (at a point due south of Gooseberry Cottage). Crossing the road I found this tree had the black, leaveless twigs and occasional sharp thorn to prove that it was Blackthorn, and if you want to compare it with the Cherry Plum that is now coming to the end of its flowering season there are some of these Plum trees on the south side of the road nearer to the roundabout.

Last Wednesday (Feb 10) in the Bird notes I commented on a rare plant mentioned in Anne de Potier's Chichester Harbour wildlife report that is now on the Harbour Conservancy website – this plant had the name of FOXTAIL STONEWORT but as it is not a flowering plant it does not get a mention in Stace's comprehensive flora of our vascular plants. Today I had a look in my 'Oxford book of Flowerless Plants' and satisfied my curiosity about STONEWORTS. On a page headed Marsh and Lake Plants it says "the CHAROPHYTA is a small and ancient group of plants which is not closely related to any other group. They all grow in fresh water and usually have a distinct and not very pleasant smell, rather like rotting tomatoes. Some species become encrusted with a deposit of calcium carbonate which has led to their sometimes being called Stoneworts" The two species illustrated in this book somewhat resemble underwater Goosegrass, having long flexible stems with whorls of very thin leaves at intervals along them – the leaves look like spikes curving upwards in a bowl shaped whorl, each spike having tinier spikes on it (as does the stem). These plants can be found as fossils in coal.

SAT 13 FEB

Walking round the lake at the IBM North Harbour site for this month's WeBS Count I found the usual selection of noteworthy plants. Top of my list were half a dozen COLTSFOOT flowers just flowering (mostly on the outer island but some behind the recently renovated 'Children's Pond'). The cycle shed north of E Building is the marker for many interesting plants – at this moment the canal bank behind the shed is turning yellow with the unusual flowers of the 'bulbilifer' subspecies of Lesser Celandine (the crucial feature of these plants is that they spread by growing tiny 'bulbils' which appear in the leaf axils after flowering when the leaves are dying and turning yellow, but at this time of year the flowers are instantly 'different', being larger and having leaves growing off the long flower stems). Over on the sunny, dry north bank of the canal opposite the shed a great variety of plants appear during the year – today Blue Fleabane was still flowering here and Small Scabious had only just ceased (many were flowering last month), but today's surprise was to find several flowering plants of CHANGING FORGET-ME-NOT. Around the site are many WHITE POPLAR – not my favourite tree but currently they have rather nice woolly catkins that are open, and on one bank I found both FOOLS PARSLEY and FIELD MADDER with flowers. Among the 29 plants I found flowering at IBM one more is worth a mention – the Glastonbury Thorn. On this clump of unusual Hawthorns the very early flowers of January are now over (I had to look hard before I found just one or two blossoms left, but with the leaves that have now turned these trees green is the mass of flower buds that we can expect on normal bushes in April.

FRI 12 FEB

Walking through 'The Parchment' housing complex this afternoon I found several plants of WHITE COMFREY in flower beside the Homewell stream (for the past two weeks I have been going out of my way to check the plants in St Faith's churchyard in the centre of Havant which always flower early, but last Tuesday they only had vestigial flower buds). Continuing down the Langbrook stream (which the Homewell stream joins) I found flowers open on Ribes sanguineum (Flowering Currant), giving off their strong scent, but this was clearly an ornamental planted bush. Further down the stream, looking down from the locked gate on the path which once led to the IBM education centre in the old farmhouse, I saw the pink of the first female BUTTERBUR flowers, and in the central stream of the South Moors which flows into the Tamarisk pool I saw one flowering plant of CELERY LEAVED BUTTERCUP (or Crowfoot). Also worth a mention were tiny Marsh Marigold flower buds in the northern fringe of the 'orchid meadow'

THU 11 FEB

The southern edge of Park Lane between Stansted Groves and Pits Copse has a major colony of LESSER PERIWINKLE and I thought it worth going out of my way to check it out today. I had just about abandoned hope of seeing flowers but decided to go on along the path, thus finding seven fresh flowers at the east end of the colony. In Havant this plant seems to have been flowering through the winter in the southern hedge of the Havant Health Centre (north side of Leisure Centre) and I am fairly sure this is a relic of genuine countryside (the site is within a stone's throw of Havant Farm Close where presumably a farm once stood in the fields) but its sheltered position in town gives it an unfair advantage over its country cousins.

WED 10 FEB

The single public path through The Holt wood from Rowlands Castle towards Horndean was hard frozen underfoot this morning so it was all the more surprising to find a plant of HAIRY WOODRUSH with two open flowers beside its northern end. A little less surprising was to find IVY LEAVED SPEEDWELL flowering at the roadside of Holt Gardens, off Links Lane, where I parked before my walk – this is only the second time I have found this flower this year.

TUE 9 FEB

Cycling around north Hayling this afternoon I found the rather scruffy plant of BORAGE (discovered on the Oysterbeds 'earth mountain' on Feb 1st) still bears fresh flowers, and back at the main road end of Langstone High Street (north side) a single plant of DOVES FOOT CRANESBILL is still covered with unseasonable flowers despite the frost.

INSECTS:

WED 10 FEB

The Chichester Harbour Conservancy website now carries Anne de Potier's report (dated 28 Jan 99) on Wildlife in the harbour between Sept 97 and Aug 98. One of many encouraging facts that can be gleaned from this report is that the land at THORNHAM POINT which is being so successfully "de-reclaimed" and returned to saltmarsh HAS 175 INSECT SPECIES recorded on it.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 14 FEB

I have heard tell of days when people believed that the migrant geese which came and went mysteriously originated as underwater barnacles – hence the name Barnacle Geese – but it came as a surprise to me earlier this week to hear on Radio Solent that someone had found a buoy drifting in the Solent encrusted with GOOSE BARNACLES and that these had been taken to the Portsmouth Sea Life centre. Looking into what these might be I found that Barnacles are not classified with shellfish as molluscs but are grouped with shrimps and crabs as crustaceans (mainly on the basis of their free swimming larval life), and the 'shells' of the adults are not the one or two plate form of shellfish but have five or six separate plates. The Goose Barnacle has a body around 5cm long encased in five translucent (looking white with a bluish tinge) plates and is attached to the substrate by a leathery looking 'stalk' 5 to 10 cm long so the Barnacle is held away from the boat or driftwood on which it cruises the seas (not for it the stay at home life of other Barnacles – so maybe these creature will not be at all pleased with having been 'rescued' from their drifting buoy and taken into captivity in Portsmouth).

WED 10 FEB

Walking under Scots Pine in The Holt this morning, well away from a path, I came on a pine stump which had on it a couple of pine cones (chewed to the central spine) and a small collection of what looked like Rabbit droppings - but there were less than a dozen pellets, no other sign of rabbit anywhere near, and the pellets were if anything smaller than rabbit droppings. Only a few days ago I came on a similar sight in Stansted Forest, and I realised today that I had no idea of what GREY SQUIRREL DROPPINGS are like so I have had a look at my books and am pretty certain that the droppings were left by a Squirrel in both cases. My Collins Guide to Animal Tracks and Signs says that Squirrel droppings are variable in shape and colour (though never more than 1cm long) and can look like what I found – it also says that it is rare to find their droppings, especially in summer (in winter snow they are easier to spot), so I am perhaps not as unobservant as it might seem (having passed 67 years without coming on this daily product of a very common animal).

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 05

FEB 1 - 7

BIRDS:

SUN 7 FEB

Kevin Stouse had a sunny if chilly day for the annual expedition to Amberley Wild Brooks, the Downs and Parham House grounds. Highspot of the day (literally, very high in the sky and well spotted by scope) was a RED KITE seen from the Wild Brooks area, too distant to really appreciate its size and colour but it nevertheless made the walk worth while despite the absence of any visible Bewick's Swans. The only unusual birds seen in any numbers were Fieldfare and Redwing, both present in strength (maybe a couple of hundred of each in several separate flocks) but the close sight of three Green Woodpeckers together added to the interest.

Trevor Carpenter visited Southsea Castle this morning and found three PURPLE SANDPIPER present with the tide very low.

Brian Fellows had a chilly walk round Gunner Point today, seeing just one SANDERLING on the shore. His weekly garden report has a very interesting observation of 13 Collared Dove descending on the garden as a single flock where he has not recorded more than two so far this year. I know they flock in the autumn to reap the grain harvest but from December to mid-summer they are usually paired and nesting (or attempting nesting) – so were these continental invaders fleeing hard weather? Brian also noted his first Blackbird song this week – they do seem early this year – and yesterday heard the first Greenfinch song which I also heard for the first time. During the week a Chiffchaff searched his garden roses for aphids (and today I heard Chiffchaff in two new places – one by the Homewell stream between Bosmere School and the Dolphin pub, and the other by the Hermitage stream just downstream of the Bedhampton waterworks outfall sluice)

I toured the Hermitage Stream, Budds Farm and South Moors today finding one Green Sandpiper at one of its regular haunts in the Hermitage Stream opposite the end of Ranelagh Road where it is only visible by looking upstream over the high wall on the north side of the waterworks entrance gate (bring your own stepladder or, like me, take a bike and stand on the pedals while leaning against the wall). Further downstream the Dabchick were beginning to show their breeding plumage colours on head and neck, and by the gravel quay the very grey headed Cormorant was fishing and I am now sure it is a continental race bird after hearing two pieces of info from Tony Gutteridge during the week. Tony has heard from an expert that the continental race birds do breed in Britain (and in fact they are leading our native birds to inland nest sites – the continental race is traditionally tree nesting, the British race normally sticking to cliff faces, but the British birds are learning to tree nest inland) and this explains why we see continental birds still here in full breeding plumage. The other item was concerning identification – to separate the races correctly you have to look at the yellow area at the base of the bill - in a continental bird this continues back below the eye in a straight line with the top of the upper mandible, in British birds it extends up and around the eye. While at Broadmarsh slipway I heard from a self confessed 'amateur birder' that a more professional group with scopes had been there before I arrived and had seen the RING BILLED GULL.

The mystery of what is being done to the eastern pool at Budds Farm remains unsolved – it looks as if the southern end will remain as a pool about half the original size, to the north of that an earth bank will slope up to a high ridge and at the north end there could be another smaller pool. Could this ridge be intended as a Kingfisher nest bank? The possibilities are endless and a message from the Wildlife Trust office tells me they do not know what is happening and have passed on the question to the County Council. Today

there was just one Moorhen on the central pool and on the seaward pool only 19 Mallard, 4 Teal, 4 Tufted Duck, 2 Pochard and a pair of Shoveler with one Oystercatcher – not even a Coot visible. The mouth of the Langbrook at high tide had a much better collection of 40 Dunlin, 20 Turnstone, 20 Ringed Plover, 12 Redshank and a Lapwing, and 60 Wigeon with a dozen Teal and a single Merganser. Wood Pigeon have been singing intermittently for several weeks now but today I heard them in many places throughout the day.

Tony Gutteridge was at Bramshaw Telegraph today enjoying a FIRECREST (which he said had louder and lower pitched calls than a Goldcrest) in Holly, a DARTFORD WARBLER and a LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER in the woodland edge.

SAT 6 FEB

John Gowen's weekly notes describe a successful Sparrowhawk raid on his garden Pyracantha on Monday and an unsuccessful revisit on Friday. For Monday he says "At 08.45 a male Sparrowhawk flashd into our Pyracantha, plucked out a Sparrow, dived low and banked hard right with a spread of its tail and a twist of its wings to fly 20 feet and rest with its breakfast under a small Holly before flying off. A fine male who stayed long enough to allow good identification" As the hawk did not pluck and eat its prey on the spot I wonder if the Sparrow went as a gift to the female – presumably shes not on a nest yet? When she is he will have to bring her not only breakfast but most of her meals in bed. Yesterday the male Sparrowhawk was back stopping for about a minute behind the holly but leaving with no prey.

Last Monday John Gowen was doing sentry duty at a post half a mile south of the Oysterbeds (see Monday 1 Feb) and enjoyed seeing the waders (including some 3000 Dunlin) flighting on to the Oysterbeds roost. Later he watched a squadron of 14 Great Crested Grebe drifting south followed half an hour later by 2 SLAVONIAN GREBE. On Tuesday he found the COMMON SANDPIPER at the Budds Farm pools. On Thursday (Feb 4) he had the most interesting observation of the week – the redhead GOOSANDER as far up the Hermitage stream as it could get without entering the concrete channel – he watched it feeding quietly for five minutes just below the concrete weirs by the Wayfarers Way path bridge over the stream. On the same day, in a strong wind, he heard the first Skylark song over the South Moors.

Brian Fellows today sent me news of a BACK SWAN seen by Michael Prior on the Stansted Brick Kiln pond on Jan 10th – the news came from the newsletter of the Friends of Stansted Forest.

John Norton was at Titchfield Haven today and saw a FIRECREST but missed out on a PEREGRINE and the resident BITTERN both of which were recorded on Birdnet as seen during the day.

Several large flocks of Wood Pigeon (each flock of more than 500 birds) were the most prominent birds seen on Idsworth Down by the Evening Class walk – they also noted 6 Skylark and one flock of 20 Chaffinch on the down. Below them the valley from just north of St Huberts chapel south through Finchdean to Rowlands Castle was carrying the ground water away in the Lavant Stream which has started to flow within the past week. After the walk Brian Fellows visited Brick Kiln pond (no birds) and Aldsworth Pond where the numbers were apparently down on those I saw yesterday (Brian saw one pair of Gadwall, 6 Canada Geese, 8 Tufted Duck, and 1 male Pochard with some Coot, Moorhen and Mallard)

I made a morning visit to the Rowlands Castle end of Stansted Forest where the Lavant Stream was flowing across Woodberry Lane (though not with the force that tore up half the road surface and swept away a length of hedgerow on its last appearance). Climbing in over the stone wall near the stream a possible Firecrest crossed my path and disappeared and three Great Spotted Woodpecker flew over me with much 'whickering' of territorial dispute. Chaffinches were singing strongly in many places and I heard my first Greenfinch song (later hearing another in my garden). Plenty of birds in the woods, including a few Yellowhammer in the open areas, and after scanning several tit flocks I saw a Treecreeper before leaving. After lunch I made a brief visit to Warblington and was surprised to find 180 Brent on the large field south of the path to Nore Barn and east of the main stream.

FRI 5 FEB

Today I cycled to Hambrook to check out the largest rookery in Sussex (in the grounds of Hambrook House) with the old wives tale that 'the Rooks get married on St Valentines day' in my mind – if that is going to happen next week they should have the decency to get the bridal chamber ready in advance but not a single bird was at that or other rookeries that I passed today (they must know of gales and snow to come that would make nest repair a wasted effort). I went via the Prinsted/Nutbourne shore and found over 60 FIELDFARE and a couple of REDWING in the field between the Nutbourne orchards and seawall, and noted two GREENSHANK in Prinsted Bay and a third in Nutbourne Bay (just below the outlet sluice of the Ham Brook). No Pintail at all on the water and no sign of the Little Owl in the ivy cover south of the farm despite a north wind and sun from the south to tempt the owl out on the side visible from the path. On my way home I found the EMPEROR GOOSE with 24 CANADA GEESE in the field on the west side of Aldsworth Pond, on which two pairs of Gadwall and a dozen Tufted Duck could be seen). One other

observation today was of a dead male Blackbird in the road – presumably this is the result of territorial aggression – the drive to see off territorial invaders takes precedence over personal safety. Whatever the reason a lot of them do seem to get hit by cars in the breeding season.

Brian Fellows checked out the Warblington fields for Brent today and found none – perversely I found 60 in the wet meadow at Nutbourne (by the Ham Brook) where I have not seen them previously (none on the more usual fields by Prinsted Bay)

THU 4 FEB

A LITTLE EGRET and GREEN SANDPIPER were both back by the River Ems just north of the A27 today when Brian Fellows toured the area today. Of the three universally common species (Robin, Wren and Dunnock) all were singing today and Brian found Wrens were predominant though they have been quiet recently but I agree with him that Dunnock seem to be singing more than I would have expected at this time of year. The ‘new kid on the block’ is Chaffinch, and this species is coming into song everywhere very rapidly. Brian also came on a total of 25 Magpies – I too have noticed more parties of Magpies together at a time when many of them are already building their nests and you would expect them to be keeping to themselves in separate pairs. I wonder if this need to socialize which most members of the Crow tribe seem to exhibit is a result of their greater intelligence compared to most birds – maybe they can’t do without a good gossip even when they are on duty as parents?

WED 3 FEB

This morning I spent a couple of hours in Havant Thicket where one Chaffinch was starting to sing and the many Wrens were quick to respond to each others songs and alarm calls as they too set up territories. The only bird of interest was a single WOODCOCK which got up just seven yards in front of me, giving a good view of its rapid retreat through the trees.

During the recent troubled times for Portsmouth Football Club I have refrained from commenting on the fact that so far none of the Pompey supporters have blamed all their troubles on the Brent Geese (widely thought to be the only reason they failed to get permission for their move to Farlington a few years back). Tonight this universal silence on the subject was broken by Chris Packham in his excellent Birdwatch TV programme – he told us that this will be one of the subjects in his next programme.

TUE 2 FEB

News of an un-oiled RED THROATED DIVER off Southampton Docks and the SNOW BUNTING at Calshot plus a Great Northern Diver (also off Calshot) – all seen last Sunday - comes from John Norton. John says it took ages to find the Snow Bunting which was feeding unobtrusively on grassy patches inside the canoe pool near the coastguards.

Brian Fellows heard a Blackbird singing at dawn today before heading for Southsea where he found 2 PURPLE SANDPIPER at the Castle, the Swan pair back at the Milton Lakes and 13 Shoveler on Baffins Pond where there were only 5 last month – the Dabchick had also increased from 2 to 4 and the Canada Geese to 56 with 152 Mallard and 58 Tufted Duck present. At the Brent Goose feeding sites numbers were down – only 150 at the Eastern Road Sixth Form College and 90 on the University Milton Campus shore field.

Yesterday morning I again heard a Blackbird singing in a neighbours garden before it was properly light and today I heard one singing happily from an Ash tree in the centre of Havant (garden of the Robin Hood pub) in sunshine at about 3pm. A little later I found a Green Sandpiper in the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton Waterworks and from Broadmarsh slipway had very good views of the SCAUP pair off Budds Farm outfall. The Kingfisher was at his usual perch on the Brockhampton stream (just below the bridge to the boat park, on the Budds Farm side, flying off downstream as soon as I set foot on the bridge). At the mouth of the Langbrook stream I was pleased to see 57 Shelduck – possibly a record for this site.

MON 1 FEB

At Emsworth this morning Brian Fellows had the great pleasure of seeing a MED GULL bathing in the Slipper Mill pond among some 100 Black Headed gulls – not only is this a good tick but ends a long period over which Barry Collins has often remarked on seeing Med Gulls here as he cycles past to and from Thorney and Brian has hitherto missed out (not that Barry has seen one there recently to my knowledge). The Goosander was not to be seen but the Swan pair were back at Peter Pond (no sign of nest building yet) and the Emperor Goose was with 8 Canada Geese on the Town Mill pond where there are still 65 Swans that have not headed off to nest sites (and probably won’t this year) plus a reduced population of 51 Mallard (another 50 of which are probably at nest sites now).

Seven solitary sntries stood to attention for three hours this morning at points around the North Hayling shoreline under the orders of Admiral Anne de Potier to ensure that no wader moved from its feeding ground without permission and without its journey being recorded. This was the first time that I have

been invited to participate in this method of studying wader movements between Langstone and Chichester Harbours which was one of a series organised by the Solent Shorebird Study Group (here and elsewhere in the greater Solent area). As one of those participating said it is difficult to draw conclusions from a one-off exercise of this sort (the birds will have been influenced by the unique combination of tide, weather, time of year and disturbance factors operating today) but 'if you don't look you don't see' and it is only through a prolonged series of such exercises over the years that we will improve our knowledge of how to manage the environment in a way that supports the shorebird populations. I see from the English Nature magazine that arrived this morning that the Solent Maritime area has now been submitted as a candidate SAC (Special Area of Conservation) for European approval and the same mag has a smiling photo of Carolyn Francis who is currently working as English Nature's Maritime Conservation Officer for Hampshire and the Isle of Wight. I am sure that the work of the Solent Shorebird Study Group has contributed much towards the possibility of the Solent achieving the greater protection for its wildlife that SAC status would/should confer.

My own post for the above exercise was on the southern end of the old rail bridge at Langstone, arriving at 8.50 to be greeted by a Kingfisher on the weedy base blocks of the old bridge and leaving at noon. As the tide rose the Redshank, Lapwing, Curlew and Oystercatcher in the 'Texaco bay' between the old rail line and the road soon left – the Redshank and Lapwing heading east over the road and the Curlew going west towards Long Island. Between 10 and 11am I was slightly surprised to see three small groups of Dunlin (only 100 in total) leave the Oysterbeds to head east over the bridge (had they been disturbed or quarrelled with their neighbours in the roost? Or were they hungry and moving to see if the tide were still low enough for feeding elsewhere?). By 11am, with the 4.8m tide high at 11.44, the Brent in Texaco bay could no longer find anything edible under the water within the reach of their necks and flew off east. After this I thought all movement was over until the tide fell but surprisingly the half-hour from 11.20 to 11.50 saw just over 700 Dunlin come rushing west over the bridge to the Oysterbeds roost and with the last of these Dunlin came 45 Curlew heading west for the harbour islands. As a backdrop to the wader activity Merganser and Goldeneye kept up a floorshow on the water with just one appearance by a Great Crested Grebe. I particularly enjoyed a double act by two male Goldeneye, and when I made a quick visit to the Oysterbeds between 11 and 11.15 I found what must have been a juvenile male in the 'finger pool' – at one point it was alongside an adult male and looked slightly larger but its very blotchy feathers may have been the result of oiling rather than youth and that could have made them stand out though the bird seemed in youthful good spirits as it was the first this year to give me the head back and then up in the air mating display.

I gather that most of the other counters saw little activity, but Barry Collins, posted at Northney marina Duckard Point, was overwhelmed with birds – he estimated there were up to 2,500 GOLDEN PLOVER in the area and about 600 KNOT, and he spoke of many birds coming east over Langstone village (though I did not see them from the rail bridge). When I asked him how many Egrets were roosting on Thorney in January he gave me a count of 106 at the start of the month and said he is thinking of making another count in the next few days – he also confirmed what I guessed from my last visit to the Thorney guardroom area, near which a huge mountain of tarmac is growing inside the base, that the airfield runways are being broken up and the concrete sold for road building material.

PLANTS:

SUN 7 FEB

An email from Pete Selby earlier this week told me of two unusual seaside plants to look out for as early as March, both having a liking for sandy coastal grassland. One is EARLY MEADOW GRASS (*Poa infirma*) which is a rare relative of Annual Meadow Grass – unlike its ubiquitous relative the rare species is said by Francis Rose to be restricted to Cornwall and the Scillies, but Pete Selby says it was found in Sussex last March and has also been found in Dorset. In addition to the identifying features to be found in Stace and Francis Rose the plants in Sussex were of a very pale yellow colour, looking as if they were dying after the application of weedkiller (though in fact healthy). The second plant to look out for is WESTERN CLOVER (*Trifolium occidentale*) which is a smaller version of WHITE CLOVER (*T. repens*) – as well as the finer points distinguishing the two species there is a major difference in that the rare one appears from March, three or four months before the common White Clover. It is not only smaller but it has almost round leaflets with no black spot and with a shiny upper surface.. The red calyx behind each tiny white flower give the flowerhead a pinkish tinge so don't expect a pure white flowerhead.

FRI 5 FEB

A good clump of BUTTERBUR spikes were just showing at Emsworth Brook Meadow (south side of the dry concrete sluice channel half way down the meadow) and four could just be seen at Racton. At Brook Meadow the almond scent of the Winter Heliotrope (now at the peak of its flowering and spurred on by warm sunshine) was very strong. The Hairspring water cress beds at Hambrook had the first really strong showing of 'wild' Primroses and the Ham Brook itself (beside Priors Leaze Lane just downstream of the big grain store) had a very attractive show of flowering Marsh Marigolds in the stream.

WED 3 FEB

Brian Fellows took a day trip to the Isle of Wight today and found masses of Primroses in flower at Ventnor along with both BLACKTHORN and BRAMBLE

MON 1 FEB

Cycling down the Hayling Billy trail this morning I found my first MEADOW BUTTERCUP flower of the year at the Langstone end – I did get off my bike and check its leaves to make sure it was not one of the many Creeping Buttercup that have never stopped flowering.

SUN 31 JAN

Today I found my first FEMALE FLOWERS ON HAZEL BUSHES – many of the male catkins are beginning to fade (though others have yet to open) and the tiny scarlet brushes of the female flowers are well worth searching for. At Racton the road junction by the River Ems had its annual surprise starting to appear – after a little searching I found what looked a bit like a tiny molehill of earth pushing up and cracking, and through the cracks I saw the tip of a BUTTERBUR flower spike pushing up. The amazing thing about this was that the spike already had some of its flowers open before it had emerged into the air. I then found a second bud with the tip just above ground (it seemed to have been trodden on). I did not have time to search for more but I guess that in a week's time there will be plenty of spike to be seen..

INSECTS:

TUE 2 FEB

An early BUMBLEBEE was flying around Milton Common when Brian Fellows was there today

MON 1 FEB

When recording the Small Tortoiseshell last week I forgot to mention something that will already be known to members of Butterfly Conservation. In the BC winter magazine that has just arrived there is an account by a Professor John Wacher of how he proved that a PAINTED LADY survived the 1997/98 winter in his garden near Hayle in Cornwall by marking its wings with a bright green permanent marker dot, 2mm in circumference, on Oct 23rd 1997 and seeing the marked butterfly sunning itself on April 7th 1998 with the green dot clearly visible. We have all suspected that Red Admirals occasionally survive the English winter and he also has proof of one of these surviving the 91/92 winter (on that occasion he regularly saw the insect through the winter as it had chosen to hibernate in his porch).

OTHER WILDLIFE:

TUE 2 FEB

When Brian Fellows was at the Eastney/Hayling ferry today he spoke to a man who had recently seen a COMMON SEAL in the harbour entrance.

MON 1 FEB

Reading John Goodspeed's poster which arrived today I see that the first FROGSPAWN had been reported to him from a garden pond in the Denvilles area of Havant today. This is the first I have heard of since the radio report of spawn on the Isle of Wight on Jan 14th)

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 04 JAN 25 - 31

BIRDS:

SUN 31 JAN

Today I walked a circuit from Stoughton to Up Marden through Lye Common and back through Inholmes Wood. Near Pitlands Farm I heard the 'chukka, chukka' calls of Red Legged Partridge but could not see them, and in the scrub a couple of Yellowhammers called (back to breeding territory already from winter flocks? Or has the weather been so mild they have stayed on home ground all the time?). The most intriguing call was the 'Chick, chick' of a Spotted Woodpecker – normally I would assume it to be

Greater, but this was coming from the edge of Woodbarn (SU 791119) where Lesser Spotted has often been seen and is thought to nest – and these calls did sound fainter and less aggressive than usual. Mark Litjens was at Hurst Castle today, finding the BLACK REDSTART which he first saw there on Nov 15 is still present (no such luck with the bird which a friend of his reported to be at Southsea Castle recently – no one else has seen that) From the carpark at the landward end of Hurst Spit a GUILLEMOT could be seen.

SAT 30 JAN

Both COMMON & GREEN SANDPIPER were on the drained pool at Budds Farm today when Mark Litjens turned up and more surprisingly the pair of SCAUP were in sight off the sewage outfall. I have heard that the Scaup were still in the Chalkdock area (Andrew Green saw them on Jan 17th) but I have no other note of them in the Broadmarsh area this year.

5 BARNACLE GEESE were with some 40 Canada Geese on the Thorney Marshes south of the east end of Thornham Lane when Brian Fellows was there today and he has heard from Barry Collins that these Barnacles have been on Thorney since mid-December (I must have seen them on Jan 22 from the main road by the guard post when I was trying to turn these smaller birds (hidden in long grass) into a troop of Emperor Geese – as I could not figure out what they were I did not mention them at the time). They are not day-trippers from Baffins Pond and could be genuine wild birds that have overflowed from Islay?? More news of birds on Thorney from Barry Collins includes up to 4 SHORT EARED OWLS over the deeps (east end) during January, a MERLIN in the south of the island, and a colour ringed GREENSHANK among the wintering birds.

FRI 29 JAN

The EMPEROR Goose was seen on Emsworth Mill Pond this morning by Brian Fellows, and he found the KINGFISHER in Dolphin Creek again but could not find the Goosander. Its absence at dusk yesterday might have been accounted for by the bird seeking a secluded place to spend the night but its absence this morning seems to support my theory that the bird seen by the Slipper Mill on the 25th and 27th was the Hermitage Stream bird on a day trip (maybe a tentative start to its return journey from winter quarters) which has returned to its preferred site at Broadmarsh.

John Gowen's notes for the past week reached me today and I see he heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming at Wade Court on Wednesday (Jan 27) and had a very good view of a Sparrowhawk perched on the metal pipes around the bridge and stile from Mill Lane onto the South Moors on the same day. As the bird had its back to him it did not immediately see him, so John had a prolonged view of this small brown backed hawk which is almost certainly the same juvenile male which I saw hunting the Budds Farm pools in high winds last week. On the Moors that day he had another good sight of two Green Woodpeckers together, giving hope of breeding. One less explicable event was a noisy invasion of a Monterey Pine close to John's garden by 20 Crows which appeared to be administering an IRA style punishment beating to the pair that normally perch in that tree. On Monday the Green Sandpiper was in the Wade Court wet meadow south of the house and 13 Magpies were in the field across Wade Lane south of the farm, and on Tuesday an unusually large (for the current time) flock of 40 Black Tailed Godwit flew east from the South Moors shore.

I continue to be surprised by the Blackbird which sings for a couple of minutes in my garden just before dawn – I heard it again this morning for the third time. I also noticed a pair of Robin together at the feeding station for the first time this year.

THU 28 JAN

Brian Fellows walked the Emsworth/Westbourne circuit along the Ems today and noted two Grey Wagtail among the 19 species he encountered – he does not say if they were together but I hope they were and that he will soon enjoy their short bursts of song and wing fluttering as they prepare to nest. A Chiffchaff was in its usual place by the riverside willows near the gasholder but no Green Sandpiper or Egrets were seen. Recent news of a Goosander seen at least twice in the Emsworth Slipper Mill area sent me out this afternoon to see if I could find two birds in our area. The Hermitage Stream bird was in its normal place in the shallow (low tide) stream just below the A27, but I could find no Goosander in the Emsworth harbour, ponds, or marina (though I did arrive there late in the day when it might have gone into hiding for the night). At Emsworth I did see the Kingfisher fly across the Slipper Mill pond and found the Greenshank on the north side of the harbour channel just outside the marina entrance. I also found a total of 81 Shelduck between Langstone bridge and Emsworth Harbour – the best total so far this winter. A Goldcrest sang in Langstone Mill Lane and a Mistle Thrush in Nore Barn, and I saw/heard a lone Redwing by the A259/A27 junction (the first Redwing I have seen this year since a few at Nutbourne on New Year's Day). On the shore I came on 65 KNOT near Warblington Church and hear from John Goodspeed that there were 150 on the west Hayling shore south of the Oysterbeds today.

Brian Fellows has sent me this thought for the day gathered from the internet – the author is a Martin Rand and he says “In this part of the world (Hampshire) Buzzards are most noticeable generally, and appear in larger groups, at two points in the year. First is the lambing season. I have a suspicion that they go after the afterbirth where lambs are born outside, but I’ve never been able to corroborate this by direct observation. Second is just after the pheasant chicks are released in late summer. E.g. eight circling over a big release of chicks at Lower Eldon E of the Test Valley this year” I wonder if anyone has any thoughts on this (but don’t tell any gamekeepers if they are of the sort that delights in any excuse to shoot at a bird of prey). Last year I was surprised to see 7 Buzzards in one thermal in the Watergate area (between Walderton and West Marden) where there is a lot of game rearing and shooting on Aug 25 but I don’t know enough about game rearing to know if birds are released at that time of year (I thought they would have been out of their cages before then, and would not have expected Buzzards to take almost full grown pheasants)

WED 27 JAN

When I reached Langstone at the start of a cycle ride to Gunner Point this morning the tide was just beginning to fall, bringing the first opportunity for the waders to breakfast, so I had a great display of Dunlin, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Curlew and the occasional Grey Plover, Ringed Plover, Black Tailed Godwit and Little Egret around Langstone and all the way down the Hayling west coast. There were, as usual, hundreds of Golden Plover and Lapwing but these birds seem to manage to spend the whole day without food (they can of course feed in fields at whatever state of tide and will have breakfasted at dawn – while I was watching the big flock of Golden Plover on the Northney saltings, which had not been covered by this morning’s 7am neap tide, at least another hundred of them – late breakfasters - appeared in the sky above and dropped down to rest with the others). In the Wade Court wet meadow 25 Moorhen were out feeding – keeping a respectful distance from the Vixen idly strolling in the sun, but there were no Teal to be seen (they would not be safe overnight in a field patrolled by Foxes) One or two Teal were on the main pond but I don’t know where the 80+ Teal normally here had gone. One of the Swan pair was on the pond, the other was standing on the shore outside the Royal Oak waiting for free beer for his breakfast. From the Langstone shore to the Hayling Ferry I saw a total of just 64 Shelduck and half of these were in one flock off Northney. Half way down the Hayling Coastal path I found 100 KNOT on the mud when I paused to check the growth of the Primroses in the ‘Daw Lane’ coastal oak copse (no sign of the Little Owl but the resident Crow pair were in evidence). At Gunner Point two lonely SANDERLING ran along the sandy tideline among a few Oystercatcher and Gulls, and in a St Catherine’s Lane garden a Mistle Thrush sang heartily from a tree-top where it was surrounded by an audience of Starlings. At Links Lane I once again glimpsed a single Goldcrest but no Firecrest, and on Sinah Gravel Pit, where the water is almost high enough to cover the Swan’s nest island, I found a nice group of 10 male POCHARD and a pair of SHOVELER at the west end – otherwise the pond was empty bar two Coot and half a dozen Tufted Duck.

At Emsworth this morning Brian Fellows found the EMPEROR GOOSE on the Town Mill Pond with just four Canada Geese, and the redhead GOOSANDER, which had been in Dolphin Creek by Slipper Mill Pond on Monday, was still present but with a lower tide it was in the pool where both the creek and pond empty into the harbour. Peter Pond was devoid of its Swan pair.

TUE 26 JAN

One SHAG was near the Hayling end of the ferry at Langstone harbour mouth this morning when Brian Fellows was there – he saw several Merganser and one Goldeneye nearby but no sign of the Great Northern Diver. Moving west to the Canoe Lake he counted a record 66 SWAN on it with a couple of Tufted Duck, a single Cormorant and 5 Mallard, and then saw 3 PURPLE SANDPIPER at the Castle. Brent Geese were feeding inland at just two sites and in more normal winter numbers – 430 on the Portsmouth College field by the Eastern Road and another 400 on the Farlington playing fields over the A27 from Farlington Marshes.

MON 25 JAN

Mark Litjens had an excellent day in the New Forest area on Saturday but rode the big dipper on Sunday. He says “Saturday started at Calshot looking for a SNOW BUNTING. I arrived at first light and was greeted by an excellent view of a BARN OWL quartering the ditch besides the road. I walked around the shingle and eventually came across the Snow Bunting on the slipway by the life boat station. It showed well before flying into the area near the swimming pool. After this I visited Pennington Marshes which was quite breezy. Five Little Egrets were equally dispersed but only two Slavonian grebes were off the sea wall. Walking around the sea wall two TWITE were feeding on the sea wall and gave good views. On the

way home I stopped off at Beaulieu Road and saw the GREAT GREY SHRIKE which was, at this time, SW of the bridge over the railway line sitting on small dead trees in the middle of the heath. - - Sunday I spent looking for Lesser-spotted Woodpecker, Crossbill, Woodlark and Willow Tit but no luck with any of them. Such is life..."

The RED KITE said by Mick Finnemore at his recent talk at Havant Arts Centre to be 'hanging about Old Winchester Hill' was reported on the internet as being seen there yesterday at 1.30pm. Thanks to David Parker for passing on this news which he spotted.

Brina Fellows bulletin of today's news from the Emsworth Ponds not only tells me that the Peter Pond Swan pair are back on their nest site without last year's cygnets which were in the harbour adding to a total of 55 Swans on the Town Mill Pond and harbour (this return comes on the same day that I see the Langstone pair back together) but has news of a "first" for that area in the shape of a redhead GOOSANDER swimming among the boats in Dolphin Creek (the narrow tidal channel running up the west side of Slipper Mill Pond to the Lord Raglan pub). As this channel is the Hants/Sussex border the bird can be validly reported for both counties. Does anyone have an alibi for where the Hermitage Stream bird was at 3.30pm this afternoon? A KINGFISHER was also in that channel, but that is not unusual.

John Goodspeed visited Farm Lane and Nutbourne Bay today and remarks on a "very yellow CHIFFCHAFF" in a garden backing onto the Ham Brook. I guess juvenile Willow Warbler will have lost their bright yellow of last autumn should any have stayed the winter - if any experienced birders are in that area and spot the bird please tell us its true identity! On the east shore of the bay there were 40 Turnstone and John thinks that a dozen Plovers seen distantly may have been Golden. He also mentions PINTAIL in the bay - this bay is usually the winter home of a substantial flock of Pintail but so far this winter I have not seen any there nor heard of them until now, which ties in with a general shortage of Pintail in many coastal sites.

Brian Fellows has brought to my attention a very useful internet site which provides links to every reputable birding and wildlife news site in the UK plus other info on publications, weather, travel. Although I have not yet got round to checking out their content I see that almost every county WILDLIFE TRUST in the south of England has a web site other than Hampshire and so I am pleased that our site appears under the title of "Hampshire Wildlife Trust - Havant area" to remind people that Hampshire has more wildlife than any other county in the UK, measured in number of species, and has a large and active Wildlife Trust organisation working to protect and enhance the county's wildlife. I have tonight added to my website a link to this gateway to UK wildlife. My thanks to whoever is responsible for setting it up and running it - the first thing to catch your eye when you visit will be a rotating gallery of stunning bird pictures that manage to achieve superb quality without taking forever to download.

One of the few links from the above website which I have so far followed is to a site run by the BIRDWATCH magazine, and that site has a "December Rarities" report telling us that the Langstone Harbour AMERICAN WIGEON is one of 12 in the UK this winter; that a GREAT WHITE EGRET was reported from Pagham Harbour on Dec 14/15; that the Timsbury FERRUGINOUS DUCK is one of 5 in the UK; and that a TWO BARRED CROSSBILL put in a one day appearance at Lower Pennington on Dec 14. If you want today's news rather than last month's there are links to "Birdguides Rare Bird News" which comes from the Birdnet pager service and is updated online hourly, as well as "Recent Bird News from FOCALPOINT" updated once or twice a day - the latest news can be downloaded from these sites for the price of a very brief local rate phonecall and read offline at leisure (sounds a bit better to me than paying premium rates to have the news gabbled at you down the phone, though that may be a biased view as I have never rung any of the birdline phone services as they are unlikely to tell me what I can see as I cycle around Havant).

Following on from the last remark above I walked around Havant and Langstone to get some fresh air for an hour or so this afternoon and was once more stunned by the aerial display of 700 GOLDEN PLOVER and 300 LAPWING over Langstone Mill shore as the rising tide forced them to leave their low tide roost area. On the pond behind them a male Tufted Duck had joined the two females and the SWAN pair were back together to guard their nest site. In the Wade Court wet meadow north of the pond the GREEN SANDPIPER bobbed at the water's edge close to me and the grass and pools were covered with birds (80 Teal, 20 Moorhen and at least 13 Magpies). No Egrets in this field today but there were 12 in the Warblington Farmhouse field (the number with the cattle there grows each week) and I saw three others on my walk.

An item of news from John Goodspeed is the continuing presence of at least two STONECHAT in the Hazleton Common area of Horndean

PLANTS:

SUN 31 JAN

Today I found my first FEMALE FLOWERS ON HAZEL BUSHES – many of the male catkins are beginning to fade (though others have yet to open) and the tiny scarlet brushes of the female flowers are well worth searching for. At Racton the road junction by the River Ems had its annual surprise starting to appear – after a little searching I found what looked a bit like a tiny molehill of earth pushing up and cracking, and through the cracks I saw the tip of a BUTTERBUR flower spike pushing up. The amazing thing about this was that the spike already had some of its flowers open before it had emerged into the air. I then found a second bud with the tip just above ground (it seemed to have been trodden on). I did not have time to search for more but I guess that in a week's time there will be plenty of spike to be seen..

SAT 30 JAN

The earth mound at Hayling Oysterbeds has been left to grow its own natural vegetation and is already greening over with many tiny plants but the only two species having substantial growths are not the native species expected. One is the large colony of MilkThistles which has extended considerably as a result of the new soil used to cover the mound, the other is BORAGE of which I found a single flowering plant on top of the mound for the first time today. A much more natural sight was of a mass of SWEET VIOLETS pointed out to me by Gwynne Johnson – these are well worth seeing but are not easy to spot. To find them go north on the coastal path from the 'North Haying Halt' carpark behind the Esso Garage past the open land of the shore part of the Oysterbeds on your left, and just before coming to where a gate used to separate that part of the old rail line track from the northern section you will see a metal gate into the County Council 'ragwort field' on your left. Go to this gate and look right (north) along the fence line of the field and you will see a great mass of the Violets flowering at the foot of the fence, well hidden from the path by the hedge.

Wade Lane at Langstone has its CHERRY PLUM blossom in full flower. Cycling back from the Oysterbeds I found myself in a tunnel of bright white blossom – well worth seeing, and easier to see against a dull sky than a bright sunny one as much of the blossom is high overhead.

FRI 29 JAN

Cherry Plum trees are now generally coming into flower and I do not expect to see BLACKTHORN flowering until early March, though there are always 'early' individual trees and last year I found the first single flower on Feb 9th. This year a tree by the Hermitage Stream in the Stockheath Lane section has beaten that record with a single flower out today and many buds to follow. The two most noticeable factors in separating Cherry Plum from Blackthorn are the colour of the shoots on which the flowers appear and the presence or absence of leaves with the flowers. Cherry Plum has young shoots which are noticeably green, and leaves begin to open at the same time as the flowers. Blackthorn has dark coloured shoots (never green) and the flowers open before the leaves appear.

MON 25 JAN

More proof of the truism that "if you don't look you don't see" came as I reached the north end of the Pook Lane footbridge over the A27 Havant bypass this afternoon and bent down to poke about in a patch of IVY LEAVED SPEEDWELL leaves and found one flimsy plant had flower buds and another had pale blue/mauve flowers to greet the spring. As this is one of the early spring flowers which is very easily overlooked I have been casting an eye over any clumps of leave that I have seen in the last few days and on this very dull afternoon 'my heart leapt up' or whatever Wordsworth would have said if he took an interest in anything smaller than a Daffodil (which I am sure he and Dorothy did). To add to this stupendous find I must record that the leaves are now bursting from the Elder bush buds (one dead Elder by the farm entrance at Langstone South Moors recently gave me the better sight of a lovely stem of 'JEWS EAR' fungus), and on the Pook Lane foreshore the clay/mud just below the high tide line is densely covered with delicate tufted strands of bright green 'hair' arranged in delicate patterns by the retreating tide – this is the young stage of the ENTEROMORPHA INTESTINALIS that will clog the beach with a six inch deep blanket of its stinking, oozy dead remains in the summer.

INSECTS:

THU 28 JAN

John Goodspeed tells me that a SMALL TORTOISESHELL was on the wing in Fort Widley two days ago (Jan 26). In the fort its emergence is unlikely to be caused by central heating and was probably the result of accidental disturbance but the daytime air temperature has now risen above 10 degrees centigrade (when out of the wind) and this could be enough to wake the butterfly naturally. Does anyone have any facts on the temperatures needed to wake hibernating butterflies naturally?

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 30 JAN

A pile of miscellaneous rubbish (plaster and plastic bags etc from recent building work) in a corner of my garden is an unlikely site for wildlife to flourish but this week end I see that rubbery 'leaves' of a fungus are pushing out from the cracks of the pile. Some of these leaves are up to 10cm across, pale fawn colour on top and scurfy white below. I think this is PEZIZA CEREAE, for which Roger Phillips describes its habitat as "rotting sandbags, damp mortar, and the soil between damp paving stones, often found in cellars".

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 03 JAN 18 - 24

BIRDS:

SUN 24 JAN

Ian Calderwood was successful in seeing the BLACK BRANT at Wittering yesterday – I'm not sure of the location but Ian says that it was 'right up by the fence' (I think the place is somewhere along the Snow Hill to Ella Nore shore of West Wittering in the lee of East Head but I may be wrong). A more exciting goose (presumably an escape) was an EGYPTIAN GOOSE seen by him today in a field by the River Meon in the Funtley area. His instructions to find it are "From Fareham along the A27 turn right into Mill Lane going past Titchfield Abbey on your left this road continues into Funtley Lane, under the M27, turn into River Lane on your right, over the bridge and park immediately on the right, walk back to the bridge and view the field to the north." I reckon this must be at SU 553087 on the road coming from Kiln Lane in the north of Fareham down Funtley Hill under the M27 and on through Funtley to the bridge over the Meon. Nice one, Ian and a just reward for joining the march protesting against the closure of Haslar Hospital in the morning.

David Parker visited Budds Farm today and saw both COMMON & GREEN SANDPIPER in the middle pool. I did not see them around 3pm when I thought the pools looked very deserted with only 12 Teal, 1 Tufted Duck and 20 Mallard plus a pair of Coot and 7 roosting Oystercatcher to be seen (no doubt Dabchick and Moorhen were also lurking in the vegetation). I did however get a further impression that the current works are intended to improve the future nature reserve – lots of topsoil has now arrived and will probably replace the concrete that has been broken up and removed from the north end of the east pool – it looks as if there will be a land section of the new reserve on the north and east side of the east pool.. In David's garden he had both male and female Blackcap today, plus two Goldcrest and a pair of Long Tailed Tit.

A Blackbird sang strongly for 2 or 3 minutes outside my bedroom window at dawn again today with Wood Pigeon also singing and after breakfast I had more Goldcrest song in Lowtons Copse (the only place where I heard Treecreeper song last spring – I saw a single bird in the same patch today but it was silent). In Stansted Forest another Marsh Tit sang strongly and Great Spotted Woodpecker was drumming. A male Bullfinch was once more feeding on Ash keys.

An afternoon cycle around Broadmarsh and Brockhampton found the Goosander in the Hermitage Stream by the gravel quay from where it flew to the sea by Budds Farm outfall, and at the slipway I had an excellent view of the RING BILLED GULL through a visiting birder's scope – the fore and aft streaking on the crown is very pronounced and the bill is a good yellow colour with a broad black ring leaving a tiny yellow tip. The other difference from Common Gull (besides the slightly larger size – which will not always be distinctive) is the very small amount of white ('tertial step') separating the grey wings from the black tips. I did not see the bird fly. Continuing down the Brockhampton stream I glimpsed the Kingfisher fleeing downstream away from me but I heard from people following me that it soon returned to the broad bridge to the boat park. Several Chiff Chaff were active here and I heard one singing in the willows around the 'Archery Field' between the old incinerator site and the Hermitage Stream. At the slipway I met Dave Mead who had just seen some Bearded Tits at Farlington Marshes (lake end of the stream) and had heard the American Wigeon was on the scrape (during high tide).

SAT 23 JAN

There were more than 100 GOLDEN PLOVER in the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour when David Parker was there today (on past experience there should be a lot more than that and they should have been

around for a couple of months by now, but this is the first news of them to reach me). David did not see the Long Tailed Duck on the Church Norton area of the harbour but did have one Slav Grebe inside the harbour. On his way home he saw the Goosander in the Hermitage Stream between the A27 and Harts Farm Way (it was asleep on the northerly of the two culverts on the east side of the stream and could easily be overlooked there – perhaps this is why it has seemed to be ‘missing’ in recent days)

John Gowen’s birding notes for the past week include a sighting of the Hayling Ferry SHAG last Monday (Jan 18) on the Hayling side, and a note of the location of 5 SONG THRUSH regularly singing in a one kilometre square centred on Langstone – this gives a spacing of around 700 metres between the birds, and I would think this is probably true of most similar sub-urban sites with plenty of garden territory.

I walked from Havant to Budds Farm this afternoon and found 5 pairs of Mallard spaced out down the Langbrook Stream, probably guarding nest sites they have already staked out for themselves. Near the footpath to the old IBM Education Centre at the Farm (now a private house) I found a pair of Long Tailed Tits seemingly settled on suitable nesting territory (though many of these Tits are still roaming in flocks.) One Snipe got up from the ‘Orchid Meadow’ where I searched in vain for Kingcups (only tiny leaves so far) and I watched a Sparrowhawk hunting over Budds Farm in the strong wind (I think a juvenile as it seemed small despite having a very brown back). With the strong south west wind more Wigeon than usual were in the mouth of the Langbrook Stream at high tide (I counted 60 of them with a few Teal) and as I was leaving a Green Sandpiper flew from Mill Lane, unusually pitching on the tideline shingle.

FRI 22 JAN

My best bird today was a singing CHAFFINCH in the trees of Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore – nearby a GOLDFINCH was singing without the pressure of a flock of its like so presumably it was genuinely thinking of a future territory and mate. Just north of Nore Barn the largest of the fields which abut the Emsworth housing (the field between the one nearest Nore Barn and the pony fields near the main road) had a flock of around 600 Brent on it. I have not seen them there before and could see no evidence that they had been eating the fresh corn here. On Thorney I found three GREENSHANK in the Great Deeps west area and found a CHIFF CHAFF calling from the trees of the small copse on the east of the main road by the Little Deeps channel with a probable STONECHAT distantly perched on a thin stem in the rough field south of the copse, a Water Rail calling from the edge of the wet field north of it and a female Reed Bunting on the opposite side of the road. Shelduck were fewer than ever along the Emsworth shore (24 at most) and none that I could see by the Great Deeps or Fowley Island.

A phone call from Gary (otherwise anonymous) reported a second sighting of a male LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER in the lower section of Pook Lane at Warblington – he previously claimed one here in December and I hope it stays for the start of the CBC season.

THU 21 JAN

Brian Fellows was at Budds Farm today, getting good views of the GOOSANDER and a CORMORANT in breeding plumage with the grey head and neck which probably indicates a continental race bird. This reminds me that I Tim Timlick told me recently that he had seen a Cormorant fly up the Hermitage Stream showing its white ‘thigh roundel’. Brian saw a bulldozer ‘flattening the mud’ in the drained eastern pool and like me (see below) wondered what was going on – my best guess is that this is a constructive operation aimed at creating and maintaining very shallow pools permanently in that ‘pool’ – the sort to attract the Sandpipers and birds like Little Stint – while deeper water in the other two pools will be maintained for dabbling and diving duck. Brian found plenty of CHIFF CHAFF by the Brockhampton stream (some singing in the sunshine) but not the Yellow Browed Warbler (I have personally written its presence off as a rumour in the absence of any definite report) though he tells me that Martin and Margaret Baggs saw a ‘Yellow Breasted’ Oystercatcher off Broadmarsh this morning (colour marked? or just oiled?). Earlier in the morning Brian had been at the Oysterbeds where he met an Ancient Mariner who beguiled him with tales of Foxes luring Skylarks from the sky (into their mouths) by feats of hypnotism (I thought it was only Stoats that could do that).

John Goodspeed was at Stansted this afternoon and found around 150 thrushes on the eastern fringe of the Forest (the rough grass which sweeps up Rosamund’s Hill from the approach road to the house) – most of these were FIELDFARE with around 20 REDWING and some Starlings. At the top of the hill, where the bridle way enters the wood, John came on a MARSH TIT and this reminds me that when I was at Lyels Wood in the morning I watched BULLFINCHES eating Ash Key seeds (not for the first time) and I was wondering what other birds eat these seeds – John has reminded me that when I last saw a Marsh Tit at this very point it also was feeding on Ash keys high on a tree above the path. Near the Marsh Tit John saw a Sparrowhawk.

Dave Mead had a good outing in our patch today, starting at Southsea Castle with 3 PURPLE SANDPIPER, then a single FIRECREST at the Hayling Golf Club entrance before visiting the Oysterbeds and seeing 5 BLACK NECKED and 2 SLAV GREBES on the ice smooth water. Walking south he looked for the 'Daw Lane' LITTLE OWL in the 'middle oak' visible from the coastal path but eventually spotted it on the metal gate at the West Lane end of the field near the bungalow. Later he was pleased to spot another LITTLE OWL at the Nutbourne Farm Lane farm – he and I thought this regular bird had moved elsewhere with the increased activity round the new stables but Dave found it in the ivy covered small trees on the seaward side of the farm perimeter near the field path to the sea. Dave thinks he saw it thanks to the north wind which meant the bird was sheltered on the seaward side of the ivy – in a normal south westerly wind the bird would not show on the side where you can see it. Before leaving Dave glimpsed a WATER RAIL from the seawall by the first stile on the way to Prinsted.

In the thick pre-dawn mist this morning the Song Thrush and Robin song was supplemented by one BLACKBIRD in fairly full and continuous fluty song in a neighbour's back garden, and after breakfast I heard another Blackbird singing in a front garden up the street. This of course violates my rule that the first Blackbird song each year is heard in the evening, but my let-out is that I have another rule which says that mist always encourages bird song at the start of the season. I do not think the Blackbirds will really start singing daily until mid-February, but it was exciting to hear their fluting again after six months or so. At Havant Thicket later in the morning I came on my first paired ROBINS (shortly after putting up a WOODCOCK and getting a good view of its speedy departure) and heard really strong and continuous song from a paired MISTLE THRUSH – the song was perhaps particularly strong as there was at least one other Mistle Thrush in the area where I watched the pair moving about together. Over Blendworth Common a SKYLARK was singing equally strongly. With the sun higher and warmer I went to Lyels Wood at Stansted and heard at least two STOCK DOVE making their 'whoop-up' song and one MARSH TIT singing its loud 'Chip,chip,chip' song from the trees.

Other birds of some interest today were a single LESSER REDPOLL calling as it flew over Havant Thicket, three Gadwall with Coot, Mallard, Tufted Duck, Moorhen and Little Grebe (but no Swans or Geese) at Aldsworth Pond, a sighting of the Green Sandpiper on the Budds Farm east pool (does anyone know what is going on there? the mud was churned up where some large vehicle had been driving all round that pool and the concrete backing to the pools was being broken up), and a view of a KINGFISHER eating a fish while perched on the Langbrook stream side of the stile from the South Moors to the seawall (by white splashes on the wood I guess this is not the first time it has perched there). Finally, at dusk, there were seven Little Egret in the pony fields north of Wade Court and as I passed four took off and flew high and straight towards the Thorney roost.

WED 20 JAN

Last night I heard from Trevor Carpenter of two more divers seen by him last weekend, the most interesting being a RED THROATED DIVER seen in Fareham Creek at low tide in the afternoon on Sunday (17th). Trevor was walking around the Cams Hall Golf Course and had just turned north from the Cams Bay/Fleetlands section when he saw the diver in the creek under the power lines. Further north one of the shoreline pools that seem to have been created purely as a water hazard for golfers, and to be barren of wildlife, had a female Goldeneye on it and Trevor has seen single Mergansers on these pools in the past. His other diver sighting was off Hill Head on Saturday – just after mid-day he saw a large diver take off from way out in the Solent and fly around in circles which brought it near the shore, eventually landing off the Swordfish pub at Lee on Solent. Trevor thinks it was Great Northern and it was probably one of the four which Mark Litjens saw on the sea there on Sunday, though it could well have been the BLACK THROATED DIVER which Mark tracked down there on Saturday (see Mon 18 below) and which Trevor had heard of as being present for several days earlier.

Today Richard Hallett enjoyed a very close view of a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER by the Eastney end of the Hayling Ferry, seeing the diver catch two fish while he enjoyed a sandwich lunch. In his own words "It was high tide and while walking in the drizzle to the point at the Ferry landing steps there it was. I watched at very close range (about 20 feet) as it swam along by the pebble beach on the Eastney Lake side. It dived and caught at least two fish as I watched it for about ten minutes until it was time to go back to work. During Sunday morning I also had a good view of two Avocets at the Lake in Farlington Marshes."

Baffins Pond had collected an extra dozen Canada Geese when Brian Fellows found 47 there today compared with 35 on Jan 6th. Mallard were also up from 138 to 152 but there were only 4 Shoveler where there had been 5 and the two Pochard seen on the 6th had also disappeared. Other numbers, including the 42 Barnacle Geese, were as usual.

TUE 19 JAN

A message from John Gowen this morning told me that I had mis-interpreted his latest notes and when (see Sat 16 Jan) I reported that he had seen 1135 GOLDEN PLOVER off Langstone I misled anyone who read my note – in fact John had seen the usual flock of 500 or more birds at 11.35 in the morning. In recent winters the flock has reached a peak of over 1000 birds, so no warning bells rang in my mind, but I must apologise and say that as far as I know the flock has not exceeded 700 birds this winter.

The Southsea Canoe Lake was presumably one of the better places for a proud Swan to maintain its dignity and unruffled feathers in today's wind and rain and Brian Fellows found 61 of them there today – he says this equals his all time record count for this water, previously set in Jan 1997. With them were 24 Mallard and 2 Tufted Duck plus the first Cormorant Brian had seen here since Jan 98, but no Med Gull. Despite the wind there were 8 Brent on Southsea Common again – it seems that they prefer to feed here on days when there are fewer humans about, though John Goodspeed recently remarked on the fact that Brent are continuing to find food on the harbour much later in this winter than in recent years (fewer coming ashore to feed).

MON 18 JAN

The following message from Andrew Green tells of an eventful birding week end. “On Saturday afternoon I made a short tour of the Southsea sea front. Starting at the Castle I counted five PURPLE SANDPIPER at high tide and two SHAG were feeding close inshore. Moving on to the Boating Lake, the regular, ringed, adult MED GULL was standing on one of the boats in the middle. At Eastney I counted 22 SANDERLING on the shore, a SHAG was fishing in the harbour entrance opposite the Lifeboat Station and I saw a GUILLEMOT in the harbour, but no sign of any Great Northern Divers. “

Andrew continues:- “Yesterday I visited Farlington Marshes. Two AVOCET were on the Lake, but I failed to see the four Little Stints which have been regularly present. A PEREGRINE sat on Baker's Island, and whilst 'scoping this a SLAV GREBE swam into view! Moving up to the north-east corner, the two regular SCAUP (a female and a first winter male) were distant, but the drake AMERICAN WIGEON showed very well on the dropping tide.”

Mark Litjens weekend news is also too full of detail to be trimmed by me. He says .. “Saturday afternoon we started at Black Gutter Bottom and saw the GREAT GREY SHRIKE. It was half way between Black Gutter and Pitts Wood but flighty. It was also there Sunday (seen by a friend). Also there a female HEN HARRIER and a MERLIN. On to Ibsley where there were 20+ BEWICK'S SWAN on the floods near the bridge by the main road. After this we went to Matcham's watch point (this overlooks the Avon Valley, south of Ringwood) and eventually saw at least 8 WHITE-FRONTED GEESE but all the geese were quite distant. Amongst them were 2 BARNACLE GEESE and many GREYLAG GEESE spread along the viewable valley. On the way home we went down to Titchfield as the pager had reported a BLACK-THROATED DIVER and eventually found it off Hill Head.”

Mark continues:- “Sunday started at first light at Broadmarsh slipway to try and see the RING-BILLED GULL. It wasn't long before it showed well on the mud opposite the slipway and I even managed to see it and a Common Gull in the scope together for a few seconds to give a good comparison. Onto Southsea castle after this and only saw 1 PURPLE SANDPIPER and a SHAG nearby. In the afternoon I spent a couple of hours at Titchfield and saw the BITTERN a couple of times along with 4 GREAT NORTHERN DIVER, 1 SLAV GREBE and a RAZORBILL on the sea.”

A further message from Mark Litjens passes on a message he received to report a BLACK REDSTART in the Southsea Castle moat, and 30+ WATER PIPIT at the Lower Test.

Brian Fellows news from a tour of Emsworth today includes the return of the EMPEROR GOOSE to the Mill Pond for the first time this winter. Only 8 Canada Geese were with it so it may have abandoned the larger flock of around 30 Canadas that it was with on Thorney (Eames Farm) on New Year's Day. Will it (and/or the Canadas) now move on inland to Aldsworth Pond where it spent last spring? The Slipper Mill Pond showed a sign of spring in the first nesting activity by Moorhens, but the male GOLDENEYE that was also on the pond is a more wintery omen. Out in Emsworth Harbour the Peter Pond Swan pair were still accompanied by all three of last year's cygnets but I doubt the adults will let them back on the nesting pond again.

PLANTS:

SUN 24 JAN

Today I found WYCH ELM flowers open on the tree which grows by the 'back gate' of Bedhampton Water Works (beside the rail line where there was once a foot crossing over the railway to Kingscroft Lane alongside Bidbury Mead. Interestingly a Goldfinch was eating some of the flowers.

SAT 23 JAN

At last the CHERRY PLUM blossom is out in the hedge of Southmoor Lane with just five flowers open on the IBM Playing fields side. After seeing it I headed home along Langstone Mill Lane, and on the brick wall of the West Mill there was a small plant of RUSTYBACK FERN with its strongly toothed leaf edges and distinctive 'rusty back' of spores.. Although I may have seen this before when the plant was smaller and I was less certain of its identity I have not recorded it and it thus becomes my first 'new species' in 1999 for the Atlas 2000

FRI 22 JAN

Along Thornham Lane today the Cherry Plum blossom was bursting its buds, but no flowers open yet. On the corner by Thonham Grange the SWEET VIOLETS were flowering well and in Prinsted I saw my first fully open DAFFODILS and one WINTER ACONITE flower

THU 21 JAN

At Southmoor Lane and Wade Lane the Cherry Plum blossom was still not open, and in the north of Lyels Wood at Stansted genuine wild PRIMROSES had sharp yellow tips protruding from the buds but again no flowers open. I did hower come on my first SNOWDROPS outside the cottage at Aldsworth Pond

INSECTS:

TUE 19 JAN

Answering a knock on my door this morning I found Maureen Coleman bearing a jamjar in which a couple of moths were nestling around Primrose flowers (the Primroses were incidental - the first source of nectar that came to hand at this time of year). I offered the opinion that the moths were Angle Shades (by shape and colouration and by the time of year, though they were a trifle small in size) but Maureen said they were Golden Plusia moths as their caterpillars had been feeding on her delphiniums and had been identified by Peter Sewell. Knowing the difficulty of identifying any caterpillar (their colour, size and location all seem to differ from what the books say!) and being as concerned as Maureen was about the likelihood of the moths surviving at this time of year I had another look at my books after she had gone, and have convinced myself that the moths were more likely to have been Angle Shades than Golden Plusia, not only by their appearance and time of year but also by the fact that Maureen says that the green caterpillars pupated in the soil. Both species have green caterpillars (Angle Shades can vary in colour) and Golden Plusia can occasionally attempt a second generation in a year (which could give a winter emergence) but the two species pupate in different places – Golden Plusia on the underside of leaves, Angle Shades in the soil. One other clue is that the Golden Plusia caterpillars are more like 'loopers' with legs at either end of the body and a gap in the middle whereas Angle Shades have the more normal set of 'prolegs' supporting the middle, but I was not told about this factor. All of which goes to emphasise two points – one is that moths do fly, find nourishment, and survive on the wing in every month of the year, the other is that identification of caterpillars is notoriously difficult in many cases. I find the supplementary information about the time of year at which species is in the caterpillar stage, the foodplant, and the place of pupation, are perhaps more useful to identification than the look ad size of the caterpillar. (I won't go on to say that I personally also find it almost impossible to perform the mental gymnastics needed to relate the features of a living moth to those shown in the artificially pinned out specimens used in moth book illustrative plates!)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 24 JAN

Springtime temperatures and wet soil have spurred MOLES into a frenzy of digging and today in Stansted Forest I saw many ordinary molehills and one extra large, domed one which made me wonder if it was one of the 'MOLE FORTRESSES' in which the female has her grass lined nest chamber. I understand that Moles are particularly grumpy and vicious creatures which never remain in each others company for longer than the essentials of mating require, and that to accommodate this temperament the male and female have their separate tunnel systems which meet at this 'fortress'. I do not seriously think this large molehill (half way up the grassy 'Broad Ride' going north from the main avenue opposite the path from Horsepasture Farm) was a 'fortress' as it was not the meeting point of two lines of hills, and mating does not normally take place until the beginning of March.

FRI 22 JAN

My first news of FROGSPAWN came from an unexpected source – a caller to Radio Solent asking if anyone could tell him to whom he should report the early arrival of the frogspawn in his garden pond. I believe he lived on the Isle of Wight, and he was excited as the appearance of the spawn on Jan 14th was almost a month before his expected date based on previous years. In response to his request a caller then came on

to give the old Romsey phone number of the Naturalists' Trust 'Hopline' which she had found very useful many years back. I understand that nowadays the Wildlife Trust think that providing a 'dating agency' to put people who want to get rid of frogspawn in touch with those who want to receive it is not a proper use of staff time and donors money, and also that with no proper understanding of the causes of the ongoing 'frog plague' it is not a good thing to move frogspawn that may be infected with the disease to new waters. The only other mention of Frog activity that I have heard of so far this year was a mention from Nigel and Gwynne Johnson of one crossing a road in the Meon Valley about a week ago – presumably heading for its spawning ground.

Cycling out of Emsworth Marina towards the Thorney Main Road I saw, on my side of a bramble patch at the Marina end of the connecting road (north side), a very handsome Fox curled up in the open about 20 yards from me, enjoying the warm sunshine and keeping an eye on me but not at all concerned about my presence watching him through my bins. In the bramble patch behind I saw the movement of another fox – presumably the vixen engaged in household chores while the 'old man' snoozed in the sunshine. I guess they will have mated by now and will be producing cubs in that bramble patch in mid-March.

THU 21 JAN

In Havant Thicket with the morning mist only just clearing at 8.30am I saw two separate Roe couples (both I think mother and daughter from last year) as they scurried off to their daytime hideouts, but much later I came on another trio, this time a healthy buck in velvet keeping close tabs on his intended doe still with last year's fawn. Normally my visits to the Thicket show me abundant evidence of deer paths, nibbled vegetation, and fresh droppings, but few sighting of the animals themselves.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS - 1999

WEEK 02

JAN 11 - 18

BIRDS:

SUN 17 JAN

Today, after watching the Timsbury RING NECKED DUCK (sleeping as usual) but not spotting the Ferruginous Duck, Ian Calderwood went looking for Great Grey Shrike in the New Forest at Black Gutter Bottom and as far south as Pitts Wood but failed to spot either Shrike or Hawfinch – perhaps if he had kept on south he would have come on the one John Goodspeed saw yesterday on Hampton Ridge. He came nearer to success with the BLACK BRANT at West Wittering but the geese were disturbed by a dog (others had seen the Brant at 1pm today). Returning to Gosport via Broadmarsh he found the RING BILLED GULL was coming for bread so got good views of that bird

I had an excellent view of the 'Daw Lane' LITTLE OWL (see Tim Timlick's sighting noted last Thursday) from the Hayling Coastal Path this morning and can now amplify my description of where to look. As you come south and get the first clear look into the low-lying meadow which runs back to the bungalow on West Lane you will see the dead oak in the south hedge of that field. The dead tree is the eastmost of three oaks and the owl is on the centre tree (i.e. the one immediately west of the dead tree). This morning it was perched on the west side of the tree just below the lowest of the big canopy branches and close to a short dead broken off branch-stump. I did not see the Firecrest near the Golf Club entrance road (one Goldcrest, one Blue Tit and two Great Tit were the only birds there despite standing for some time on the Links Lane approach road and then going in behind the brambles using the difficult narrow entry a little west of the electricity sub-station and park bench). At the Ferry I saw one Cormorant and watched a man being winched down from the Coastguard rescue helicopter into a speeding RNLi inshore rescue boat – presumably for practice – but did not see a Diver.

SAT 16 JAN

The Evening Class outing this morning was to Farlington Marshes where they saw 48 different species including the AVOCET (both of the two in the lake), a female Stonechat near the point and a colour ringed Black Tailed Godwit (said by Chris Cockburn to be a visitor from the Wash). Brian's account goes on to say "Birds we were told about by other birders, but did not see, were 3 Short-eared Owls flying over Long Island and a Peregrine perched on a post. Other birds on the recent sightings board that we missed included 1 imm Merlin, 1 escaped Saker, 1 Water Pipit, 1 American Wigeon, 4 Little Stint, 1 Spotted Redshank, 1 Greenshank, 10 Pochard, 3 Tufted Duck, 17 Black-necked Grebe, 1 Whimbrel, 1 Red-necked Grebe, 2 Slav Grebe and 1 Guillemot." Brian comments on the mass of Brent and mentions that a count of 3000 is noted on the board, but I also see from the last three HOS annual reports (1994,5,6) that winter numbers seem to be dropping. The 'winter peak month' figures for Chichester

Harbour as a whole are 12647 in Jan 94 which dropped to 9567 in Feb 95 and to rose a little to 10769 in Feb 96. Similar Langstone Harbour figures are 7776 for Jan 94, 6750 in Jan 95 and 6215 in Jan 96 (when there were 4,000 grazing on Farlington Marsh – presumably the 3,000 listed on the board now relates to that grazing figure)

John Goodspeed had a good day in the New Forest, seeing a SHORT EARED OWL at Bramshaw Telegraph, a GREAT GREY SHRIKE on Hampton Ridge and then going to the Avon at Ibsley where he saw 28 BEWICK'S SWAN.

Kevin Stouse led his walk from Nutbourne around the Cobnor peninsula but saw relatively little – the main interest was in a flock of perhaps 100 FIELDFARE and a similar number of REDWING in a copse in the fields west of Chidham village. Kevin also told me that last Monday he had been surprised to see a Greenshank close to Langstone Mill and also remarked that when he was by the Brockhampton stream he had seen many of the Chiff Chaff taking a close interest in the wooden pallettes stacked in the industrial estate – perhaps a delivery of pallettes had arrived complete with spiders.

I spent a couple of hours this mornng checking out the birds on the IBM Lake for the delayed WeBS count and, in place of the winter Coot flock that I expected (in past winters when inland water is fozen up to 120 birds mass there) I came on the first territorial dispute between two pairs, the males fighting viciously. There was one flock of 33 birds and a total of 58 Coot but their 'early spring' behaviour reflected the general atmosphere, as did the presence of a pair of Swans, presumably back to check that no other Swans were muscling in on the territory. When handing in my count to Dennis Bill he told me he had seen one SLAV GREBE in the harbour (north shore area) In the afternoon I passed Langstone Pond and watched a restless flock of around 600 GOLDEN PLOVER. From the Royal Oak I could see around 80 KNOT whose gait when feeding reminds me of old ladies wrapped in shawls and shuffling along where the Dunlin behave likely restless children, full of energy and brighter, cleaner clothes. On the mud off Pook Lane I saw the most encouraging sight of the day – 57 SHELDUCK where there were only 32 in last week's count, but this is still a little short of the 64 which I would regard as the minimum winter number on this mud flat.

John Gowen's notes for the past week arrived in my letterbox today and I see that he was at Farlington Marsh last Monday (11th) and saw an unspecified number of BEARDED TIT in the reeds near the reserve building with 4 STONECHAT nearby. On the 12th he found the COMMON & GREEN SANDPIPERS at Budds Farm Pools (the east one empty). On Wednesday he went to north west Thorney where there were 250 Lapwing on Eames Farm fields and 25 Tufted Duck on the Little Deeps but otherwise very low numbers (only 12 Shelduck in the Emsworth channel and 6 Wigeon on the Great Deeps west of the road). Back at Langstone that day he recorded what will probably be the peak count for this winter of 1135 GOLDEN PLOVER. On Thursday he saw the RING-BILLED GULL at Broadmarsh (same day as Tim Timlick's sighting noted below) but he, like the rest of us, failed to see the Goosander there.

FRI 15 JAN

John Goodspeed was perhaps the only birder who ventured out today and he was rewarded with a glimpse of several 'crests', one a FIRECREST, on both sides of Links Lane where it enters the Golf Club property on Hayling. Going on to the even windier Gunner Point sands he found 13 SANDERLING feeding but did not spot the Great Northern Diver (Ron Cole watched it recently from within the shelter of the Ferry Inn). I suspect this will be a good weekend for shoreline birders but not so good for the battered oceanic species that may have been swept in.

THU 14 JAN

At Broadmarsh this morning I met Tim Timlick who had seen the RING-BILLED GULL on the concrete case of Budds Farm outfall before I came along and who gave me his news from Hayling, the most exciting item being the presence of at least six, maybe nine, FIRECREST in the bushes on your right as you drive into the Hayling Golf Club along the short stretch of Links Lane from the Ferry Road. Tim has seen six around the electricity sub-station there and Bob Hoare is said to have seen nine or more. From his window overlooking Hayling Bay Tim has seen a juvenile KITTIWAKE recently (suprisingly the first he has seen this winter) and he has also seen the 'Daw Lane' LITTLE OWL back on its favourite perch at the base of what he calls the 'middle oak' in the hedgerow going west to the coastal path from the bungalow on West Lane near Daw Lane. (To see this bird go south on the Hayling Coastal Path from the pillbox where a path goes east to the West Lane bends. At first there is a thick hedge and thicket on your left, and as soon as you have a clear view of a meadow on your left look at the trees half way along the south of the field –there is one dead oak and several living ones and the owl may be almost at the base of the 'middle oak' of the living ones, or somewhere there).

My own sightings at Broadmarsh included the Kingfisher glimpsed in flight up the Hermitage stream just north of the A27 (I was looking upstream under the bridge) and both COMMON and GREEN

SANDPIPER on the east pool at Budds Farm (both east and centre pools were almost drained and the Sandpipers were together on the larger stony islet in the east pool) Cycling home up Southmoor Lane from there I heard my first GOLDCREST SONG of the year from the thick Lawsons Cypresses. Back at home I had a phone call from Sue Drewett who had just been watching a young male Sparrowhawk perched in her garden for over an hour, and in my own garden a female Sparrowhawk went across my lawn at waist height within ten yards of me without showing any concern (the tits in the bushes were screaming with fear).

Richard Barker today told me of the second DARTFORD WARBLER he has come on in Havant Thicket this winter. The first was on Nov 16 at SU 719103 and the second on Dec 29 at SU 715105. The two sightings seem likely to be of the same wintering bird but you are more likely to hear it than see it.

A message from Mark Cutts passes on news from Kev Ilsley who today (I think) saw the MED GULL back at Southsea Canoe Lake and also saw SEVEN PURPLE SANDPIPER at the Castle (at low tide)..

Brian Fellows news includes messages from the internet recording Ring-Billed Gulls still at both Broadmarsh and Timsbury, and more excitingly a BLACK BRANT at West Wittering. The last bird of this race which I saw was in a flock of 57 Brent off the South Moors last April, and presumably that flock was passing through on their way east. At this time of year the flocks are more likely to be resident for the winter so I guess this bird may be seen again – possibly it is the same one that used to be a regular on the west shore of Thorney Island in past years? News of this bird reminds me that I have heard nothing of Light Bellied birds around Langstone Harbour since two November sightings (Ian Thirlwell saw one back at Milton on Nov 12 and Brian Fellows saw one on the Southsea Playing Fields near the Canoe Lake on Nov 17).

Brian remarks that he heard few Robins singing today which reminds me that I have been surprised to hear so little song from Wrens for several weeks – I know they have the usual quiet period when moulting in the autumn but I would have expected them to be at least as vocal as Dunnock at the moment.

WED 13 JAN

My last message tonight came from Paul Boulton who was at the Staines Reservoirs today, finding the south reservoir still drained and the Peregrine still present, but he also found that the number of SHELDUCK had almost doubled from 30 seen on Dec 30 to 57 today. A Great Northern Diver and several Slav Grebe were also there.

A RED KITE is ‘hanging about over Old Winchester Hill’ at the moment. This was a parting gem from a sparkling talk that I, with at least 100 others, enjoyed from Mick Finnemore at Havant Arts Centre this evening. We had some beautiful slides and a lot about the wildlife of this wonderful nature reserve, but what made this talk so much more interesting than the normal presentation that we have from the usual ‘wildlife expert’ with great photographic and identification skills was the insight into the reasons why we find these rarities in particular places on account of their habitat requirements and species interactions, and the problems of managing the land to ensure the survival of certain species at the expense of others. Rabbits, deer, sheep, civil servants, new age travellers, dog walkers, naturalists, archaeologists and the general public were a few of the interacting species which determine the survival of our flora and fauna – all sharing an overall lack of understanding of the impact of their actions on the natural environment. I am tempted to say that I came away with the impression that we can only enjoy the natural wonders of this hill because the army blasted the scrub off the hillside during the war and the land is too steeply sloped to make profitable farmland – I don’t really mean that, and I do recognise the vast amount of time and expertise that has gone into the management of the nature reserve, but the talk did re-inforce my fundamental view of nature conservation which is that we get what we really, really want, and until the subconscious mind of the general public recognizes a need for a thriving wildlife the efforts of the few fighting their last-ditch battles on isolated nature reserves are doomed to failure. Read what Bob Page (the retiring director of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust) has to say in his farewell article at the front of the new issue of ‘Wildlife’ – namely that we have made vast strides in talking about, and doing things in support of wildlife conservation in the 21 years since he joined the Trust, but nevertheless the threats to wildlife are still as great as ever and there is a lot less of it left to protect.

On New Year’s Day Helen Gutteridge heard a Blackbird sing briefly near St Faith’s Church in the centre of Havant – very much a ‘one-off’ event but a lovely bonus for the day. Song Thrushes are now in full voice every morning with Mistle Thrush heard occasionally. Wood Pigeon have been heard supporting the Collared Doves on several days, and Dunnock sing fairly regularly with Great, Blue and Coal Tits heard as frequently as any species. I still have not heard Chaffinch singing properly but I’m sure they will as soon as the weather improves. Both Linnet and Goldfinch twitter their ‘flock songs’ when the sun shines and no doubt Skylark are singing where they can still be found.

Tony Gutteridge told me tonight that on Dec 28 at Nutbourne he had seen a female or juvenile MERLIN

forced to the ground by a Crow, and that on Jan 6 he had seen two BRAMBLING with Chaffinch at Up Marden. Among other casual news today I heard that a Little Egret has been seen more than once recently in the concrete channel of the Hermitage Stream where it runs through Leigh Park just upstream of Barncroft Way, and Diana Bishop from Warblington Castle told me that she has seen up to a dozen Egrets in the field north of the castle (the one with cattle by the farmhouse).

Brian Fellows regular news tells me that 5 Brent were on Southsea Common today – the first time he has seen any there this winter – and that a pair of Pochard were new visitors to Baffins Pond (a single female had been there earlier).

A summary of birds seen on New Year's Day (plus welcome news that local donations to Hampshire Wildlife Trust now stand at £160 and are still rising) reached me from Gwynne Johnson today. For interest this includes a mention of birds seen by Rosemary Webb in Japan on New Year's Day, among them 12 species that are to be seen here, but the thing that caught my eye was that the Japanese call their special birds "living national treasures" – perhaps the Japanese are once more a step ahead of us in moving towards a public opinion that does see wildlife as important to their nation?

TUE 12 JAN

The Mediterranean Gull was again absent from the Southsea Canoe Lake when Brian Fellows visited there today (there was a single Tufted Duck and 50 Swans) and the wind and rain meant that he did not manage to see the Eastney Great Northern Diver. Yesterday he found a pair of Swans on the Emsworth Slipper Mill, making me wonder if these are the Peter Pond pair moving back to guard their nest site. (Incidentally I noted a pair at Emsworth Mill Pond making a start at co-ordinated neck dipping on New Year's Day, and one of those birds plus others I have seen recently was disproving the 'Mute' name with quite a vocabulary of grunt and groans). South of Emsworth Mill Pond, on the shore by the Sailing Club, the wintering Greenshank was also seen on Monday.

The Broadmarsh RING-BILLED GULL was seen yesterday by Kev Ilsley according to a message from Mark Cutts in Gosport. Mark ventured out in the rain today and found Ringed Plover, Grey Plover and Redshank in Haslar Lake with Mergansers on Stoke Lake by Walpole Park and a Goldeneye in Anglesey Lake at the end of that creek – no mention of Goosander.

MON 11 JAN

To see one Bittern is most birder's unfulfilled dream, to see two within half an hour must be the thrill of a lifetime, and to see a number equivalent to the whole British population of these birds must be more memorable than winning the lottery. Moira Doherty managed to achieve the second state of bliss (on the scale I have defined) in a short visit to Fleet Pond around dusk on Saturday 9th and her message says that by Sunday evening the number of Bittern present at Fleet was thought to be more than three – with really hard weather approaching if this rate of arrival is kept up it should be possible to achieve the state of nirvana by the end of the month.... This visit to Fleet seems to have been just one part of a grand tour of Hampshire, Surrey and a bit of Berkshire made by Moira over the weekend and she may have been a little dis-oriented by the end when she saw 6 Bewick's Swans on what I assume was the Hampshire Avon in the Fordingbridge area (if you want to find them try "Lane opposite pub, left off Fordingbridge Road, over river" in the Hants/Wilts/Dorset border area.)

PLANTS:

SUN 17 JAN

On Portsdown today John Goodspeed noted over a hundred BEE ORCHID LEAF ROSETTES, a few of which were in an area mown last summer which John intends to try to protect for the coming summer. Going round the IBM Lake yesterday I also noticed how prominent the leaves are at this time of year and I know from past experience that those leaves will vanish from sight as the spring advances and they will not re-appear until the flowers are about to show, so if they are to be protected from mowing this is the best time to mark their location. On Hayling today, at West Town station, I looked once more on the banks of the ditches which separate the station grassland from the fields to the east and north and this time found one of the clumps of Primrose leaves had a definite flower bud in its centre – Sue Drewett says she has effectively wild ones that have been flowering for some time in her garden but I have yet to see a flower in a genuinely wild location.

SAT 16 JAN

My visit to the IBM North Harbour site for the monthly WeBS count this morning produced the usual good list of 28 flowering plants (to which I added another three at Langstone to give 31 for the day without even counting Dandelion let alone many plants I could have easily found locally). The high spot was the expected sight of the small clump of special HAWTHORNS ('GLASTONBURY THORNS') planted by the IBM Lake which regularly flower in January – today at least 12 flower heads were blooming though none of the leaves were fully open as they sometimes are by now. Another expected sight was a mass of THYME LEAVED SPEEDWELL which always flowers early there on a certain bank. The WINTER HELIOTROPE is now in full flower and three huge carpets were spread on the ground in different places, each giving off a strong scent from the mass flowering. By the canal MARSH MARIGOLDS were still in flower (sometimes they have run out of steam by January) and one plant of HEMLOCK WATER DROPWORT was covered with flowers. Perhaps the most unexpected sight was of several plants of SMALL SCABIOUS in flower and one each of BLUE FLEABANE and HAWKWEED OXTONGUE, but I was equally pleased to record False Oat Grass (along with Annual Meadow and Cocksfoot) which I have not seen so far this month. The big colony of 'Bulbifera' sub-species of Lesser Celandine had plenty of leaves to show (as did many Bee Orchids) but no flowers. At Langstone this afternoon I found another clump of normal LESSER CELANDINE flowering, and passed a large plant of SMOOTH HAWKSBEARD, but although I was able to get into the Wade Court wet meadow and scan the Wade Lane tree tops with my binoculars I could not find a single open flower among the thousands of buds on the Cherry Plum trees which line the south end of the lane.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 17 JAN

A further note from Michael Bending today on the subject of newts is well worth quoting verbatim. He says "The newts are quiet at the moment because it is rather cold. If it's reasonably warm I would expect them to start laying eggs by mid February. This is worth seeing. The female lays a single egg on the underside of a pond weed leaf and then carefully folds the leaf over with her hind feet so protecting the egg."

Michael goes on .."I don't believe they are as rare as is sometimes suggested. One web site I visited said there were about 400,000 in the UK. I guess they are not that widespread - where there are any they tend to be in large numbers. In the past I have counted over 30 in our pond. Although the newts are very successful in our pond, frogs are less so. They have been having a hard time during the past few years. Each year I have found several dead ones - I assume from the frog "plague". We have had spawn but it doesn't last long - the newts eat it. Comparing GCNs with the others, the difference in size is much more obvious than your figure of 50% larger might suggest. The GCNs are much more heavily built. There really shouldn't be any confusion."

SAT 16 JAN

This afternoon I checked out a local frogspawn pool but could see no sign of frogs or spawn – and no messages have reached me to say that others have had more success in finding them. I did however receive a welcome and interesting message last night from Michael Bending who tells me that GREAT CRESTED NEWTS have returned to his garden pond in the Waterlooville area in which he regularly has all three newt species (a few Palmates have also returned but so far none of the Common (smooth) newts). I must admit that I have never seen the Great Crested species but I reckon I would have little difficulty in recognizing one if I did as their average overall length (6 to 6.5 inches) is half as long again as the Common species (around 4 inches) with the Palmates come third at no more than 3 inches. If you come on a male Common Newt in the breeding season it's bright belly colours and prominent crest may tempt you to think you have the rare Great Crested species but there is a simple way of distinguishing crested males – the Common species has a continuous crest along body and tail where the Great Crested has two separate crests, one on the body which stops short of the tail, then another crest on the tail. The real problem with newt identification is I think between the Common and Palmate newt females, or males out of the breeding season. At all times the chief distinction is that Common newts have prominent spots on their backs where the Palmate are almost unmarked (like small Common Lizards) – in the breeding season Palmate males have webbed hind feet and very inconspicuous crests compared to Common.

WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS – 1999

WEEK 1

JAN 4 – JAN 10

BIRDS:

SUN 10 JAN

Today's top local news comes from Alistair Martin who saw two redhead SMEW on the West Trout Lake at Chichester (seen from the Trout fishery carpark) and then walked south of the fishery building to see a female RUDDY DUCK in the shade of the overgrown island in the East Trout Lake. Yesterday Alistair was at Broadmarsh and had good views of the RING BILLED GULL opposite the slipway – he says it now has a more strongly marked bill (brighter yellow, bolder black) and a head and nape streaked rather than spotted as it was last year. When it bothered to wake up he could see the pale eye. Up at the head of Chalk Dock near the A27 he managed to see the American Wigeon on a rising tide and he heard that the Scaup had been seen between the small Broadmarsh carpark and North Binness.

At Needs Ore today Mark Litjens saw a Great Northern Diver and a Peregrine, heard the Raven calling and almost ran into a female Brambling near the carpark. He then came to Brockhampton and saw 16 Chiff Chaff around the stream and Budds Farm (no one I know has seen the Yellow Browed Warbler). Finally his pager had an unconfirmed report of a female SURF SCOTER drifting east off Hill Head (Titchfield Haven) at the same time that one was said to have been flying norther east over Church Norton. Mark also tells me that the American Wigeon was on the Farlington Deepes at midday today and that a few WHITEFRONT GEESE can be seen in the Avon Valley between Matcham's viewpoint and pumping station.

Trevor Carpenter tells me that the notice board is back on the Titchfield Haven seafront after a year's absence and that it reports 4 GOOSANDER on Brownich Pond (west of the Haven, half way to Hook). From the cliffs at Brownich on Jan 2 Trevor counted 66 Great Crested Grebe in the usual winter flock on the sea (a much lower number than the hundreds he has seen there in past years) – the notice board reports a single Slav Grebe there at present and gives daily sightings of BITTERN in the Haven (but it requires long and patient watching in the cold to glimpse it). Over at Port Solent Trevor saw 204 GREAT BLACKBACKS on the grass (there are masses around in January and the Paulsgrove tip is a magnet for them – when I was working in the IBM offices years ago I was impressed one January by an airborne flock of around 400). Finally he has seen the GREENSHANK in the top of Fareham Creek (Delme Pool) which Lyndon Hatfield says has been there all winter (see Jan 7)

Kevin Stouse and his party found 19 AVOCET (out of a total of 21 said to be in the harbour) on parade as one squad half way down Pagham Harbour from Sidlesham Ferry to Church Norton (off the gorse clump with the tide rising) after they had been watching a WHIMBREL among a flock of Curlew in the fields as little nearer the Ferry Pool. They missed a Short Eared Owl which had been hunting over the scrub near the gorse, and just one of their party (catching up from behind) said he had seen a very large White Egret flying over the harbour, supporting a tale told by a dog walker of what could have been a Great White Egret – these are only rumours, but I seem to remember that a genuine Great White Egret did visit Kent and Sussex about this time a year ago.

At Church Norton Kevin's party saw 5 Knot and the Long Tailed Duck which has been there all winter but they missed a couple of Spotted Redshank which Kevin saw near the shingle spit there yesterday. Out on the sea they saw one Eider and just 4 Slav Grebe but they met a lady reserve warden who told them that windsurfers were responsible for dispersing the large flock that is normally there. She also said that the Surf Scoter which they did not see is very difficult to distinguish from a Velvet Scoter until it flies and shows no white in its wings.

Kevin Stouse also told me that last Tuesday (5th) he had seen a redhead Goosander on the mud off Langstone Mill – I assume this must be the Hermitage Stream bird making its first appearance east of Langstone Bridge. This could account for my failure to see it at Broadmarsh on New Years Day. Also on Tuesday Kevin saw Green Sandiper at both the Wade Court Meadow and on the South Moors (Tamarisk Pool)

My morning was pleasantly spent counting the birds in Tipner Lake by the M275 into Portsmouth as part of a Greater Solent area low tide count. The sight of over 4,000 gulls close packed on the sunlit mud (and at one point when scared all taking off together to form a swirling blizzard of gulls) was impressive and there was a good variety of waders and wildfowl to be seen but the most unexpected sight was an escaped KESTREL which flew from the ground into a clump of shoreline Alders in the open grass area of Alexandra Park north of the Mountbatten Centre. I was told that it had been surviving there for some time and would not allow itself to be captured but as it has both bell and jesses it's chances of catching mice and voles must be greatly reduced, clattering its bell as it 'silently' hovers above them. (If anyone

can re-capture it they will probably be saving its life). Another sight that caught my eye was a Dog Fox trotting openly across the middle of the Portsmouth Grammar School playing fields at 10am and stopping to cock its leg against one of the central flag posts

A message from John Chapman on my answerphone when I got home reported 3 PURPLE SANDPIPER at Southsea Castle and a female BLACKCAP in his Langstone garden. Brian Fellows took his wife to lunch at the Royal Oak at Langstone today and persuaded the massive flock of GOLDEN PLOVER to put on a spectacular flying display for her before they flew off southeast (toward the ploughed potato field at Northney Church Lane again?). Brian's internet news today (all sightings from yesterday 9th) is of the Smew at Chichester (as seen by Alistair today), the FERRUGINOUS DUCK at Timsbury where there is also said to be a RING OUZEL and a RING-BILLED GULL, and of 2 BITTERN at Fleet Pond. In his own garden Brian has had a first visit from a Chiff Chaff and I see his House Sparrow count is down to a maximum of ten birds.

SAT 9 JAN

A message from Mark Litjens today reads ... "I started in the New Forest to try and see Hen Harriers come out of a roost site that has been used in past years but there was no sign of any today at first light. I then walked along Ashley Walk to Pitts Wood and eventually had 1 Hawfinch. The Great Grey Shrike had been seen near this area in recent weeks but a 2-hour walk around the area was again fruitless.

Later in the day I visited Brockhampton/Broad Marsh and had 12+ Chiffchaff along the track by Budds Farm sewage works. A friend of mine saw a Chiffchaff of the race Tristis here earlier in the morning but I saw no sign of it whilst I was there nor any sign of the reported (from last w/e) Yellow-browed Warbler. A Kingfisher dashed along the stream and a Sparrowhawk caused panic amongst all the birds on the shoreline. From the Broadmarsh car park I walked towards the dual carriageway and found the female Goosander standing in the middle of the creek on the uncovered mud."

Ron Cole saw the Hayling Ferry Great Northern Diver at midday today from the Hayling side (and may have glimpsed the second bird).

The weather was kind to those involved in the Chichester Harbour low tide counts this morning. I arrived at Langstone Bridge just as the top of the sun was appearing over Hayling but lack of wind coupled with no overnight frost made it comfortable to sit on the ground for the first hour, and later the sun felt like a spring morning. The Golden Plover flock had increased to just on 600 birds and there was an all time high for January of 162 Knot and 1157 Dunlin but I am still concerned about the absence of Shelduck. My count of Shelduck on the January count for the past three years illustrates my concern – in 1997 there were 379 birds in this section, last year I recorded 234 but today only 58. I know that the numbers make a sudden jump at this time of year and maybe the birds will arrive tomorrow, but until they do I will be worried for their future. A similar three year view of Dunlin shows 561 in 1997, only 186 in 1998 and 1154 today, and for Knot (which only appear on the Langstone shore sporadically) I have figures of 40, 4 and 162.

Brian Fellows also did a low tide count at Tournerbury where a Peregrine caused much unrest but did not appear to be hunting (for some time it perched on a post in Dip Rythe, offshore a little north of Tournerbury Wood). He recorded 22 species on the shore in average numbers but was surprised to find a single Shoveler among them and to have only 38 Teal – his count of 68 Shelduck was apparently the sort of figure that he expected. . Not recorded in the count he saw the tame Pink-Foot goose still on the farm pond where it feeds with the domestic geese

A message from Ian Calderwood reached me last night just after I had made my update but I have passed it on to Kevin Stouse who will be leading tomorrow's walk to Pagham Harbour and Church Norton. Ian had actually seen the Surf Scoter yesterday afternoon at around 3.30pm when, he says, "It was drifting from the Severals area at Church Norton towards Selsey and twice flew back towards the Severals." Ian is also the first person to tell me that the bird is a female. I hope Kevin's party manage to see it.

Today Mike Harris was perhaps the first person to see the Hermitage stream Goosander in 1999. He saw it this morning in the gravel quay pool and no doubt it will continue to be seen there for a month or more yet this winter.

FRI 8 JAN

The person whom I would most like to have been for today was Dave Mead so that I could have enjoyed the wonderful sound of WOODLARK SONG which greeted him as he arrived in the carpark at Liss Forest (he didn't even have to make the walk to the old tank on the hill). Dave says there were two birds flying over, one giving the beginnings of full song, the other silent (hopefully a female). Nearby a Great Spotted Woodpecker drummed and distant drumming from a second bird could be heard. When he crossed the road and walked south west away from the heath along the old railway line Dave came on a flock of

around 30 SISKIN with a few Redpoll and Goldfinch, and feeding on the ground near them was a single male BRAMBLING with Chaffinches. (I gather there are quite a few Brambling in the north of Hampshire, but very few are in the south)

Dave Mead also told me of his visit to the New Forest yesterday. At Black Gutter he saw the Great Grey Shrike and two Hen Harriers (male and female) before heading to the Rhinefield Hawfinch roost where he saw a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and 8 Hawfinch.

A message from Brian Rackett today tells its own story – he says “After reading your recent note concerning a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER near the Hayling Ferry pontoon at Eastney, I visited there in my lunch break today (around 12.30) and was delighted to see TWO such divers, very close in to the shore, just south of the pontoon. They allowed me to walk along the shingle just a few yards from where they were diving and superb views were appreciated. It certainly beat sea watching on Selsey Bill in the spring when you will be lucky to get nearer than half a mile from a fast moving "Diver species" passing by in around 20 seconds.”

Brian Fellows went to Nutbourne this morning while the sun was still shining and in the muddy meadow he not only saw three Snipe but once more had a good view of WATER RAIL. Plenty of other good birds were in that field and in the bay (20 Black Tailed Godwit were back on the mud) but one unusual sighting was a FOX sunning itself in one of the fields. Going on to Thornham Point he spotted a STONECHAT in the marsh fields south of the lane.

At Church Norton the SURF SCOTER that was reported on the internet as being there on Tuesday (5th) is back in the news – David Parker tells me it was reported as being still off Church Norton up to 3.30pm today but well out to sea. (Dave Mead recalls that there was one which stayed for some time off Littlehampton last winter (?) and wonders if this is a return of the same bird, in which case it could hang on for some time)

100 FIELDFARE and 2 BUZZARD were seen at Stansted this morning. John Gowen found the Fieldfare on the open grassy slope of Rosamunds Hill (eastern edge of the forest) seen on your left from the dip in the tarmac approach road just before you reach Stansted House itself, and I saw the Buzzards (hopefully a pair) over Lyels Wood, one being mobbed by a Crow, the other soaring peacefully. In the afternoon I paid a quick visit to Broadmarsh and Budds Farm with the tide up. Construction work within Budds Farm proceeds apace – the southern area (just north of the pools) has been cleared and flattened, and up in the north (near the Brockhampton stream bridge) a huge hole is being dug, Maybe because of this activity and the thinning of scrub within the site the Chiff Chaff were very active around the Brockhampton Stream bridge – I reckon I saw at least ten, and there were probably at least 20 there, but I could not see the Yellow Browed Warbler nor hear its high pitched ‘dog whistle’. One unusual bird on the pools was one of what I call the ‘Claret Headed Mallard’ from Langstone Pond (big as Mallard they seem to a hint of Tufted Duck plumage on the body and their heads and necks (which would have a bright green sheen in a darke Mallard) have a dullish claret coloured sheen.

Correction to note about Baffins Pond (see Tue 5 Jan). Brian Fellows points out that the figures he sent me were for 24 visits to the pond covering the whole year at the rate of two a month so the figures which I said were for the past 24 weeks were actually for the whole year. My apologies for making an unwarranted assumption.

THU 7 JAN

A message from Lyndon Hatfield today gives interesting news from the Fareham area. He says “Today (Thurs 7) there was a SLAVONIAN GREBE on Fareham Creek between Cams Bay and the Pylons at about 12.30 together with reasonable numbers of Little Grebes (8+), Goldeneye (10), Mergansers (15+). (seen from the western shore) Also the longstaying GREENSHANK (from Nov at least) was still in Fareham Lake below the Delme railway bridge (normally about 100yds south of the bridge on the eastern shore). -- Late news from Sunday 3 Jan (about 2.30pm) was a flock of about 50 finches at the old Wickham railway station which comprised SISKIN, REDPOLL and Goldfinch but I couldn't pin down numbers of each, except mostly Siskin and Goldfinch with perhaps 3-4 Redpoll. Directions: from A32 northbound at Wickham church turn left under bridge and right by Chesapeake Mill, Keep right by Fire station to parking area on right. They were in the trees by the car park.”

Brian Fellows today walked by the River Ems from Lumley to Westbourne and back and saw one Green Sandpiper by the river where it runs along the north bank of the A27 for a short way. Elsewhere he saw a Grey Wagtail and watched two separate Chiff Chaff feeding in Willows. Incidentally, my surprise at finding Curlew Sandpiper listed as a ‘species not seen’ on Brian’s account of birds seen on New Year’s Day was justified – this unlikely species was standing in at short notice for a Common Sandpiper that was indisposed and unable to appear in the list that day (i.e Curlew was a misprint for Common).

WED 6 JAN

David Parker has been beach-combing on the internet and has picked up a gold nugget of info which says that the RING BILLED GULL was back at Broadmarsh slipway at mid-day yesterday (and if it really is the same bird that was there last year it should stay around for a bit and have a less nondescript plumage). Also from the internet is news of a SURF SCOTER on the sea off the Severals at Church Norton – it was seen there around 13.30 yesterday but I doubt it will go on the list for Kevin Stouse's walk next Saturday. Back at Brockhampton the YELLOW BROWED WARBLER may be around though the only evidence for it is a note on the Farlington Marshes notice board which says it was seen on Jan 2nd but no precise location is given. (The notice board also gives the Ring Billed Gull and says it was first seen on Jan 4th)

Brian Fellows was near the Hayling Ferry at Eastney at 1130 (tide about half up) today and had close views of a GREAT NORTHERN DIVER coming up with crabs as it swam from the harbour entrance into Eastney Lake (aka the Glory Hole and Langstone Marina area). He says it was like the bird that was in Anglesey Lake at Alverstoke (Gosport) last year and its scaly back suggested a first winter bird. Being generous with his Christmas presents Brian also passes on the description of a first winter bird given in the BWP CD-ROM which he was given – “Like winter adult, but upperparts browner (except for blackish forehead) and less uniform, with round (not square) feather-margins grey and appearing as pale scales in good light. Bill pale grey, sometimes bluish-white with dark culmen and tip even more obvious; eyes browner than adult.”

The Farlington Marshes notice board today listed the following (as reported by Brian Fellows). “General: Peregrine 2, Little Egret 6, Water Pipit 1, American Wigeon 1, Wigeon c600, Pintail c120, Shoveler 80. Harbour: Black-necked Grebe 15+, Slavonian Grebe 2, Red-throated Diver 1+, Scaup 2, Red-necked Grebe 1. Lake/Stream: Avocet 2, Little Stint 4, Greenshank 1, Spotted Redshank 1. Broadmarsh: Ring-billed Gull 1 ad (4/1), Yellow-browed Warbler 1 (reported 2/1).”

My cycle ride from Havant down Hayling Island to Gunner Point and back in pleasant sunshine today added the missing BLACK TAILED GODWIT to my new Year List with 25 of them on the Langstone shore and also Turnstone (about 60 of them sitting out the high tide in a carpark puddle on the Beachlands shore near the Inn on the Beach.. There were plenty of Ringed Plover with the hundreds of Dunlin roosting around the Oysterbeds and 20 Merganser in one group in the pools but still there is a great shortage of Shelduck – only four on the Langstone shore, another four on the Northney shore near the bridge (there could have been a flock of them in the old boating lake near the marina but I did not look there), none in the Oysterbeds area and just another four at the Kench. One thing that there was more than usual of today was Great Tit song.

TUE 5 JAN

Brian Fellows could not find the Purple Sandpipers at Southsea Castle (rough sea) nor the Med Gull at the Canoe Lake but did go on to find the first five SHOVELER back at Baffins Pond and increased numbers of Brent feeding on land (300 at Portsmouth Sixth Form College, 210 at the University Milton campus, and 400 on St John's College playing fields north of Farlington Marshes but only 19 on the Southsea playing fields near the Canoe Lake. Brian has also sent me statistics of the birds at Baffins Pond which show that he has seen 18 species of wildfowl there in the past 24 weeks (well 16 if you knock off the lone hybrid goose and the two ugly sisters – Muscovy ducks. The average number of Mallard over the past six months have been 143 (with a peak of 216) and a single female RED CRESTED POCHARD has been there in 4 of the past 24 weeks (I wonder if it is now at the Milton Lakes or on Great Salterns lake?). Possibly the most interesting birds at Baffins are the BARNACLE GEESE which have a successful feral breeding record and the flock now numbers 42 (if you see Barnacles on Farlington Marshes do not assume they are genuine wild birds).

Today's best birds for me were a couple of small parties of LINNET making their quiet 'flock song' in tree tops at Racton. Another bird seen today which I did not see on New Year's Day was Pheasant, but I was more pleased with the sight and sound of a single Fieldfare exploring a small garden orchard at Woodmancote. As I set out through Racton Park Farm I reckoned there were perhaps 100 Rooks and 50 Jackdaws in the tall trees that will soon be full of Rook's nests. When I returned the sun was setting and most birds were settling for the night but there was not a sign of the Rooks –if they had settled lower in the branches they might have been less visible but I'm pretty sure I would have heard them. I would have thought the rookery trees would be the obvious place for their night roost but apparently not – I know that there are traditional night roosts used in winter to which hundreds of Rooks will fly for miles, but where they go locally is a gap in my knowledge – can anyone help?

MON 4 JAN

Today's post brought a letter from the RSPB which I suspect you will also have received but if not you may be amused to hear that they seem to be the first casualties of the 'MILLENNIUM BUG'. Their computer

obviously did not know what to do when printing the expiry dates on the million membership forms that have just been posted to members and so it put the expiry date as January 1999 instead of 2000. Today's letter was to tell us not to panic – we can still enjoy life and membership for the whole year (but no promises for anything after Dec 31st). On the same subject I hear that the Port of Southampton put out a 'Warning to Mariners' forbidding any of them to sail within the waters controlled by the port for two hours either side of midnight four days ago – there was a genuine fear that the computers that control their engines, steering, and no doubt the gin optics, would fail and the boats would charge about the port like headless chickens. I hope the lack of any such failure augurs well for next New Year.

MOORHENS were investigating a nest box on the Emsworth Slipper Mill pond when Brian Fellows made his rounds today. If this mild weather continues I expect a good number of unseasonable nests to be built but I also expect that the bitter weather now hitting Chicago will, in about three week time, put a damper on such activities among our birds. One bird that will not be breeding this week is a lone Canada Goose that re-appeared on Emsworth Mill Pond today after a prolonged absence. It would be interesting to know why birds that are normally gregarious occasionally go solo – have they been sent to Coventry by their fellows, have they crept off to die and then thought better of life, or are they genuinely individuals with a different outlook on life to their fellows?

Brian also sent me a statistical summary of all the birds which have been seen in his garden during the past year. His list has 26 species, but like the English Cricket Team it has a very long tail of species that do not stay at the wicket for long. Only four species were present in every week of the year (Starling, House Sparrow, Collared Dove and Greenfinch) Surprisingly even Blackbird, Robin, Blue Tit, Great Tit and Dunnock took substantial holidays away from the garden (presumably not nesting in or near it) so I suspect that a few nestboxes will be going up to encourage them to stay in 1999.

PLANTS:

FRI 8 JAN

Being on Budds Mound today (where the brown buds on a WYCH ELM were breaking open to show the colour of the 'purple pinchusions' that will open as flowers very soon now) I went along Southmoor Lane to check for flowers on the roadside hedge of Cherry Plum trees (hundreds of white buds looked as if they must flower within a couple of days) and found a GOAT WILLOW in the same hedge bearing a full crop of golden anthered PUSSY-PAW flowers. On my way home along the path running along the south of the A27, and north of XYRATEX, I saw half a dozen Hazel bushes with open catkins and also open were the purple catkins on COMMON ALDER and the green ones of GREY ALDER.

TUE 5 JAN

Today's big surprise was to find a single small plant of PEPPER SAXIFRAGE in flower beside the track leading down from Racton Park Farm to the main road. Down by the main road junction by the River Ems there is as yet no sign of the Butterbur shoots but elsewhere on this afternoon's walk (on the roadside leading east from Woodmancote) I found another patch of Lesser Celandine in flower and along that same road there is a lot of Butcher's Broom with superb red berries as well as the tiny flowers for which you have to search. Another item worth noting was my first sight of Blubell shoots appearing in Racton Park Wood.

MON 4 JAN

HAIRY BITTERCRESS was flowering in the Langstone area today, another newcomer to the flowering plants of 1999. I have found flowers on Wavy Bittercress in damp woodland throughout the winter (including Stansted last Saturday) but Hairy Bittercress has had a good pause since its last appearance.

INSECTS:

TUE 5 JAN

A very tatty RED ADMIRAL warmed itself on the outside frame of my workroom window in this morning's sunshine. The air temperature today very nearly exceeded the all time record for a January day which was set in 1956 at 14.5 degrees. The butterfly must have thought April had arrived, but I doubt it found any flowers to restore its energies with nectar.

When examining the plant of Hairy Bittercress that I found yesterday I was surprised to find a tiny aphid on its stem and this led me to wonder how these tiny creatures survived the winter as I was under the impression that aphids emerged as live young from their mothers, but were unlikely to live long enough to survive the winter (and I could not see them having sufficient energy to continue giving birth to new generations during the winter months). The answer to this question I read is that aphids are superior to us

in not being restricted by one form of reproduction and sexual activity. In the summer many aphids are wingless females capable of reproducing live young without any sexual activity, i.e. they are parthenogenic females. This is a good strategy for keeping the race alive but can lead to a degeneration of the species over time, so from time to time some of the young are born as winged males which disperse to mate with females of different lineage. A third form of reproduction occurs in the autumn when the females cease to give birth to live young but instead lay eggs, and it is these that over-winter, hatching in the spring into parthenogenic females which start giving birth to live young as soon as they are sufficiently mature.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

MON 4 JAN

On New Year's Day David Parker saw something that eluded all the birders from whom I have heard – a mouse on his garden nut-feeder during the day time. From his description of long tail and light coloured underparts I guess it was either a WOOD MOUSE or YELLOW NECKED MOUSE. Both are said to be good climbers with the Yellow-Necked maybe the better climber and the most likely to come to garden sheds and the like in the winter but by far the less common species. As both species are supposed to be strictly nocturnal this was an unusual sighting in every respect (perhaps the mild weather has encouraged them to go on breeding and this was a mother with hungry mouths to feed). It would be interesting to hear from people who deliberately set out to feed small mammals – I believe that the idea is to set up a sort of covered bird table (so that the birds don't take all the food) with access via bushes or artificial walkways (best as covered tubes). If the table is just outside a window and gets peripheral illumination from the lights in the house you can in time attract and watch quite a collection of animals by night. If there is a possibility that these are Yellow Necked mice it might be worth having a word with Richard Jones at Fort Widley to see if he is interested in setting some Longworth traps to capture them so they can be identified – he was undertaking a survey of them in 1998.

SUN 3 JAN

If you need a MED GULL for your 1999 list it seems that the Browdown Battery carpark at the west end of Stokes Bay (Gosport) is worth a try. Mark Cutts told me of an adult there on Nov 27th (see Dec 1st entry) and today tells me that both an adult and a first winter bird were seen there at high tide today by Ian Calderwood. I haven't heard anything for years about the Med Gull that used to be a regular winter fixture by the hovercraft slipway at Lee on Solent – perhaps this one at Browdown is its replacement.

David Parker was at Southsea Castle today and tells me that you can also claim your PURPLE SANDPIPER for 1999 if you go soon before they run out of stock – he only saw 2 of the 6 that were there on Dec 8th. He did not see the Canoe Lake Med Gull but I guess that will show again and save you a journey to Browdown.

Brian Fellows news of New Year's Day has just reached me and it started magnificently with a male BULLFINCH breakfasting on Forsythia in his garden (no doubt it was one of the 'Northen' race to make things even better, but he does not make that claim). At noon he led his large party out from Emsworth to Thorney Deeps west and they achieved an overall score of 62 species (including those seen by members of the party before joining the walk). He tells me that they found 5 MERGANSER on the Emsworth Mill Pond and another 2 on the Slipper Mill pond (the first to come into either pond this winter) - when I cycled by those ponds a little later I did not even bother to look closely as I thought I had ticked everything likely to be there – I never saw a Merganser so let that be a lesson to me. I'm glad to see that they did not see a Turnstone as that was also missing from my day list (and I did get my own back by being lucky enough to see the Emsworth Harbour Greenshank which eluded them). With telescopes they were able to see Gadwall, Wigeon and Pintail very distantly and with only binoculars there was good viewing of the waders on the Emsworth Channel mud and the geese (Canada and Emperor) on Eames Farm fields. Coming back to Emsworth they enjoyed song from both Mistle and Song Thrush in the Brook Meadow area, and saw a Chiff Chaff feeding in the willows overhanging the western branch of the River Ems. I am slightly surprised that in the list of birds not seen (but presumably expected) Brian lists Curlew Sandpiper – are there any still around in this area? One probable that they may have been close to was the Wickor Point winter Whimbrel – is that still around? (I saw it with Kevin Stouse's party on Nov 22nd and understood from Barry Collins that it was likely to stay the winter)

Today Brian Fellows visited Aldworth Pond and Stansted Forest. He found more than 30 Coot on the pond with 28 Tufted Duck and 4 Gadwall. In the forest he also saw a Kestrel and Tit flocks but does not report any hunting of the tits by the Kestrel (see my note yesterday). Brian also sends me his garden bird news for the past week (he's still getting up to 15 House Sparrow, 24 Greenfinch and 12 Chaffinch). Sticking strictly to the rules of the garden bird survey and not counting the species flying over he had a reputable 25 species using the garden during 1998 and has started 1999 well with the Bullfinch.

SAT 2 JAN

A prompt reply from Mark Litjens tells me that the AMERICAN WIGEON is now likely to be seen where the Chalk Dock channel ends south of the A3M/A27 junction and can best be viewed from the concrete outfall of the stream emerging from under the roads to drain into the Chalkdock channel (the big outfall nearer to Broadmarsh than Farlington Marsh – not the small inconspicuous one near the Farlington Marsh entrance). This place always attracts a lot of Wigeon and other birds but when the tide is high they go elsewhere and when it is low they are difficult to see in the creek so the rising or falling tide is the best time to look with the rising tide preferred. The bird has also been seen recently in the broad part of the stream in the Marshes (just upstream of the lake).

Mark also tells me that he does not know who holds the record score for a Hampshire New Year's Day birdlist but he is certain that Mike Duffy for one has beaten the 100 barrier. Will the proud current owner of the title please step forward and reveal himself. (no prizes offered).

A message from Mark Cutts last night told me he had seen a BULLFINCH on Browndown (the shoreline between Gosport and Lee on Solent) where he has never seen one before and asked if this was an unusual location for this species. Today Chris Mead (in his monthly bird news in British Wildlife magazine) tells us that Danish observers saw 5,475 Bullfinch migrating west on Nov 3rd, possibly heading for Britain. These migrants are of the North Eurasian race (*Pyrrhula pyrrhula pyrrhula*) which differs from the British/Irish race (*P. p. pileata*) in being marginally bigger than our birds, the males being brighter pink and the females paler grey on the back. I suppose a coastal site like Browndown is a likely place to see migrants heading west along the channel but my memory of the place includes a number of small scrubby oaks and other trees scattered over the shingle and forming a denser belt on the inland perimeter of these ranges, and these could attract restless local Bullfinches. Has anyone got more up to date news of these migrants?

Chris Mead's news in British Wildlife includes two "tabloid headline" items which caught my eye – the first is of a PALLAS WARBLER that was unfortunate enough to kill itself by flying into the windows of the English Nature HQ at Peterborough (how much must they fine themselves under the Health and Safety clauses of the Wildlife and Countryside legislation?), the second of a GREAT BUSTARD which flew over the Poole/Badbury Rings area of Dorset during the first weekend in November, scrupulously hiding from all birders and only showing itself to the odd golf-course worker and farmer. Presumably the Bustard escaped from some illegal breeder and was eaten by one of the many Black Panthers which roam the west country – do you have better suggestions about its origin and end (a reverse package holiday arranged by Spanish airlines?). The death of the Pallas Warbler is one of many such where birds crash into windows and there is little that can be done to stop them – placing hawk silhouettes on the glass may deter some birds flying through what appears to be a gap between buildings during the day, but if the bird is already in panic flight from a live hawk it may not perceive the plastic silhouette, and in any case the main problem occurs at night when the windows reflect moon or other light. We all know that lighthouses attract thousands of migrants to their death against the light (though netting and perches save some lives) but I was not aware that brightly lit skyscraper buildings (especially in the US) kill masses of birds in the same way.

The LANGSTONE GOLDEN PLOVER flock disappear to unknown destinations at high tide, but today Maureen Coleman found a flock of around 300 (either from Langstone or Thorney Island) on a ploughed potato field at Northney. The field is the first one on your right as you walk east from Church Lane on the new permissive path to the east seawall (and can come back via St Peter's Avenue).

A phone call from John Gowen today told me of a 'tired' Guillemot seen in the Oysterbeds by him at noon, making me wonder if it could be the same bird for which help was requested last Monday (see Dec 28th). At best they were the same bird and it has survived the week, at worst it is the second of a series of dying birds. John also gave me his birding notes for the past week which contain an interesting sighting of 60 Shelduck at Budds Farm outfall on Monday 28th Dec.. I suspect this was part of the influx that I have been expecting, but if so they did not stay with us (they may of course have been a chance collection of birds already in the harbour). My worries about the current shortage of these birds were confirmed yesterday when I was at Thorney Great Deeps (west) and could only see 7 Shelduck in total on the deeps and Emsworth harbour area. John's notes also mention that Mistle Thrush nested in the South Moors/Mill Lane area of Langstone last year, reminding me that one of the things that caught my eye yesterday was what looked like a new Mistle Thrush nest in the low fork of a tree in the Denvilles area. I suppose they could be starting to nest now in this mild weather, and it is also possible that the presence of just one Collared Dove in my garden where we have daily seen a pair together could mean that one is already sitting.

I was in the north of Stansted Forest west this morning with little to see other than many Coal Tits but as I was leaving I saw a KESTREL come flying at full speed from the Warren Down meadows into the trees at a height of 30 feet just where I was watching a number of small birds which uttered cries of alarm and scattered at the sight of this raptor. I saw the Kestrel making such a hard turn, with wings and tail spread to give maximum thrust, that I immediately assumed it was a Sparrowhawk though its wings seemed very pointed. As it straightened up and flew away from me I saw the light brown upper wings, and when it perched on a branch in my view I confirmed it was a Kestrel. Whether it was chasing a bird in the air (or hoping to catch one that might get in its way) I do not know but it looked as if that might have been its intention. It certainly did not have any success.

FRI 1 JAN

A brief message from Mark Litjens tells of his New Year's Day listing success – 93 species (does anyone ever get the 100 in Hampshire on this day?). Mark's message reads – "Highlights were excellent Barn Owls at Keyhaven with

Tawny and Little calling, Med gull at Milford-on-sea, Redhead Smew at Needs Ore (though no Raven there), Ferruginous Duck at Timsbury, American Wigeon in Langstone Harbour and finally Avocet, Little Stint and Short-eared Owl at Farlington Marshes. In all an excellent day with 93 species.” I’ve sent a message in return to ask where the American Wigeon was – sounds as if it was back in the Farlington Marshes area and seen from there, but I’m not certain.

I hoped for 75 species and got 73 on my 1999 list today during an eight hour cycle around my patch in good weather. Best bird of the day was undoubtedly a male LESSER SPOTTED WOODPECKER which (as is their way) just appeared in my binoculars while I was searching for Tree Creeper in Stansted Groves, allowed me two or three minutes of excellent viewing as it worked the smaller branches of oak trees close to me, then flew off. Other goodies were prolonged song from CHIFF CHAFF at Budds Farm, a KINGFISHER flying down the Brockhampton stream, the GREEN SANDPIPER waiting for me in the Wade Court Meadow pool, half a dozen GADWALL back on Aldsworth Pond, and forty or more FIELDFARE in the Nutbourne area (with just one Redwing). A single GREENSHANK was kind to me as I was passing Emsworth Harbour and a single male PINTAIL showed itself off the Emsworth Western Parade while the day ended with a magnificent aerial display by the combined GOLDEN PLOVER and LAPWING of the Langstone shore and a GREY WAGTAIL in the Lymbourne stream when I was almost within sight of home. The baddies which failed to turn out today were the MERGANSER (none seen), the Broadmarsh GOOSANDER, and Tree Creeper and Green Woodpecker plus Sparrowhawk and Stonechat. Never let it be said that Canada Geese are goodies but I was pleased to be able to add them to the list in the fields west of Eames Farm on Thorney, the more so as they had the single EMPEROR Goose with them. For other items on today’s menu see the Flowers page for news of the first flowering CELANDINES and the Other Wildlife page for an encounter with a velvet antlered ROE BUCK