

RALPH HOLLINS WILDLIFE HIGHLIGHTS – 2002

WEEK 52 DEC 23 - 29

BIRDS:

SUN 29 DEC

Everyone must now be hearing regular Song Thrush song both in the mornings and evenings (one singing loudly here in Havant yesterday evening may well have been paired as a second silent bird was in the next tree to it) but as darkness fell on this wet and windy evening I was very pleasantly surprised to hear full throated Blackbird song from a garden close to the A27 in the Brockhampton area of the town. The song stopped me in my tracks as I was heading home for tea, and the Blackbird must have seen me as it decided to leave me in no doubt as to its identity by flying out of the garden shrubbery on to the house roof above me, where it continued singing. +++

If you don't feel like driving to Keyhaven to see this bird Jason Crook tells us today that the regular Broadmarsh adult Ring-billed Gull was back at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream near Broadmarsh Slipway yesterday (Dec 28) in the morning.

SAT 28 DEC

John Clark was in the Ibsley area of the Avon Valley (north of Ringwood) today, where the water levels are exceptionally high, bringing in a different collection of birds to those normally seen here - just one juvenile Bewick's Swan was seen in flight heading north (suggesting that the other Bewicks could be in the Woodgreen area just north of Fordingbridge). 2135 Wigeon and 1530+ Teal were much higher numbers than usual here and with them were 713 Gadwall, 197 Shoveler, 375 Pochard and 13 Goldeneye. Goosanders numbered 16 (24 were seen last Sunday) and there were 8 Green Sandpiper as well as some 975 Coot. Among the gulls were more than 9 Yellow-legs and 544+ Lesser Blackbacks. +++

At Brownwich Pond on the Solent shore west of Titchfield Haven Bob Marchant today saw what he is convinced (well almost) is an adult male Ferruginous Duck - the description sounds good but there may be some dispute over the pale cheeks and the amount of black at the bill tip (adult male should have only the 'nail' black). The bird was previously found by John Faithfull who saw it flap its wings to reveal the extra broad white wing bar. +++

FRI 27 DEC

Peter Raby had today's most unexpected sighting when he visited Titchfield Haven and found a total of 59 Eider off shore where there have been only 12 or 13 at the most so far this winter - these must be new arrivals as this count exceeds the total of all those reported from the Hampshire and Isle of Wight coasts so far this winter. Another Christmas present for birders was a Red-throated Diver which arrived far inland at Fleet Pond yesterday (found by Gilbert Rowland) and was still there today. +++

Other birds within Titchfield Haven reported by Peter Raby included 248 Black-tailed Godwit - a nice flock but nowhere near the total of 1000 birds that have been there in previous winters (the December 2000 count was up to 1500 of them). The male Marsh Harrier is still present and Peter also saw 3 Pintail. +++

The reduced number of Black-tailed Godwit at Titchfield Haven does not mean that we have fewer of them in Hampshire, but merely reflects a change in their choice of winter quarters - the large flock that favoured the Haven a few years ago can now be found in the lower Avon Valley where Kevin Sayer today estimated a total of 800 (seen from the roadside at Sopley) but he probably saw only one part of a much larger flock (last Sunday - Dec 22 - John Clark counted very nearly 2000 of them a little further upstream). Other birds to be seen from Kevin's viewpoint were around 2000 Lapwing, 250 Wigeon, 50 Shoveler, 20 Redshank and 2 Egrets. Later Kevin went to Ibsley and saw no Bewick's, suggesting that they had flown to join the flock at Slimbridge by the River Severn though Paul Beckett had found 11 there only three days ago and there is a good chance that they are still in the area. +++

Still on the subject of Black-tailed Godwit I see that Trevor Carpenter today found 112 of them at Cams Bay in Fareham Creek, probably in addition to the 248 seen at Titchfield Haven, and no doubt there are still hundreds of them elsewhere in Portsmouth, Langstone and Chichester harbours (though I have no recent figures and have myself noticed a drop in numbers around

the Langstone area). In the Cams Bay area Trevor also found an increased number of Shelduck (though only a total of 12) and noted the return of 29 Golden Plover. 2 Great Crested (but no Little) Grebe were present with 10 Goldeneye, 222 Lapwing and 279 Brent Geese (no Canadas!).

THU 26 DEC

Here in Hampshire Brian Fellows took a walk around Gunner Point on Hayling Island and found at least 50 Sanderling on the sands there (apparently not deterred by shoreline walkers). Brian also saw, perched on a buoy near the Hayling-Portsmouth ferry, the regular Shag which frequents the mouth of Langstone Harbour. +++

On the other side of Portsmouth Trevor Carpenter found the Great Northern Diver still showing well in Paulsgrove Lake where it has been a fixture since Dec 7. While in the Port Solent area Trevor also counted 242 Great Black-backed Gulls on the large expanse of grass adjacent to the Paulsgrove rubbish tip, presumably indicating that since the resident falconer on the tip lost one of his falcons under a rubbish crushing bulldozer his attempts to scare off the gulls with megaphone and shotgun are not being very effective.

WED 25 DEC

I recently raised the question of how common it was to see flocks of Collared Dove in the winter months and both Brian Fellows and Trevor Carpenter have told me of sightings which indicate that it is not at all uncommon to find flocks of 20 or more in garden-type situations in winter months. Brian says that when he lived in a house whose garden backed onto the fields around the River Ems between Emsworth and Westbourne he regularly expected flocks of up to 50 birds in his garden at any time between October and December, and Trevor lists three more places where he would expect to find flocks of 20 or more birds. The first of these sites is just west of Portchester Castle on the north shore of Portsmouth Harbour, the second is further along that shore in fields bordering houses near Cams Bay, and the third is in the newly developed Priory Park estate lying between Warsash and Locks Heath where at least 20 birds were crammed into a tiny garden seen in the past few days.

On Dec 22 I reported Richard Creer's sighting of the 'Emsworth Spoonbill' flying into the original Little Egret roost trees by the Thorney Island Great Deeps at dusk, and I assumed that it was intending to spend the night there but today Barry Collins saw a different aspect to the bird's behaviour. With high tide at 3pm this afternoon Barry was not surprised to find the Spoonbill in the Egret roost trees in the late afternoon when he arrived to count any Egrets that might come to spend the night there - what was surprising was that, as the tide fell at dusk, and 37 Little Egrets flew in for the night, the Spoonbill took off and headed for the Emsworth channel, presumably to feed. When watching the Wade Court Egret roost at Langstone I frequently find three or more Grey Herons in the trees before the Egrets arrive - the Egrets come in and settle around the Herons, but as the last Egrets arrive and it becomes fully dark, the Herons invariably take off and fly away, presumably to feed rather than to roost elsewhere. I guess that it is equally difficult for Herons to see fish in murky water after dark as it would be for the Egrets but I suppose the Herons may be after other prey such as mice or voles that come out to feed after dark and which can be detected by sound, to be caught by the swift bill of an otherwise motionless Heron as they run around its feet. I can't imagine a Spoonbill going for similar prey in the dark but maybe it's large and no doubt sensitive bill tip is equally good at detecting and catching marine prey in murky water after dark as it is in the daylight (whereas the Egrets do seem to rely much more on their eyes to guide their spear like bills onto their prey).

TUE 24 DEC

In West Sussex I see that the birds currently on show at Pulborough Brooks included 1400 Lapwing, 100 Pintail and 50 Shoveler while Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Hen Harrier can all be expected by visitors. Darren Fry adds that all the regular birds can also be seen but does not give counts for either Bewick's Swans or Ruff. +++

In the far east of the county I finished my shopping while it was still light and paid a quick visit to the Wade Court Egret roost where at least 35 Egrets flew in but my count was interrupted by the arrival of our local MP (David Willets) and his wife who paused in their jogging to admire the birds and ask questions about them..

Also seen in that area was a Firecrest, a Water Pipit and one Corn Bunting - the latter reminding

me that where, just three or four years ago, a flock of 150 Corn Bunting was expected on the Downs above Brighton each winter (and similar flocks of 100 plus in other areas including Fishbourne near Chichester), the highest count of Corn Bunting reported from Sussex this winter has been the 19 birds seen on Thorney Island on Dec 8, and the highest count of the year the 37 birds seen at Hoe Cross near Hambledon on April 6. +++

A theory to explain the decline of the Corn Bunting has been proposed by David Harper (of Sussex University) and Nick Brickle (Game Conservancy) based on their research in West Sussex farms. I have only seen a brief note of their findings in the current issue of British Wildlife magazine, but as I understand it they have found that cereal crops on these farms are being harvested much earlier in the year than used to be the case, meaning that the grain is available to the birds for a shorter period than it was in past years, and added to this there are fewer weed seeds in the crop or left after harvesting. The net result is that where in the past the Buntings could find food for themselves and their young for long enough to support two broods of young the food is now available for a period barely long enough to raise one brood. This has the effect of reducing the 'harvest' of young Corn Buntings by more than 50% (no second brood, and any first broods that have problems can run out of food before the young are old enough to survive).

A final item worth reporting comes from the Titchfield Haven website which has just been updated to cover the first three weeks of December and includes a full co-ordinated count of all birds on the reserve on Dec 16. Picking out just a few of the figures for that count I see that the Canada Goose then numbered 336 with 570 Wigeon, 314 Mallard, 212 Teal, 70 Shoveler, 57 Pochard (though 70 Pochard came to the evening feed on Dec 7), 23 Gadwall and 7 Pintail within the reserve. Among the waders there were 250 Lapwing and just 51 Black-tailed Godwit but 17 Water Rail were heard, as were 26 Cetti's Warblers. 5 Chiffchaff and 1 Water Pipit were also found.

MON 23 DEC

Last week's reports of Sanderling roosting on shingle at Southsea are echoed today by reports of Sanderling with Turnstone on the shingle beach bordering the Widewater lagoon at Lancing where Adrian Thomas of the RSPB saw.. {{ 15 Sanderling stepping awkwardly over the shingle }} .. and where Bob Kent later saw 26 Sanderling with 32 Turnstone. Also on the West Sussex coast the Ruddy Shelduck was still present at Brooklands Lake, Worthing. Over at Puckpool Point east of Ryde on the Isle of Wight more than 100 Sanderling were roosting on a shingle bank (very likely the same birds that were driven from the Southsea beach by dog walkers yesterday). Before being driven to roost by the rising tide at least 55 Sanderling were on Ryde sands where an Egret, 8 Bar-tailed Godwit and over 200 Brent Geese were unexpected sightings.. +++

I have just received a superb Christmas Card from Bob Chapman by email - a close up photo of a superb male Goldeneye swimming on a glassy sea wearing a Father Christmas hat (perhaps not all visitors to Farlington Marshes are aware of Bob's artistic talents - I have been privileged to see some of his sketch books of birds, but I was not aware that he was into computer art). With the card was news of what was to be seen at the Marshes yesterday, amplifying Will's sightings (given in Sunday's notes) with news of two male Goosanders flying south over the harbour, two adult Med Gulls, a Merlin and two Peregrines. Bob also gives the location for the Brant which Will placed vaguely on Portsea Island - it was in fact on fields just across the water from the reserve by the Portsmouth Outdoor Centre. +++

Another piece of supplementary info re Sunday's notes comes from Kevin Stouse who says that after I left his walk party a further 10 Egrets were in the Warblington Farm fields so the 'local group' of Egrets that spend the high tide period around the Wade Court area is still around 35 birds. Kevin also tells me that he too (like Brian Fellows - see notes for Friday Dec 20) has two Robins appearing side by side in his Havant garden without any show of aggression, though he had not thought that they might already have paired for the spring as Brian suggests.

Richard Carpenter yesterday visited Hook near Warsash where he found 27 Collared Doves, presumably in a sort of flock, and this reminded me that when I was near Portchester Castle for the Portsmouth Harbour low tide count on Dec 14 I had seen a similar number of Collared Doves flying around and perched in garden trees just north of the Castle. I did not comment on

them at the time as they have been a 'fixture' in that area for as long as I can remember, but Richard's report makes me wonder how common are these regular daytime gatherings of Collared Doves. I expect to see flocks of these birds in autumn harvest fields, and to find them coming to large night roost gatherings (e.g. in Warblington cemetery), but in the daytime they normally spread out over the surrounding area in much smaller groups (six or eight birds together being unusual). So how many places have regular daytime gatherings of 20 or more birds? I suspect that several farms where grain is to be found on the ground will have such gatherings (Heberdens Farm at Ildsworth north of Rowlands Castle springs to mind) and that the reason for all such gatherings is the regular availability of food, but maybe there is more to be learnt about these birds

John Clark has now published a summary of the findings of the Dec 14 Shrike survey in the New Forest which recorded a total of only three Great Grey Shrikes compared to the seven that were seen a month earlier. I think the consensus is that this result does not mean that half the Shrikes have left the Forest but merely that the weather (with its effect on their prey, the Shrikes themselves, and the observers) meant that fewer were seen. In the recent discussion of whether the Shrikes had changed their diet from beetles to birds one major factor was not mentioned - that is the use of the 'larders' for which these birds are famed - if prey is in short supply the Shrikes can stay hidden in cover living off these reserves (though, I would think, only for a short time). +++

The counts of other birds returned as part of the survey shows that most other species were considerably down in number - some, like the Fieldfares (down from 1575 in November to 946 in December) may have left the Forest, others (e.g. Redpoll down from 121 to just 6 and Crossbill down from 66 to 2) may have moved to different habitat within the Forest where the observers did not go, and some species numbers will have varied (up or down) just by chance. Against these declines there were several increases - Hen Harriers were up from 3+ to 5+, Ravens from 5 to 6, Buzzards from 11 to 14 and Snipe from 10 to 110 while two new species were added to the list for the winter (2 Willow Tit and 17 Mandarin). As John says, through having so many observers working on this co-ordinated basis more information is being gathered about the Forest's birds in general than could ever have been gleaned from casual records.

PLANTS:

SUN 29 DEC

The first Hazel catkins were fully open in Langstone today on a tree that is regularly the first in the area to come into flower - perhaps as a result of warm air and carbon fumes from the many cars that ceaselessly patrol the main road through Langstone to Hayling Island. The tree is easy to spot as it grows on the north side of the bus shelter in the layby near the entrance to Mill Lane and almost opposite Langstone High Street. Earlier I had counted 5 flowers now open on the Lesser Celandines by the Lymbourne Stream, and other flowers on today's list were Wood Avens, Herb Robert, Perennial Sowthistle (*Sonchus arvensis*), Meadow Sweet and Ivy-leaved Toadflax. If I took a magnifying glass out to check my front lawn (as I did earlier this week) I suspect I would also have found one plant of Thyme-leaved Speedwell with flowers ...

MON 23 DEC

Brian Fellows weekly newsletter for the Emsworth Brook Meadow site lists 21 flowering plant species seen there in the past week and among these are some that you are unlikely to have seen elsewhere, such as Wild Angelica, Wood Avens, Water Figwort, Tall Fescue, and (slightly more common) Common Mallow and Feverfew.

INSECTS:

SAT 28 DEC

Messages reaching me today report that a Peacock butterfly was seen in flight today at Pitts Wood in the northwest New Forest (seen by Les Stride), while Steve Boswell had a Red Admiral in his Lyndhurst garden on Christmas Day.

THU 26 DEC

Tony Wilson today went to a Carol Service in a church at Hove and saw a single Small

Tortoiseshell fluttering within the building - I hope it was able to return to hibernation within the building after the excitement was over. Here in Havant a Pine Carpet moth appeared on the kitchen window of Barry Collins house, and at Greywell in the north of Hampshire Paul Boswell's kitchen window also attracted a moth - this time a Mottled Umber (I think both sightings were after dark, the moths being attracted by light to the outside of the windows).

TUE 24 DEC

Two Red Admirals were seen in flight today - one seen by Mike Gibbons in his Christchurch garden just in Dorset, the other by Trevor Carpenter in his Fareham garden. +++

A lot more moths were seen at traps run last Sunday night (Dec 22). Here on Portsdown above Portchester Jon Stokes had two migrants (Silver Y and Rusty-dot Pearl), a Yellow-line Quaker, a Brick and a Mottled Umber as well as 6 Winter Moths and 12 December Moths. In the north of the county at Fleet Rob Edmunds also had Mottled Umber (two of them) plus an eighth moth species for the night - a Common Marbled Carpet.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 29 DEC

A Common Newt seemed to have decided that its winter rest was over yesterday when it was seen crossing a woodland ride in the New Forest by Les Stride, and a much more active water animal was seen by John Clark in the Avon valley (near fishing pools at Hucklesbrook north of Ringwood) when he came face to face with an Otter only ten yards from him and later saw it (or another) carrying a fish at a safer distance from him. +++

Also yesterday John Shillitoe had the now rare sight of a Hare in the open fields near Hoe Cross, west of Hambledon.

SAT 28 DEC

In his Warsash garden this morning Dave Tolcher had several male Frogs back in and around the pond, eagerly awaiting the return of females (and 'singing' to encourage them). Dave hopes to be able to record spawn in the pond before New Year's Day.

WEEK 51 DEC 16 - 22

BIRDS:

SUN 22 DEC

Will Walmsley was at Farlington Marshes today seeing his first Water Pipit (at the lake, not in the usual place on the stream by the reserve building) and a probable Jack Snipe. Looking west to the water by the Eastern Road bridge there were two Scaup (one female and one first winter bird), and around the reserve were 5 Avocet, 6 Stonechat, some 75 Knot and 400 Bar-tailed Godwit plus a lone Golden Plover. No mention from Will of Shelduck - I would have expected a big flock to be back by now on the water south west of the reserve around Little Binness but maybe we have them all in the stretch from Emsworth to the Oysterbeds. +++

Will also tells us that the 'new' Brant is still to be seen on grass by the Eastern Road, and passes on a very interesting report of a Bittern seen within the past week at a garden pond in Hambledon - this reminds me of the 'sickly' Bittern that, several years ago, spent some time in wet fields at Durrants (Rowlands Castle) and was last seen standing in the roadway of Prospect Lane where a stream runs under that road (the lady who told me about it had to swerve her car around a motionless Bittern standing with its bill pointing to the sky on the tarmac of the road). Perhaps the one in Hambledon is visiting the vineyard to 'take the waters' as a cure for its ailments? +++

Paul Winter was also in the Portsmouth area today, visiting Southsea Castle and seeing 1 Purple Sandpiper and 69 Sanderling (disturbed by dog walkers).

Song Thrush, Robin and Wren were singing as I walked from Havant to Warblington church to join Kevin Stouse's party heading for the Hayling Oysterbeds, and while I was with them I heard both Mistle Thrush and Dunnock song in the Wade Court area (but nowhere did I hear the strong Great and Blue Tit song that has been noticeable around my garden recently).

Viewing the Sweare Deep area from the Warblington shore with the tide rising we had most of the

expected birds plus one Turnstone feeding on the stony shore among a group of ten Ringed Plover. Both Bar-tailed Godwit (at least 50) and Knot (around 70) were present with plenty of Dunlin but surprisingly there were very few Redshank, Curlew or Grey Plover here (one or two of each). A flock of perhaps 200 Golden Plover wheeled in the sky but then headed east out of sight leaving a few Lapwing at Langstone and no Black-tailed Godwit that I could see. Shelduck were still numerous (I counted 56 east of Langstone Bridge) and one or two Merganser and Goldeneye were seen occasionally. At Langstone Mill the Kingfisher gave excellent views perched near the balcony of the Mill building before flying to fish from the boat hulk just offshore.

Reaching the top end of the Hayling Coastal path we had distant views of two Black-necked Grebe in the harbour before we reached the Oysterbeds in which there were at least 38 more Shelduck but the best birds were in the lagoon, starting with another Kingfisher. Curlew, Redshank and Ringed Plover were roosting on the Tern nest island, and in the water were troupe of 7 female and one male Goldeneye which delighted us with a full display - the male jerking his head back many times while just one of the females followed him closely, holding her neck stretched out submissively just above the water with her head turned slightly up to admire the back view of her chosen mate. In the same pool two male and one female Merganser gave a different sort of display, most of it being aggression between the males and involving high speed chases across the water but one male did once or twice stretch its neck up and open its bill to impress the female.

In the field adjacent to the lagoon a pair of Stonechat attracted some attention but we were distracted from them by a pair of Kestrels hunting in the background, the male of which caught a large vole - later we came on the male eating its meal in the branches of a poplar tree, viciously tearing flesh from it as an audience of small birds collected in nearby branches to watch in silent fascination. +++

Getting back to Langstone we found a high tide roost of 8 Egrets in the wet meadow south of Wade Court among the many Teal and Moorhens, and (returning home on my own up Wade Lane) I found another 17 Egrets in the meadows north of Wade Court.

Just over the Sussex border at the west end of the Great Deeps at dusk Richard Creer saw the Spoonbill fly from the east to settle for the night in the trees where the Egrets used to roost - one Grey Heron was with it. Whether the Spoonbill had been feeding further east in the Deeps, or whether it has discovered new feeding areas to the east of Thorney, is unknown. Richard also noted a Shoveler on the Little Deeps. +++

SAT 21 DEC

The Havant Wildlife Group had a Christmas special outing to Titchfield Haven for their regular Saturday morning walk and were rewarded with the sight of both Bitterns - on top of which they heard report that a third Bittern was now present (and I have heard this confirmed by others).

Also in today's entries on the SOS website is an interesting note regarding a subject that has been raised several times recently - namely the assertion that some of the Blackbirds that come here to winter are 'different' from our Blackbirds, but no one seems to know where they come from. Val Bentley contributes the following .. {{ I recall that when ringing at a site near Bristol in the early 1980's that our resident blackbirds had wing lengths averaging 129mm, while those new birds we trapped in winter could have wing lengths of up to 139mm. Unfortunately, none of them ever had a foreign ring on - or even one from another part of the UK! }} +++

FRI 20 DEC

Since Ian Thirlwell found Purple Sandpipers back at Southsea Castle a week ago Martin Gillingham has made at least two visits to look for them and today he found 2 of them present with a Rock Pipit and 7 Turnstone. Equally interesting is that on both visits he found over 100 Sanderling in a high tide roost on the shingle beach east of the Castle, between it and the Pier. The first sighting of the Sanderling was on Wednesday (Dec 19) just after high tide, and Martin was able to get within 20 feet of the birds without them flying off. More than 120 of them were there today between 1 and 2 hours before high tide. I think the Sanderling do not have a fixed high tide roost place on this beach (which is very subject to disturbance from walkers) and if they are not here they could be anywhere on the beach east of the pier right up to Fort Cumberland (the east end of this stretch, where the road curves inland from the promenade, is

one of the more likely places to see them, probably with Dunlin and Ringed Plover). +++

If you want to see the Sanderling the high tide period is the best time but that is not usually a good time to see the Purple Sandpiper which frequent the seawall below the promenade in front of Southsea Castle. They are most active when the tide is falling, allowing them to search for food among the still wet seaweed which is covered at high tide. If the tide is high I suggest going to where a cannon points out to sea from the castle wall - the cannon that is roughly in the centre of the castle's sea-frontage - where there is a small 'ravine' or gully in the stone sea wall running vertically down from a little below the promenade and you may see the Sandpipers roosting motionless in this gully - alternatively they may then be still active at the east end of the castle promenade.

David Thelwell today found four Hawfinch back at the Mercer Way/Canal footbridge site in Romsey and comments that they have returned almost to the day on the date when they were first seen last winter, but a message from Mike Rafter (who visited the Fishlake Meadows on Nov 24 and then saw a couple of Hawfinch in the Mercer Way area) suggests to me that they may have been around for about a month already. I hope they perform as well as they did last winter! +++

In his Emsworth garden today Brian Fellows found two Robins .. {{ feeding together on the grass in my back garden, with no hint of any aggression towards each other. }}. He concluded that they were already paired, and found support for this in David Lack's famous book on the Life of the Robin in which (page 64) David writes that .. {{ observations at Dartington showed that the first Robin pairs were formed in the middle of December, over 3 months before the birds nest. }}. In my own garden I have one pair of Blackbirds that seem to work together but only yesterday I witnessed a prolonged fight between two Blackbirds which clearly showed that there was an invisible line down the lawn marking the boundary of the more aggressive Blackbird's territory which the intruder had violated - maybe the aggressive bird was already defending a breeding rather than a feeding territory. While on this subject I also have a young male Blackbird in my front garden which shows no fear when I emerge in the early morning with bread and birdseed (mainly for my House Sparrows) - this Blackbird follows me around, almost within arm's reach, until it gets some bread (he also appears to take the bird seed from the ground). +++

On the same subject I have a pretty tame Song Thrush that is daily seen in my back garden, and I agree with Brian that Song Thrushes have now started singing regularly and strongly (if only in brief bursts). Yesterday I not only heard 'my' Thrush singing in the early morning but later heard two others when cycling through the Emsworth area. Blue and Great Tits, Collared Doves and Dunnocks, plus Robins, are all singing strongly now though Wrens are remarkably quiet. While in the Emsworth area I also enjoyed a good view of a Kingfisher flying across the north end of the Slipper Mill pond to perch in Tamarisk trees in the extreme north east corner of the pond by the junction of the A259 and Slipper Mill Road.

At Titchfield Haven, so Richard Carpenter tells me, both Bitterns were seen again today, as were two Dartford Warblers and the now regular Firecrest

THU 19 DEC

One Peregrine was back this morning on its regular perch on an electricity pylon overlooking the Wallington River where it curves round the west end of Portsdown when John Shillitoe was there. Nothing very unusual about that, but John then saw that a second pylon was occupied by a Kestrel while a Buzzard was plodding around the field below these two, searching for its breakfast of earthworms. Also feeding on the ground were some 40 Fieldfare and 100 Linnets
+++

Yesterday's news (for Dec 18) from Pulborough Brooks may indicate that there are 11 Ruff present - five were seen from one hide and six from another (though these could have been duplicates a count of 11 Ruff would not be unusual for this site).. I have already mentioned yesterday's sightings of Red Kite near Ditchling Beacon and 2 Snow Buntings at Cooden. which is close to the Pevensey Levels on which 2 Lapland Buntings, 4 Water Pipits and 6 Jack Snipe were seen. Off nearby Bexhill one Little Gull was seen and to the east of Bexhill in the Filsham reedbeds at Coombehaven one Bittern, one Marsh Harrier, two Chiffchaff and a Firecrest were reported

WED 18 DEC

Bob Chapman's new computer at Farlington Marshes has now settled down and today Bob was able to give us a quick email update on recent sightings at the reserve. His most unexpected news is that last Monday (Dec 16) a flock of 17 Bewick's Swans flew east over the reserve as if they had given up the idea of spending the winter here and were heading back to Siberia (more likely in view of my theory of bird navigation they had just come to the south coast after travelling overland and were casting about for landmarks that would guide them to their winter quarters but had by chance turned left instead of right on the first toss of the coin to decide which way to go - perhaps we will see them coming back soon when they fail to find the Avon valley to the east, or perhaps they were heading for the Arun valley in the first place). That sighting would be enough to make most people's day (I think sightings of Bewick's arriving at this time of year are much less frequent than are sightings of departing birds when the winter is over) but it was outdone by another very rare arrival at the Marshes - a Bittern coming into the reeds in the evening, flying over an Avocet which had already settled down for the night and causing a noisy commotion among the Bearded Tits in the reeds. Unlike Titchfield Haven and Fleet Pond very few Bitterns have ever been seen at Farlington (even though there have been sightings at other places in our area such as Sinah Lake on Hayling, the Lymbourne stream at Langstone and even in wet fields at Rowlands Castle that I can recall over the years) so I hope this one bucks the trend and stays at Farlington though Bob does not mention any further sightings since that one glimpse on Monday evening. +++

More general news from Bob is of regular sightings of three Avocets (a total of 19 were seen in Chalkdock Lake on one day early in December, and 5 were said to have been seen today), and the harbour has seen occasional Great Northern, Red- and Black-throated Divers with 2 Long-tailed Ducks last Monday (Dec 16). The total of Black-necked Grebe is now 17 and there are also 5 Slavonian Grebe in the harbour but the Red-necked Grebe seems to have departed. In the past week a Firecrest has been seen regularly near the stream spring in the northern part of the reserve and at the end of last week more Brent seem to have arrived bringing with them 8 more Pale-bellied birds (to make a total of 12 in the harbour) and a new Brant which Bob saw in two places by the Eastern Road in Portsmouth on Dec 15 when it was on the golf course and then on the Sixth Form College grass. Finally Bob says that the female Scaup (he has no doubts about its parentage) has remained on the Budds Farm pools, being visited briefly by a male Scaup during last week (the same bird was also said to have visited Farlington Marshes). +++

When the flock of Bewick's flew over Farlington on Monday Jason Crook was quickly on his mobile phone to warn Barry Collins that they were coming so Barry also saw the flock fly over (at about 1pm). Also on Thorney on Monday (Dec 16) Barry watched a Barn Owl hunting at dusk over the Thornham Marshes (east end of the Great Deeps) and earlier in the day a Great Northern Diver had been in Chichester Harbour mouth area of Pilsey island. Barry's news for today was of the Black Brant (first seen on Thorney Island airfield on Dec 11) back on the airfield today, when the regular Spoonbill spent the high tide period in the Thorney Deeps - it is usually there but yesterday it roosted on Fowley Island in the harbour just west of the Deeps.

TUE 17 DEC

On Thorney Island today Barry Collins noted 8 Bearded Tits somewhere in the reeds around the Deeps but the Spoonbill which normally roosts beside the Deeps during high tide today decided to sit it out on Fowley Island (just west of the Deeps at the point where the Sweare Deep leading to Langstone Harbour forks west from the Emsworth Channel). In Emsworth Barry saw one Med Gull on the Slipper Millpond and found a second one in Emsworth Harbour area.

Last Saturday (Dec 14) Kevin Stouse walked from the Pook Lane area of Warblington via Langstone to Budds Farm, seeing over 250 Golden Plover on the east shore at Langstone and two different Kingfishers (one at Langstone Mill and one on the Langbrook stream just west of Langstone village). Neither the Scaup nor the 'Dodgey Fudge' duck could be seen at Budds Farm but 7 Egrets and 6 Heron were in fields near Pook Lane.

MON 16 DEC

Richard Carpenter was in the Titchfield Haven reserve today and found good numbers of duck

species but only 45 Canada Geese and 41 Black-tailed Godwit (though he does point out that he did not check the fields and river north of the area you can see from paths and hides within the reserve). 107 Teal and 62 Wigeon were not exceptional, but he goes on to list 48 Pochard, 24 Shoveler, 23 Gadwall and 10 Shelduck all making a good show for visitors (who could also watch 23 Cormorants drying their wings - better than watching paint dry?). The flock of 48 Pochard is I think the largest that has been reported so far this winter in the local area but I note that a recent monthly update of the Titchfield Haven official website reported that 43 Pochard were in the reserve as early as Nov 17, attracted by the evening meal which Hampshire County Council provides for the wildfowl in its care at this reserve each winter evening. In addition to the Godwits waders included 250 Lapwing, 67 Oystercatcher and 28 Turnstone plus a single Sanderling on the beach with 5 Common Scoter, 2 Eider and 2 Great Crested Grebe offshore. The male Marsh Harrier was seen (both today and last Saturday, Dec 14) and there were 3 Chiffchaffs and 1 Egret in the reserve.

At Emsworth the Town Millpond remains drained at low tide but 32 Mute Swan were prepared to suffer the indignity of having to stand about on the mud in order to claim their free bread handouts from the citizens of the town. 118 Mallard also remained on the mud but perhaps they were after more healthy live food stranded by the retreating tide - probably minute organisms swallowed with a healthy coating of mud to help the medicine go down - certainly 8 Oystercatcher had flown in specially to see what this mud had to offer. 58 more Mallard were on the other two ponds with 28 Coot, but the Spoonbill was today feeding out in the water at the edge of the Emsworth Channel (as it had been last Saturday when I wrongly placed it in the Millpond). Brian has taken some good photos of the bird, and one of them makes a really good personalised Christmas Card which I have received with great pleasure!

My own birding today was an hour spent watching the Langstone-Warblington shore as the tide dropped. Each time I go there the composition of the bird community and the numbers of each species is different and much of it is unpredictable. Today the majority of the Dunlin seemed to have moved on to mud east of the area I was watching and only 2 Knot and 2 Bar-tailed Godwits showed up where there have been tens of Knot and hundreds of Bar-tails. Not a single Black-tailed Godwit could be seen today but in their place at least 30 Shelduck were feeding in the channels close to me as the tide started to fall, and later most of them came out onto the mud near me. Wigeon numbers had also increased to 40 in my section. Another bit of contradictory behaviour was the appearance of three or four Ringed Plover far out on the smooth mud where previously I have always looked for and found them in the stony, weedy upper shore. On the open water the Goldeneye had increased to ten but not a single Merganser showed up and the roost of Golden Plover which recently seemed to be increasing daily dropped from a count of 366 on Dec 13 to just 24 today. One interesting bit of behaviour was a standup fight between two Redshank which went on for the best part of a minute, the birds buffeting each others breasts and pecking at each other like fighting cocks (all over nothing as far as I could see). Not so unexpected was the sight of several Redshank arriving before the tide had fallen to expose the mud, wading about in the water and quite happily swimming when they came to a place where the water was deeper (Redshank and Avocet are I think the two waders which are most regularly seen swimming).

Other news for Saturday comes from Brian Fellows who was with the Havant Wildlife Group walking the Nutbourne-Prinsted circuit on the Chichester Harbour shore during the morning. The great majority of the birds they saw were at the Nutbourne end - the wet meadow through which the Ham Brook flows into the harbour had 250 Wigeon, more than 100 Teal and 200 Lapwing with 46 Black-tailed Godwit, 9 Snipe, a Heron and a Redshank (plus 40 Canada Geese which seem to have settled there for the winter - Tony Gutteridge saw 58 there on Nov 19 and a local resident told me they had been there for some time before that). Out on Nutbourne Bay among more Wigeon and Teal were 30 Pintail, 10 Knot, an Avocet and a Greenshank. There were also many Brent here, and Brian commented that one flock of around 100 contained 40 juveniles. Brian wonders if there has been a further recent influx of Brent family parties, but regardless of that he agrees that the families with young do seem to form their own flocks separately from the non- or failed- breeders.

In the shore fields at Nutbourne a flock of 15 Fieldfare were feeding on berries and another ten

flew over, but it seems that none were in the orchards where the majority are usually found.

PLANTS:

SUN 22 DEC

Walking from Havant to Warblington I found one Lesser Celandine with a fully open flower in a south facing situation at the foot of a wall, and coming back up the Billy Trail by the Lymbourne stream I found a second open flower in the streamside - the one which had been in bud last Friday. In the Wade Court area the warm air had encouraged the bed of Winter Heliotrope there to give off its strong scent, and over on Hayling Island more than one plant of Hawkweed Oxtongue still had a healthy show of flowers.

SAT 21 DEC

While at Titchfield Haven this morning the Havant Wildlife Group not only found Wavy Bittercress, Red Campion and several other plants still in flower but also one plant of Wilted Thistle (despite the lack of chalk in the soil here)

FRI 20 DEC

I imagine that many people, seeing that last night's BBC 2 schedule included an Horizon programme about El Dorado, would wonder why an apparently scientific series had descended to making a fantasy programme, but if they did not watch it they missed out on what I think was the most encouraging programme I have ever seen, giving hope for the future of both mankind and wildlife throughout the world. Coming from a self-confessed pessimist about the future of the human race that is meant to be a very high accolade for the programme. +++

The story line was that when the Spanish first reached the headwaters of the Amazon in the region of Peru and Bolivia they found an area in which hundreds of thousands of natives had a thriving civilisation 'magically' supported by food from soil that everywhere else in the Amazon basin was then and is now incapable of supporting agriculture. This civilisation had given rise to the El Dorado legend, though these first explorers did not find much if any gold there. +++

The next western visitors to return to this region forty years later found hardly a trace of this civilisation (it is now thought that western diseases brought by the first visitors killed all these people within a year or so), so the story faded into oblivion. +++

The TV programme was the story of a recent investigation into this area, finding traces of civilisation and agriculture extending over an area greater in size than the UK which must once have been densely packed with people living on artificial islands (earth mounds) interconnected with a system of raised causeway roads running straight as a die from each island to all its neighbours. The reason for the islands was that the rains flooded all the lower ground annually. We were also shown one remaining village where the way of life indicated the survival of a complex civilisation with rituals and a hierarchical structure in the community. +++

Now we come to the point which struck me so strongly. Everywhere else in the Amazon basin the soil is very poor and cannot support prolonged agriculture (hence the futility of cutting down the rainforest in a vain attempt to farm the land) and the soil of this El Dorado area is basically the same. However, around the raised islands on which the people lived, the top layers of the soil are blackened and immensely fruitful (experimental farming plots of normal and black soil showed, after three years use for growing crops, just one wilted plant was left in the otherwise barren normal soil while the yield of the black soil plots had increased exponentially over the three years without added fertilisers) +++

To cut a long story short this magical productivity of the soil is thought to come from two causes. Firstly the slow burning of the dead vegetation after each crop, burning it in the way that charcoal is made from wood by exclusion of air from the burning material. This vegetable charcoal is then dug back into the soil giving the black look. The second factor is not yet properly understood, but for some reason bacteria flourish in this soil and are able to extend its fertility into neighbouring soil. This was illustrated by an industry that has grown up in this area whereby the rich soil is dug up and carried away on lorries to be sold at a high price elsewhere, and the people who make money out of this have found that their 'pot of gold' (the black soil) can be made bottomless if they leave the bottom foot or so of the black soil when digging it out, leaving it untouched for perhaps twenty years, after which they dig down and find as much new

fertile soil (enriched just by the bacteria) as they had before digging up the first lot. +++
If we could introduce this agricultural technique throughout the world could we not at one stroke solve the problems of starvation and disease that make life brief and miserable for the great majority of earth's inhabitants? I know that it would take more than just revealing the secret of the soil to solve our problems - we would first have to prevent the secret becoming the property of the big firms which now hold the poor of the world to ransom, and we would also have to convince people that the world population must be controlled (otherwise the new fertility would just increase the mouths to be fed). Nevertheless I came away from watching the programme with a real feeling of optimism for the future of the human race - potentially we have a way of feeding the people, and with it an opportunity of persuading people to realise the limitations of the earth's resources and to change from the false faith of everlasting growth to a faith in survival through stabilisation of our population and demands for personal gain.

Returning from my flights of fancy I can report that today I found my first full sized flower bud on a Lesser Celandine beside the Lymbourne stream beside the Billy Trail here in Havant, and elsewhere I saw my first new flower buds on new growth of Common Fumitory.

MON 16 DEC

Richard Carpenter found Marsh Thistle flowers were still to be seen at Titchfield Haven today, and Brian Fellows' weekly newsletter from the Emsworth Brook Meadow site records 23 plant species flowering there during the past week, including Common Mallow, Water Figwort and even Cut-leaved Cranesbill. Brian has also sent me a note of a couple of entries on the national Phenology website telling me that Primroses have been seen in flower in the west country and Lesser Celandines in Kent. The Primroses are no surprise to me as they were out at two places in Stansted Forest as early as Nov 17, and I found a good cluster of flowering plants on an ancient grave in Warblington cemetery on Dec 8, but the Celandines are the first I have heard of - not that I have not been looking for them in a couple of local spots. In Dec 2000 the first Celandine flower was out by the Lymbourne stream here in Havant on Dec 10 but in 2001 the first flower bud was not seen here until Dec 23 though a plant in the Warblington area had a fully open flower on Dec 5.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 22 DEC

Walking the low lying fields west of Pagham village and north of the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour on Friday (Dec 20) to carry out a water bird survey Lawrence Holloway put up three separate Hares, saw one Fox, and found five different Water Voles in the Pagham Rife which he was surveying.

FRI 20 DEC

When I looked up Goose Barnacles in my Reader's Digest book of British Waterlife I failed to read the first sentence which says that all barnacle species are not molluscs but are crustaceans - crab like creatures that have decided to stop scuttling around on legs and to sit tight on some firm surface (I think the secret of their allocation to the Crustacea concerns the pattern of the plates which form their outer 'skin'). Thanks to Andy Horton for pointing this out, and to Keith Hiscock who commented (on Andy's Marine Life internet forum) that the marker post (carrying the 1000 Barnacles) that was found by Barry Collins on the Pilsley sands is very unlikely to have come from within the harbour but had almost certainly drifted there from somewhere on the exposed open sea coast, possibly on Britain's Atlantic coast, maybe from further afield.

MON 16 DEC

If anyone out there has suddenly developed an interest in Goose Barnacles following my recent comment on Barry Collins find of a colony of 1000 attached to an old channel marker post that was washed ashore on the Pilsley Sands in Chichester Harbour they might like to have a look at a web page devoted to Barnacles (part of Andy Horton's website for the British Marine Life Study Society) ... the address is
<http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/BMLSS/Barnacles.htm>

WEEK 50 DEC 9 - 15

BIRDS:

SUN 15 DEC

A pair of Magpies were apparently nest building close to the entrance to the Cascades shopping centre in Portsmouth today when Peter Raby was there - it will be interesting to see if they continue with the attempt, encouraged by the extra warmth of all those shoppers raising the local temperature, or whether this was just a gesture (like the song we are now hearing from tits and dunnocks) +++

My own news from a cycle ride around Bedhampton and Broadmarsh this morning includes a sighting of a Peregrine flying east from Farlington Marshes towards Langstone. I saw the bird flying over the old Broadmarsh playing fields on which 120 Brent were feeding despite the presence of a travellers encampment in the carpark area of the playing fields. Five Gadwall were on the Bedhampton Mill pool and during my trip I heard strong song from Great and Blue Tits and from a Dunnock (Robin and Collared Dove were also singing). For the second day running a Song Thrush spent some time on my lawn, but it did not sing. +++

SAT 14 DEC

Further downstream at Arundel the Great Grey Shrike is still showing well by the river, and 4 Ruddy Duck can be seen on Swanbourne Lake. +++

In Hampshire Graham Osborne found that the number of Pochard on the Budds Farm Pools had increased from about half a dozen a few days ago to 22 today, and the Shoveler count was up from a couple to 14 (I wonder if they are now back at Baffins Pond?). 30 Pochard were counted by Steve Keen on Sowley Pond between Lepe and Lymington last Wednesday (Dec 11) but I have no idea if they were newcomers. +++

Having been delayed in my normal website update for Thursday and Friday I am including a couple of items below for Saturday (but check this day's entries again when I put out the weekend update next Tuesday as there will no doubt be other news to come - which I will put above this 'marker entry')

Ian Thirlwell found 5 Purple Sandpiper back at Southsea Castle at 2:30 pm today when the tide would have been low (perhaps just starting to rise - dead low at 13:04 today). These are the first I have heard of anywhere in Hampshire other than the west Solent (Hurst area) this winter, and there is no guarantee that they will stay. +++

Another first (I think) for our local Havant area this winter was a Green Sandpiper which Graham Osborne saw when he visited Budds Farm today. Graham said the bird was in the adjacent field to the pools by which he must mean the old IBM Playing Fields just across Southmoor Lane - perhaps it was investigating the water that has accumulated in the bottom of the big trenches dug around the new factory development plots or maybe the bird was just flying over to a more usual place to find it around the 'Tamarisk Pool' on the Langstone side of the South Moors. In previous winters I have convinced myself that the Green Sandpipers we see around Langstone and Bedhampton are not fixed to the places where they are seen but fly a daily circuit which includes stopoffs in the Hermitage Stream (just south of Bedhampton Station and upstream from the Waterworks road entrance), Budds Farm Pools, the South Moors Tamarisk Pool and the Wade Court wet meadow (currently hosting over 100 Teal) between Langstone Pond and Wade Court buildings. +++

I was just one of a gang carrying out Low Tide Counts in Portsmouth Harbour today, my section being Paulsgrove Lake, the large inlet in the north east of Portsmouth Harbour with Portchester Castle at its mouth, the A27 road along its northern boundary, and Port Solent marina on its east side. Yesterday a newsletter and spreadsheet giving details of the Dec 7 high tide WeBS count in Portsmouth Harbour came from Dennis Bill and I saw that there had been a Great Northern Diver in Paulsgrove Lake during that count, and today the Diver was virtually the first bird which I saw when I arrived at the site. Having been there a week and showing well through the hour or so I was viewing the area today I guess it will give other people a chance to see it and if you want to do so I suggest you drive as for Port Solent but continue along the road that serves the area until you are forced to stop outside the gates of the MoD Horsea Island site. Here there is a roundabout for easy turning of cars and plenty of parking on grass off this roundabout. From the road here you can scope the whole of the main channel leading to Port Solent and should quickly spot the bird somewhere along it. +++

While there today I also counted the Brent feeding on the large area of grassland between Port

Solent and Horsea Island (no longer an island since the land north of it was reclaimed around 1970 to provide a route for the M27 to reach Portsmouth without knocking down hundreds of houses). The Brent seem to find this grass especially nourishing for their young and among the 191 geese feeding on it today were 42 juveniles. The actual proportion of young to adults among the overall population of Brent currently along the south coast is probably 5% or less so the 21% of juveniles in this flock is very unusual, and it would be misleading to report it and have it included in the national totals which reflect the birds breeding success unless it were as part of an overall ageing survey of all the Brent wintering in Portsmouth Harbour (totalled as 2185 birds in the Dec 7 WeBS count)

FRI 13 DEC

In yesterday's notes (Dec 12) I have reported that the Emsworth Spoonbill is enjoying the temporary draining of the Emsworth Millpond each low tide when any fish accumulate in small pools in which the Spoonbill can eat as much as it wants. Brian Fellows watched it doing so again today, observing it getting the fish from the bottom of the pool by probing its bill down until its head was submerged (as well as the more normal sideways sweeping of the surface layers of the water). In addition to watching this bird in the empty Millpond he also scanned the harbour outside the pond and found a record count of 126 Shelduck present, and as this co-incides with my own observation this morning of 49 Shelduck in the western arm of Chichester Harbour by Langstone Bridge I think there is cause for some rejoicing in an upturn in the Shelduck population as seen hereabouts. Of course the birds may have just arrived in the area and will move on to form the expected flock of several hundred that gathers in Langstone Harbour each winter south west of Farlington Marshes - we will have to wait and see.

The number of Bewick's Swans arriving on the south coast seems to have increased in the past few days. Simon Woolley found 10 of them on the Avon at Ibsley today (not sure if they are new arrivals or part of the unspecified number that have been further down the river with the four Whooper Swans at Burton near Christchurch), while late news for last Monday (Dec 9) from the River Arun between Amberley and Pulborough indicates that there may be 11 there - four were counted at the RSPB reserve and 7 in the Amberley Wild Brooks area (there may have been duplication between these two counts, and the 10 birds at Ibsley may have flown in from the Arun, though I doubt it!). +++

This morning I made an attempt at doing a 'Mid Tide Count' of birds on the Langstone to Warblington shore but a combination of rain, mist and a lower than usual tide invalidated the results so I will have to have another go next week - nevertheless I could see enough to record an increase in Shelduck (to 49) and Golden Plover (to 366) with most of the other usual species present (though there were less than half a dozen Bar-tailed Godwit seen while I was there). +++

The counts are supposed to start three hours after high tide to coincide with the start of the exposure of the mudflats but although I arrived at that time most of the mud was already exposed (as this was a neap tide) and I soon found that mist on the eyepiece of my scope caused by the warmth of my face and the saturated air made it almost impossible to separate distant Dunlin from nearby Knot (all the birds spread widely over the mudflat were walking in the plodding, hunchbacked way of feeding Knot and although the peckrate of the Dunlin was faster the fact that the mist obscured the contrast between upper and lower plumage and the fact that the species were intermixed made accurate counting of the two species impossible). +++

A few Curlew, Grey and Ringed Plover were present but hardly any Redshank and I didn't see a single Oystercatcher but there were around 100 Brent and 33 Wigeon feeding among the weed at the top of the shore. Out on the open water I noticed five Goldeneye and one Great Crested Grebe but no Merganser, and there were hardly any gulls and only one Cormorant. Lapwing numbers had increased but as most were distant, shrouded in mist or hidden by mud and vegetation I could only estimate a count of 100. +++

When I decided to abandon the shore count I had a look at the Teal in the Wade Court 'wet meadow', counting at least 115, and then had good views of the Kingfisher on its usual perch above the Lymbourne stream where it emerges from under the seawall footpath. On the way

back seven Egrets were feeding in the pony fields north of Wade Court (I only saw one on the shore) and a Goldcrest was working its way along brambles and bushes lining Wade Lane road section below the A27 and, both in my garden and at Langstone Pond, Dunnock were singing strongly though with few accompanists (just Collared Dove and Robin that I heard).

The SOS website today carries two press releases of general interest to all birders. The first tells us that the tick list of British Birds has been officially increased by one to a total of 565 species - the additional bird is the Snowy Egret which was seen in Scotland between 5 Nov 2001 and 17 Sept 2002. Commenting on this bird the BOU (British Ornithologists Union) say ... {{ This first for Britain is highly unusual in two respects; first the extraordinary length of its stay, and second, the number of localities at which it was recorded visiting three different counties (Argyll & Bute, Ayrshire, Dumfries & Galloway) }} the item goes on to say ... {{ The bird may still be in Britain as it went missing from 1 June (after revisiting its original locality of Balvicar) before being located at Caerlaverock on 6 September }}. If you want to tick this species in Britain the only clues I can give towards its identification come from what I was told about it a year ago when I wrote .. {{ The Snowy Egret is an American bird that has previously only been found on this side of the Atlantic in Iceland and the Azores. It was discovered recently at a place just south of Oban and was still there today (22 Dec 2001). It seems that the bird is quite happy to come within 20 metres of massed observers but as it looks almost identical to a Little Egret you need a close look to be sure of its identity - the crucial point being the presence of a yellow 'noseband' at the base of the otherwise black bill. In a Little Egret this 'noseband' area is normally blue grey and shows no great contrast to the black bill, though it does become pinkish when the Little Egret is in breeding condition, but it is never the yellow colour of a Snowy Egret. The only other distinguishing feature of the Snowy Egret is that the yellow of the Little Egret's feet extends by a variable amount up the back of the legs of a Snowy Egret, but as the bird in Scotland is thought to be a first winter this feature does not seem to apply. }} +++

The second press release tells birders what they should do if they come across corpses of unusual birds (how to preserve them before sending them off to the appropriate authority, and where to send them). One point that I would not have considered is that you should carefully weigh the corpse before putting it into your freezer so that the 'live weight' is known. Rather than repeating the full details here I suggest you make a note of bird-enquiries@nhm.ac.uk which is the email address of the Bird Group at the Natural History Museum - then contact them when you have a corpse! While waiting for their reply wrap your corpse in absorbent paper (kitchen paper towels), put it in a plastic freezer bag and freeze it - not forgetting to include any loose feathers or other parts which have come from the bird, and also including a written note of the details of the find (where when etc) before you forget them! It is also perhaps worth a visit to one or both of the websites www.bou.org.uk and/or www.ibis.ac.uk where you should find further details.

THU 12 DEC

The 'Emsworth Spoonbill' remains alive and well despite my misleading headline which suggests that army personnel on Thorney Island have been trying to shoot it - that thought arose in my fevered brain when I read in Barry Collins news that the Spoonbill's peace and quiet in the Thorney Deepes (where it normally roosts - at high tide and at night??) was disturbed on one day this week by a shoot on the nearby army base - not on the SSSI around the deepes! I also recalled the alarming efficiency with which soldiers at Longmoor in East Hampshire despatched some 200 Canada Geese in the Woolmer Pond area earlier this autumn when given the go ahead to cull them in the interests of conservation (no comment from me on the rights and wrongs of this but I am always glad to hear of reductions in the Canada Goose, feral Pheasant, and Woodpigeon populations). +++

Proof of the Spoonbill's health came today when it was seen in the Emsworth Town Millpond by several people, including Brian Fellows. The millpond is currently without the sluice gate which retains water in the pond when the tide goes out (vital repairs to the sluice are in progress) and this means that when the tide is out any fish are swept into a small pool near the Slipper Sailing Club building where the water flows out into the harbour. Naturally this is where the Spoonbill was seen, frequently lifting its head to gulp down each fish as it was caught. Brain tells me that, although we normally see Spoonbills feeding with an Avocet-like side to side sweeping action

of the bill (useful for detecting prey items in murky tidal water) the bird was here catching fish from the bottom of this pool by putting its bill straight down and waiting for a fish to swim into it (well more or less!).

Recent news from Sussex has as top of the list (in my view) a sighting of a most unlikely bird in an unlikely area. The bird was a freshly hatched downy Black-Swan cygnet (it is now coming up to summer in the antipodes to whose climate these bird's biological clocks are set). The place was a pond on the east side of Cowdray Park (a notable local wildlife free zone) by the road from Midhurst to Petworth. The pond is called Benbow Pond (was it Admiral Benbow who was shot to encourage other sailors to do better?) and you should currently see four adult Black Swans and this one cygnet on it - they were seen there yesterday (Dec 11). I wonder if any birders who regularly pass through Funtington (west of Chichester) would think it worth their while to make a short detour to check out West Ashling pond where a pair of Black Swans were nesting earlier this autumn? +++

More genuine birding news for yesterday (Dec 11) comes from Barry Collins on Thorney Island where he saw a Black Brant on the old airfield - a few years ago the Emsworth channel on the west side of Thorney had a regular Brant over several winters but this is I think the first sighting of one in Chichester Harbour this winter. +++

Also seen yesterday were two Goosanders flying over the Pulborough Brooks area (these could be the same two which flew west past Bexhill on Monday (Dec 9) - they could equally well be the two males which Barry Collins had over Thorney Island on Dec 7, but another report of 9 Goosander flying south along the River Arun on Dec 9 suggests to me that there are plenty of different individuals now roaming the south coast).

Other Sussex news for Monday (Dec 9) comes from Barry Collins (who had a total of 15 Avocet - his highest count so far of a resident and growing winter flock of Avocet off the east shore of Thorney Island - and 12 Greenshank around the Thorney Island area, as well as the Spoonbill) and from Pete Hughes at the Pulborough RSPB reserve who gives a detailed report of wildfowl in the Arun valley at Pulborough and the Amberley area. Pete's counts appear on the SOS website as relating to Dec 9 so maybe they made their WeBS count on that day, and they are impressive reading +++

In the following list I give two figures for each of the main wildfowl species - the first is the count for Pulborough Brooks, the second for the Amberley Wild Brooks area and presumably they were count at the same time by different people allowing us to add them together to get a view of the total number of birds in that section of the Arun valley (though there may be some overlap as the birds moved around). Pete's figures then are:- Wigeon 2500/1600; Teal 1300/1400; Pintail 400/100; Shoveler 85/30; Mallard 80/120; Pochard 30/0; Bewick's Swan 4/7; Lapwing 450/850; and Golden Plover 0/35. Other birds at Pulborough were Merlin, Kingfisher, Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and one Crossbill. In the Amberley area were the 9 Goosander mentioned above, 2 Green Sandpiper and most startling of all was a single Wood Sandpiper. In Hampshire the latest ever record of a Wood Sandpiper was 26 Oct 1975 and there is just one report of a possible overwintering bird seen at Ibsley by the River Avon from 23 Feb to 6 Apr 1984 - I don't know if this is a first wintering record for Sussex. +++

Last Sunday (Dec 8) Barry Collins had a welcome encounter with a flock of 19 Corn Buntings in an unexpected place - the sand dunes of the Pilsey area of Thorney Island. I guess they were after seeds from some of the shore plants which attract large flocks of finches in the autumn each year, and I recall my own surprise in finding a similar flock of Corn Buntings on the sand dunes around Black Point on Hayling in one winter of the 1980s or 90s. +++

Also in Barry's recent news is a record of three Red-throated Divers in the Thorney Island area on Dec 6 - two of them were in the west end of the Great Deeps and one was in the harbour.

Two items from Dennis Bill's newsletter sent to Portsmouth Harbour WeBS counters reporting the highlights of the Dec 7 count should interest a wider audience. The first is that among 52 Canada Geese seen in the Cams Hall/Fareham Creek area on Dec 7 was the 'albino' bird which caused a stir in the Fareham area earlier in the autumn when large flocks of Canada Geese flew over the town daily and this albino was usually seen with them, though it has been based in the Titchfield Haven area since Oct 16. Interestingly Dennis Bill had a good look at it and could see it is not a strict albino as he noticed that the typical Canada Goose head

markings could be made out on it in a 'darker shade of white' though it appears pure white from a distance or in flight. +++

The other and more dramatic piece of news in Dennis' newsletter concerns the long running saga of the Falconer who has been employed (at the instigation of the Environment Agency, who believe that gulls feeding on rubbish tips can carry disease to humans) to prevent gulls from feeding on the tip. The falcons have been successful in this (we have hardly seen a gull on the IBM lake or at the tip during this years counts until November) but at a cost to the Falconer and his birds. Right at the start of the exercise, over a year ago, one of the falcons flew off, and more recently, Dennis tells us, a falcon seized a gull and brought it to the ground only for both falcon and prey to be crushed beneath one of the bulldozers which spread and compact the rubbish. A sad story, but that is why we are once more seeing gull on the tip and the IBM Lake. For a ludicrous twist to the tail of this tale Dennis says that the Falconer is still present but is refusing to fly his birds (if he has any left!) and is attempting to drive off the gulls with a loudspeaker megaphone - alternatively shouting 'Go away gulls' in an authoritative voice, and playing amplified music to them (one wonders what he chooses to play). As a footnote to this when I was at Port Solent on Saturday Dec 14 (see my notes above) I thought I could hear someone letting off maroons or perhaps firing flares over the nearby tip site but I still had over 1000 gulls in Paulsgrove lake.

WED 11 DEC

Despite a raw east wind the sun shone on the latter part of my first trudge round farmland in SU 6922 (near Langrish, east of East Meon) this morning for the BTO Winter Farmland Bird Survey. A single Red-legged Partridge and a hunting Kestrel were the only unexpected birds but I did notice unusual proportions in the numbers of both corvid and thrush species. Starting with the thrushes I found an unusual prevalence of Blackbirds, something which others have reported all over the south of England this winter. Although they were not in a single flock my count of Blackbirds was 34 against 4 Redwing, 2 Fieldfare and just 1 Song Thrush. Turning to the corvids I expect to see a good number of Rooks here (there is I believe a big springtime rookery in the Rookham Copse and the same wood seems to be a traditional winter roost for corvids) so I was not surprised when a cloud of over 100 rose from the trees soon after I arrived but I was surprised to see (and hear) that the great majority were Jackdaws (my initial estimate was 80 Jackdaws to 20 Rooks). Later, when I found the flock on the ground among feeding sheep, I upped the count to at least 90 Jackdaw and around 60 Rooks. To add to the disproportion I did not log a single Crow in the whole of my nearly four hour visit. Another question was raised in my mind when a small flock of around 25 Meadow Pipits rose from a field exactly where I had seen a similar flock on a visit two years ago (before Foot and Mouth) - on the first visit this field was cereal stubble, probably offering the birds some food, but this time it was newly sown grass, so what attracted the birds to it rather than the other fields? I have noticed at Old Idsworth Farm that the winter flock of Skylarks are always to be found in the same field when they have at least half a dozen other adjacent fields with similar stubble for feeding and of similar size to avoid surprise by predators.

News of other specific sightings that may be of interest includes a Black-necked Grebe off Hill Head seen by John Shillitoe today, and I will be interested to see if the bird remains there or moves to join the majority of this species in Langstone Harbour. We all admire the apparent pin-point accuracy of bird navigation which brings Swallows back to the same barn in which they bred a year before their return flight, and the similiar navigational skill of birds such as the grebes making long distance flights back to traditional winter quarters, but I tend to think that some if not all the birds (especially those flying overnight) are no more skilled than were airplane pilots of the pre-electronic navigation aids era who would follow a compass bearing through or above cloud, often drifting far off course if the wind varied from that predicted in their flight plan, and would then, when elapsed time told them they should be over their destination, have to descend through cloud and desperately search for land marks to direct them to their destination before fuel ran out. The birds do have an advantage in being able to land almost anywhere and 'rest and refuel' before making the effort of seeking out their true destination.

+++

Trevor Carpenter was at Cams Bay on Fareham Creek today and I see in his list an entry for 12

Little Grebe. Back on Oct 31 the total of these birds here in Fareham Creek suddenly rose to a peak count of 30 and Trevor then said that he expected more to arrive to match last year's winter peak of 36 in early December. So far his prediction has not been fulfilled (the 30 were not seen again and I have seen no mention of Little Grebe from Trevor or Matt Lawes since Nov 12), and I hope the current cold spell soon puts that right. Does anyone know if there is a flock back in the east end of Ports Creek this winter? - I seem to remember that in the 1980s up to 40 used to winter there. +++

TUE 10 DEC

In casual conversation John Goodspeed mentioned that he had seen a Sandwich Tern in Langstone Harbour near the Hayling Oysterbeds, and I think but am not sure that he was referring to a sighting made today. Regardless of the exact date it would seem that at least one of these Terns is wintering in the area, so worth keeping an eye open for it. John also commented on how few Brent were to be seen in the harbour, and I suspect that he was noting the effect on which I commented in entries for last Sunday and Saturday, namely that the great majority of the Brent are now to be found on inland fields. +++

MON 09 DEC

In his lunchtime break today Kevin Stouse took a look at the IBM Lake at Portsmouth and to start with his good news he enjoyed views of a Kingfisher checking out the canal system which drains this 'below sea level' site. Kingfisher are rarely seen here so this was a 'once in a year' sight. The bad news was the return of 26 Canada Geese to the lake - normally they have all gone to Titchfield Haven by the time December comes round but maybe this year some intend to stay here for the winter - or maybe, with the ever-growing population of these geese, the prospective owners of the nest sites here think it wise to make sure no one sneaks in and steals their regular nest locations. +++

Other birds on the water included the single male Shoveler I saw on Saturday but the odd Goldeneye had disappeared (it was at the east end of the lake). Kevin also saw a couple of the Reed Buntings (which had been joined by a Goldfinch) feeding on the Pampas Grass on the islands, saw one Chiffchaff, and found a good display of gulls once again present. +++

At IBM there are nutfeeders hanging on at least one of the balconies outside the offices and Kevin watched a good number of Greenfinch frequenting them, while back at home (in response to the question posed yesterday) he says that Dunnock regularly use nut and seed feeders in his garden - he goes on to say that Magpies have also learnt to feed from his nut feeders, and he gets great entertainment in the late spring when a pair of Magpies bring their young along to teach them how to feed from them!

I have long held the view that the increasing number of Pheasants living off the countryside are a contributing factor in the decline of seed eating farmland birds and I know that some people agree with me while others do not. Apparently this subject has been under discussion on a website called www.habitat.org.uk (a new site to me but it sounds interesting), and I learnt about it through Glyn Roberts who today quotes from it on HOSLIST. The gist of the quote from Dr Steve Parrish of the Game Conservancy is that those who rear game birds not only feed their birds well but do a lot of good habitat management and plant game crops which benefit other birds. I do not disagree with this but my point is that more and more Pheasants have now escaped from the land where this management takes care of them and are living off the land in places where there are no counter-balancing good works. For example here in Langstone I see five Pheasants continuously feeding in the wet meadow south of Wade Court, miles from any game rearing, and in the fields and woodland of Old Idsworth Farm (where there is no rearing or shooting) they are prolific - I must point out that the farmer there (David Uren) does not share my view and does not object to supporting the birds from which he gets no benefit other than their 'pretty colours'. I would like to know if there are any parts of the British countryside that are still Pheasant-free zones.

Yesterday both Ian Watts and John Shillitoe visited Titchfield Haven. Ian was lucky enough to see the distinctive markings of a male Velvet Scoter as it flew in and landed on the sea among the small regular group of Eider and Scoter, and John heard reports of both Bittern (just one) and Dartford Warbler seen by others on the reserve. +++

Last Friday Lawrence Holloway led a group of Sussex Wildlife Trust members from the Sidlesham

Ferry to Church Norton and back, the high spot of the outing being a Red-throated Diver within the harbour mouth area which came within 20 yards of the watchers on the Church Norton shore. They also saw a wintering Whimbrel as well as one Spotted Redshank and a dozen Avocet

PLANTS:

SUN 15 DEC

A cycle ride to Broadmarsh and back to Havant this morning gave me flowers on Ox-eye Daisies, Red Clover and Hawkweed Oxtongue as well as the expected Gorse and Winter Heliotrope that are now in their prime. On the way home by the Langbrook Stream I found the Meadowsweet plants beginning to die back but still having a good show of flowers, as did Water Mint and Water Forget-me-not. Nearby was a Common Mallow with plenty of flowers.

SAT 14 DEC

Despite rain at the end of my bird count around Paulsgrove Lake today I went out of my way to check the Chicory plants on the Portchester Castle shore and found the great majority were totally withered, but at least one young plant was still green and had a good fresh flower. Heading back over the wet grassland to the Castle carpark I noticed a single buttercup plant with a couple of flowers and leaves more like Celery-leaved than Creeping Buttercup - I could not see any sepals at all but presume from the wet seaside location this was Hairy Buttercup

FRI 12 DEC

A quick walk around the section of the Hayling Billy old railtrack which runs behind my house this afternoon gave me a list of 20 plants in flower to which I added the Winter Heliotrope which is flowering well at Wade Court, seen by me this morning. Annual Wallrocket, White Campion and Herb Robert were the most colourful and unexpected at this time of year while the others were probably on everyone's list if they bother to make one - Smooth Hawk's-beard, Bristly Ox-tongue, Red and White Deadnettle, Hogweed, Ivy, etc.

MON 09 DEC

Brian Fellows' weekly bulletin of news from Brook Meadow at Emsworth includes a list of plants still flowering there during the past week. Among those you are unlikely to see elsewhere now are Wild Angelica, Wood Avens and Purple Toadflax. Wavy Bittercress is starting to flower there with one new grass which Brian believes to be Tall Fescue.

Long before the golden anthers show on Willow 'Pussy Paw' flowers the brown leathery outer covering of those flower buds splits to show an inner covering of silky white hairs, and while Richard Carpenter was in the Brownwich area just west of Titchfield Haven today he found this silky white inner cover already showing on one eccentric tree which likes to demonstrate its hardy nature by this show of bravado as the bitter east winds bring hard frost - good luck to it!

INSECTS:

THU 12 DEC

Returning to my computer this evening after a break for tea I found a brown Plume Moth sitting on the keyboard. I gently moved it elsewhere then checked my books to identify it and came to the conclusion that it must be the common 'Many-plumed' or 'Twenty-plumed' moth *Alucita hexadactyla* - the main reason for choosing this species being that I see that it is a hibernator. Presumably it had been woken by the warmth in my room and thought it would check out my website news.

MON 09 DEC

Three more reports of Red Admirals seen last week have just come to my attention. Two of them were seen at Brook Meadow in Emsworth on the same day (Nov 5), and the third, which advanced the 'latest date' by one day, was seen at Portland in Dorset on Dec 6.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 15 DEC

I happened to pause at the entrance to the west carpark at Broadmarsh this morning, and saw a Short-tailed Field Vole running as if it had come along the Harts Farm Way road and then turned into the carpark, but instead of continuing down the tarmac to the shore carpark it

disappeared under the huge concrete block blocking one side of the entrance against traveller's vans. I'm glad to see that some creature has found a positive use for these monstrous obstructions.

WED 11 DEC

A sad story coming from John Chapman at Langstone today reminds me of another aspect of the 'great unseen' which overshadows the few observations of wildlife that we make. In this case the unseen is the wildlife activity which goes on in our gardens each night after the birds have gone to roost and we have drawn the curtains of our warm rooms from which, during the day, we have been watching the struggle for food and the perpetual awareness of imminent death that dominate the life of the birds that we watch. +++

John's story is simple - going out to replenish his bird feeder in the morning he found, hanging from the metal barred frame around the feeder, the freshly dead body of a mouse which had presumably been attempting to get a meal from the peanuts but had slipped and fallen through the metal bars which caught its head and broke its neck. +++

I remember that there was once a phase of wildlife watching in which people would place 'bird tables' outside the windows of their rooms and provide covered ways along which small mammals could approach the table in seeming safety. The table would be dimly illuminated and the people inside the house would sit quietly in darkness and observe the creatures that came to feed (and perhaps witness the occasional equivalent of a Sparrowhawk strike as a weasel dashed in among the small creatures and took its evening meal. No doubt professionals still make this sort of observation but for the majority of us who profess to be keen observers of wildlife there is too much of interest on the TV to leave time for that sort of wildlife observation. With no reflection on John's knowledge of small mammals I note that he does not name the species of mouse - how many of us, who can instantly identify a common bird, can name the equally common species of e.g. mammals and snails that frequent our gardens in numbers?

Taking up this theme of the wildlife that surrounds us, but which is terra incognita to most of us amateur naturalists, Barry Collins contributes an apt example from his observation of a harbour channel marker post recently washed up on the Pilsy Sands in Chichester Harbour. The section of the post which had for years been under water was covered with a thousand Goose Barnacles looking like silvery grey Mussel Shells around 2 inches (5 cm) long, each attached to the post by a long flexible brown stem which may be 8 inches (20cm) long allowing the living mollusc to reach out into the surrounding water to feed. Have you ever seen these creatures? I have not but how many hundreds are there in the water in which the birds we watch are for ever diving? +++

If you have walked the shore from Langstone to Emsworth recently you must have seen deep drifts of washed up seaweed of an unusual type - long flat ribbons of brown up to ten feet long and an inch or so broad with just occasional brown capsules of the sort that hold air to raise the seaweed up into the water. I have only just had a look for what this might be and I see that it is almost certainly Knotted Wrack, said to grow profusely on sheltered shores in water that permanently covers it so that we do not see it at low tide. Another part of the 'great unobserved'.

MON 09 DEC

From Brian Fellows' weekly newsletter for the Brook Meadow site in Emsworth I see that the Hampshire Wildlife Trust have received a report of a Water Vole sighting near the Recreation Ground in Emsworth and Brian's local Water Vole experts have been asked to check it out. If the site is the one I think it is (a tiny trickle of a brooklet running down the west side of the main Horndean Road recreation ground) I very much doubt there is any suitable Water Vole habitat there. An adventurous Water Vole on a cross country journey might have passed that way but the report is much more likely to have been of the ubiquitous Brown Rat.

WEEK 49 DEC 2 - 8

BIRDS:

SUN 08 DEC

A very dull, drizzly morning suggested a short walk around Havant to get some fresh air but when

I got out I found there was quite a lot of bird life around starting with the usual 15 to 20 House Sparrows that now come to bird seed in my driveway. Blue Tits, Robins, Wrens and Collared Doves were all singing while the chattering 'song' of several collections of Starlings suggested that they were enjoying the weather. Near Langstone village a lone lost Redwing 'gukked' from a treetop, then whistled as it flew off, and close to that spot were two Song Thrushes and perhaps 20 Blackbirds which suggested a travelling group of continental thrushes. On Langstone east shore the tide was just falling and there was a good show of shore birds including a dozen Black-tailed Godwit and at least 20 Knot but still few Lapwing and no Golden Plover that I could see. The few Brent on the shore, and the occasional large flights of these geese coming and going to inland, suggested that local fields were being pillaged but I did not find them in the fields near the shore around Warblington church (though there were 14 Egrets with cattle and 18 Curlew flew over me to feed on the wet grass fields in preference to what the harbour mud had to offer even though it was only freshly exposed). In the churchyard a flock of around 40 Greenfinch flew out of a yew tree where they had presumably been feeding on the crop of red berries (strictly called arils). I know that a lot of birds enjoy the sweet red outer covering, but I believe that they avoid eating the highly poisonous seeds inside. Maybe the Greenfinches were doing the same but I would have thought they would be more likely to crack open the seeds - does anyone know anything about Greenfinch feeding habits in this respect? (Note that I have no evidence that the birds were eating the berries or seeds, though in mid-morning such a large number hopping about in the branches before flying off suggested that they were feeding rather than roosting).

Dunnock are normally ground feeding birds and I have never seen them on a peanut feeder but Moira Doherty at Alton found one on her garden peanut feeder today. Sounds as if they too are evolving to take advantage of food sources. Has anyone else noticed this with Dunnock?

SAT 07 DEC

Will Walmsley and John Shillitoe visited Farlington Marshes today, seeing a Slav Grebe off the point and 2 Black-necked Grebe in Chalkdock Lake (the harbour total of these is now said to be 17). Also on their list were 45 Merganser, around 15 Goldeneye, an estimated 20 Pintail, 5 Gadwall and one Pale-bellied Goose. Will also passes on very interesting news from Bob Chapman who, when working in one of the fields not open to the public, disturbed 13 Jack Snipe and perhaps 60 Common Snipe). Bob also reported a Firecrest in the reserve north of the road.

Will and John went on to Budds Farm Pools where they saw the female Scaup and are prepared to back my view that it is a genuine Scaup (though they also saw a very dubious Tufted Duck which may have been confusing the issue). The Ferruginous Duck was still present, and maybe they saw its bill as they agree with the majority who say it is a cross with a Pochard. They also saw a female Goldeneye on the pools so it sounds as if one of the two I saw there recently has stayed.

If anyone is thinking of going to Farlington Marshes from Broadmarsh in the near future I heard (on Sunday Dec 8) that travellers are back on Broadmarsh and were intimidating at least one group heading for Farlington Marshes.

My monthly visit to the IBM Lake at Portsmouth today gave me the first Snipe that I have seen there this winter, and a couple of unexpected duck in the form of a male Shoveler and a female Goldeneye. More expected were 16 Teal, 14 Tufted Duck and 6 Pochard, though just 39 Mallard was a low count. Coot and Moorhen numbers on the other hand were up (to 82 and 49 respectively), and the gulls were in more normal numbers than recently with over 300 Black-headed, 30 Herring Gulls, 20 Common, 4 Greatback and 2 Lesser Blackback. At least three of the Black-headed gulls had almost complete black face masks (and I see that John Havers, who found the Red-throated Diver at Slaugham today - see below - also noted a 'summer plumage' Black-headed gull there). The two adult Swans were near their nest site at the west end of the water and the two cygnets were minding their own business at the far end of the lake. Other birds noted were the regular Cetti's Warbler, one Chiffchaff, and a party of seven Reed Bunting feeding on Pampas Grass as they were last month. One Jay was unusual here and Blackbird numbers were much higher than usual (as they seem to be everywhere here near the coast.). +++

Brian Fellows was also out making a WeBS count today on his south east Hayling sector where a total of 1400 Dunlin was the second highest total Brian has recorded there. On the shingle bank west of the Black Point sailing club 34 Ringed Plover was also Brian's second best ever count there and he had an overall total of 76 Grey Plover in the area - most of these were on a small island near the shore south of Mengham Rythe Sailing Club. 42 Coot on the relatively small lake at the Fishery Lane holiday camp reflected a recent increase in coastal number similar to the increase which I found at the IBM Lake today. Although Brian does not mention any Brent seen on inland fields he only found 264 on the shore, and I suspect that many of those that are based in that part of Chichester Harbour were ashore eating some farmer's growing wheat. Also presumed inland were the Egrets which have been in this area - on the equivalent count in October Brian had 13 of them, in November 10, but today only 4.

On the Sussex side of Chichester Harbour entrance Ewan Urquhart was making the WeBS count in the West Wittering area, recording 4 Little Sint still on East Head with 2 Snow Bunting that have not previously been there this winter (but they could be the same two that were in the Church Norton/ Selsey areas in November). More regular birds were present in good numbers - 600 Golden Plover (are these in addition to a big flock on Thorney airfield??), 200 Lapwing, 100 Knot. 102 Redshank, 62 Grey Plover, 46 Snipe, 3000 Dunlin and 1300 Brent plus a male Ruff and one Greenshank.. 150 Wigeon, 224 Teal and 150 Mallard were also here, and I was interested in the high number of Mallard but have no knowledge of whether this is an unusually high count for the location (looking at recent Sussex bird reports it seems that 150 is probably around half all the Mallard recorded in Chichester Harbour by a December WeBS count and I would have thought the majority would be in places like Fishbourne, Emsworth and Langstone plus the Thorney Deeps). A little away from the shore a Water Rail was once more showing well in the Snow Hill area and Cetti's Warbler was heard.

Also on the SOS website is news of 4 Ruddy Duck at Swanbourne Lake (close to the Arundel WWT reserve), and the Great Grey Shrike is still present on the banks of the river just downstream from the wildfowl centre - looking at my map I see that you can view the bird from the west side of the river, getting to a riverside path from the road immediately south of the WWT centre. In the north walls area of Pagham Harbour two Whitefront Geese were today with a flock of Canadas but these are not necessarily 'wild birds' (they could be the two which spent last winter at Lymington, or other escapees). In the south of Pagham Harbour 31 Med Gulls were today at the Pagham Lagoon (plus another 5 in the harbour)

Finally for today Theo Roberts tells me that winter Blackaps are back in his garden and he has already heard their subsong. None had been seen in his garden in November but a male and two females appeared on the bird table within 20 minutes of the special cake mixture being baked and put out for them on Dec 1. Two of the birds were old friends - ringed in the garden in previous winters while one female was unringed.

FRI 06 DEC

When Richard Carpenter was near Brownwich Pond today he saw two Swallows flying west (by mistake or intending to leave via Portland Bill??) and heard that three more had been seen over the nearby Titchfield Haven reserve. Richard also tells me that Brent are only now starting to come ashore to feed on the fields in the Chilling area, most of them still feeding on the shore. I find this surprising in view of the fact that Bob Chapman reported the first 200 ashore on Farlington Marshes in the week ending Oct 18 and I saw 100 flying off fields at Chidham on Oct 23 while Ian Thirlwell remarked that a small number were on Southsea Common by Oct 26. In the first half of November I found 242 on the Port Solent grass, 600 on the Warblington fields and Kevin Stouse had 250 near Chichester on fields near the Fishbourne channel. More recently there have been several reports of the Brant back in the Hook area which imply that many Brent have been feeding ashore there since mid November so I suspect that quite a few have been using the Chilling area fields when Richard was not looking. +++

Other news from Titchfield Haven today includes a list from Richard Carpenter of birds now regularly seen on the reserve, starting with Bittern (Richard says that there are now believed to be two present), Barn Owl, Bearded Tits and a single Rock Pipit that can usually be seen around Hill Head harbour, but so far no winter flock of Water Pipits has been reported. +++
Ian Calderwood also visited the Titchfield Haven seafront from which he watched a Red-throated

Diver fly east and counted 13 Eider with 5 Common Scoter offshore. +++

In the Lymington Marshes area today Bill Marjeram saw a smart Ruff and commented on the numbers of Pintail and Shelduck (at least 30) now present, and he passes on a report of a Little Auk said to have been seen by others.

News from the SOS website confirms that the Great Grey Shrike is still by the River Arun at Warningcamp, and four adult Bewick's Swans are in the Amberley Wild Brooks area. Offshore in the Glyne Gap area between Bexhill and Hastings there was a Red-necked Grebe and three Purple Sandpipers were on the beach today.

THU 05 DEC

A visit to Budds Farm pools late in the afternoon gave me an excellent side-on view of the dubious hybrid Ferruginous Duck asleep on the water with its bill hidden under its wing but otherwise looking very smart after completing its eclipse. If I was not aware of the history of expert diagnosis of its identity (and assuming this is the same bird that has visited Langstone Harbour in the past three winters) I would be prepared to swear that it was a genuine drake Ferruginous Duck.. Drake Teal and Shoveler are also in their finest plumage by now (only two Shoveler present). I did not see the Scaup but did find two female Goldeneye on the pools, and 6 Pochard were there (only one of them a female). +++

On the nearby South Moors shore all the expected birds were to be seen including Turnstone, Ringed Plover and even a couple of Merganser on shallow pools left by the retreating tide. One Knot was on the tideline with many Dunlin but over on the North Binness tideline were what looked like perhaps a hundred Knot and more than a thousand Dunlin

In East Sussex 15 Bean Geese were seen today in the Scotney Court area of Rye Harbour, and the finder suggests they were of the Taiga subspecies (*Anser fabalis fabilis*) which breed in the forests of northern Europe rather than the Tundra subspecies (*A.f. rossicus*) which breeds further from us in the marshes of northern Siberia. This is what I would expect (the European birds wintering in Europe and the Siberian ones heading for Asia in winter) but if this is the case it is strange that the great majority of the few Bean Geese which have ever reached Hampshire seem to have been Tundra birds - Birds of Hampshire says that of the records for which the observer named the race 49 were said to be of the Tundra (*Rossicus*) subspecies and only 3 were of the European Taiga subspecies. You need a close look to separate the two subspecies - the main diagnostic is the amount of orange on the bill - much more orange on the Taiga than the Tundra birds (the Tundra birds also have a shorter neck than do the Taiga ones, but unless the two are side by side this may be difficult to judge!).

Robert Watson has given us regular counts of Pied Wagtails roosting in the centre of Basingstoke over at least a couple of winters, but so far he has only watched them around the IBM office building - some of his counts this year have been ... Feb - 445, Mar -535, Apr - 90, Sep - 218, Oct 263, and Nov - 634. That sounds enough to be getting on with but today Mike Wall tells us that a friend has just recorded a count of 440 roosting in the shelter of the North Hampshire Hospital, also in Basingstoke, to which Robert has replied that he will extend his investigations to see if these are birds that have moved from the IBM building area or are a second parallel roost in addition to the town centre birds. +++

A couple of other items in today's Hoslist postbag are a report from Steve Keen of a male Merlin chasing Siskin through the village of Sway today, and a count of 600+ Golden Plover at the Eastleigh Wide Lane site this morning with none present just before sunset. One theory is that the birds roost in large flocks during the day and break up into small flocks which scatter to go foraging for food during the night - if this is correct then perhaps the birds fly off to choose and check out their feeding grounds while it is still light, landing as the day ends. +++

And finally for today Richard Carpenter tells me that a Firecrest was reported from Titchfield Haven where he saw a lone Golden Plover with the 250 Lapwing now present there. He also confirms the continuing presence of the 'Baffins Gang' of feral geese (11 Barnacles, 1 Snow Goose and 1 hybrid Bar-head) with a total of around 300 Canada Geese - presumably including the 'albino' and the 'white headed' marker birds.

WED 04 DEC

A Ring Ouzel seen in the New Forest today by Tony Hale may well turn out to be the fourth to spend the winter in Hampshire within living memory. Birds of Hampshire gives the latest date

for a passage bird as Nov 10 (in 1984) and the Bird Report for 2000 shows an average last date of Oct 28, but just three Ring Ouzels have been found over-wintering - one in the New Forest in 1984, one in the Winchester water meadows in 1985 (both observed over an extended period) plus a 'one day wonder' in a Tichfield garden on 17 Feb 85. Tony found his bird (a male in full frontal view) at SU 2311-64 some 500 metres south of Ocknell Pond and 300 metres east of the northeast corner of Sluffers Inclosure and I wait with interest to hear if it is refound there during the winter. Tony was at the time searching for Great Grey Shrike, and after trudging the Forest for a good two hours he returned to the carpark to find one waiting there for him. +++

Other good birds were seen today in the Keyhaven/Hurst area. Out on Hurst Spit Mike Rafter had one Purple Sandpiper (only the second Hampshire report of this winter - the first was of two birds in this same place on Nov 14), and in the Keyhaven area Pete Smith found a group of 10 Twite somewhere in the salt marsh. Easier birds to spot on Pete's Keyhaven area list were 220 Golden Plover on plough and a Short-eared Owl high in the air mobbed by 2 Crows and a hundred Black-headed Gulls - suprisingly a Marsh Harrier came to investigate the commotion but quickly sheared off without joining the fray. Mike's list included 2 Avocets and a Raven plus 5 Knot, 4 Goldeneye, 11 Eider and a Merlin. +++

In connection with Tony Hale's possible wintering Ring Ouzel I see that the Hampshire Willdife Trust website carries a report dated 22 November from the warden of St Catherine's Hill at Winchester in which he remarks .. {{ Other birds to be seen are the occasional wheatear, stonechat (there's usually a pair in the valley for most of the winter) and the colourful bullfinch. }}. As most of this report concerns matters such as scrub bashing and sheep grazing with little focus on the current wildlife I suspect that the mention of Wheatear comes from month old memories of seeing the birds on the hill, but if anyone knows better and there was a Wheatear there in the third week of November I would be interested to know more - could it be thinking of wintering?

Under the heading of notes for today the SOS website carries an account from John Simons of birds seen in an extended walk covering the area north and east of his home at Dean Lane End north of Rowlands Castle. In the Old Idsworth area he watched six Buzzard circling high above a rabbit carcass and waited for them to descend on it but they disappointed him and sheared off. In the same area he noted 100 Fieldfare, 20 Redwing and 50 Siskin - all of them presumably operating as flocks - and he also notes an estimated 50 Blackbirds though I am not sure if these were also in a fairly close flock or an estimate of more than usual Blackbirds scattered over a large area. A Sparrowhawk was a not unexpected sight but a single Cormorant, high overhead and heading south for the coast, was interesting - maybe it was on a one off long distance trip (perhaps from the Thames valley) or maybe it was a canny bird that makes regular trips to inland fishing lakes where there is less competition from other Cormorants - Petersfield Heath Pond or at the smaller ponds at Buriton and South Harting. +++

Another intriguing entry in John's list is of an estimated 20 Bullfinch in the Warren Down area bordering the north west corner of Stansted Forest. In winter small flocks of Bullfinch are not uncommon but in my experience the groups are usually small (around half a dozen birds) so if this was a single flock of 20 or more I would think it was exceptional - can anyone comment on the largest flocks they have seen? +++

In my notes for Monday (Nov 2) I probably put two and two together to give a false answer in respect of the movements of the Goodwood Stork - the evidence I had then was that one Jill Redmond had been watching the motionless Stork at Goodwood on Monday afternoon when it flew off south towards the coast, and I coupled this with what was only a rumour (unconfirmed by anyone from the RSPB at Pulborough Brooks) that a Stork had arrived on the River Arun at Pulborough near the White Swan pub. From these two I concluded that the Goodwood Stork had moved home, but Mike Collins (who works at Goodwood) tells me that it has been present there for every weekday recently, and it is still there today (while there is as yet no further news of the Pulborough bird). +++

It may be that the flight which Jill Redmond saw was part of the bird's regular routine of moving from its daytime position on the golf course to its night time roost on local roof tops. Mike quotes a recent Goodwood estate newsletter which .. {{ revealed that the stork roosts on the

roofs of the Valdoe cottages which is a short flight across the main road which runs up to the racecourse. Also the tenant of the gatehouse told me how he came home very late one night and was just about to put his key in the lock when he became aware of a huge creature with outstretched wings silhouetted on his roof, he said it took a few moments before he realised it was not a vampire about to attack him but only the stork. }}

Driving along Hayling Island West Lane this afternoon I saw a big flock of Brent feeding on what I assume was an advanced autumn cereal crop so I stopped to check the number which was much bigger than I at first thought (it was raining at the time). When the rain shower had passed over I estimated the number feeding as one flock was between 900 and 1000 birds.

The birds were undeterred by white flags fluttering briskly from poles in the crop. +++

Another big count for today came from Ian Watts who found the Eastleigh Wide Lane flock of Golden Plover had increased to 600 birds (but only 40 Lapwing there). Previous highest counts of Golden Plover here this autumn were of 420 on Nov 27 and 400+ on Nov 7. Looking through these records and thinking of the low number of Lapwing currently present I saw that on Oct 17 the Lapwing count was 400.

TUE 03 DEC

Conditions were good for checking the number of Egrets coming to roost at the Langstone Wade Court site this evening and I was there long enough to make a full count which totalled 97 birds - equal to the record for this site set on Oct 16 this autumn.

John Firth, who lives at Romsey, has just come across a local female Blackbird which has a most unusual plumage - in John's words .. {{ It has a white rump and 2 white wing bars on each side. I have seen several partly albino blackbirds but never with such even markings. }} I agree that most plumage abnormalities are random, like the House Sparrow which feeds in my garden showing a single totally white primary feather which at first glance suggests a Chaffinch wingbar, but I recall once seeing a male blackbird with the complete head pure white down to the bottom of the neck where the colour changed to the normal black as neatly as if a circle of masking tape had been stuck round the birds neck before the head was spray painted (though the feathers were I am sure natural but pure white). +++

If anyone wants to see another example of carefully co-ordinated aberrant plumage they should have a look for a Magpie which resides near the mouth of the River Adur at Shoreham - its plumage is normal except that both wings are totally pure white (this bird was discovered about a year ago by Andy Horton and he reported re-finding it again only a few days ago). +++

Another bird which seems to have a neat variation on normal plumage is by chance quoted today by Mike Collins who says .. {{ Talking of odd plumage there is a Blue Tit at Goodwood with yellow top to its breast but the lower part is all black. }}

Richard Hallett walked the shore from Langstone to Emsworth and back today, getting close views of the local Spoonbill feeding off Nore Barn (the Barn itself can still just be made out as an overgrown ruin in the wetland area immediately west of the last Emsworth houses on the shore, but the name now applies to the public open space and shore woodland between the housing and the start of the Warblington Farm fields). The Spoonbill was there nearly four hours after high tide - during which it had probably roosted on the Thorney Deeps. At the Langstone end of his walk Richard also had good views of the Kingfisher on one of its regular perches (in the shade of the west wall of the Langstone Mill building, on stakes lining the outflow of the Lymbourne stream where it emerges from under the seawall path). +++

Yesterday (Dec 2) Richard Hallett enjoyed the sight of 14 Avocet among the 44 bird species he saw at Pagham Harbour. +++

Other sightings for today come from Bill Marjeram at Titchfield Haven where he saw the Bittern in flight and found a good number of Redwings, Chaffinches and Goldcrest around the reserve as well as single Chiffchaff, Treecreeper and a couple of Cetti's Warblers. +++

Not in Hampshire but maybe heading our way was a Long-tailed Duck flying past Bexhill today, and also in the Sussex news was a sighting of 26 Tree Sparrows in the Pett area close to the Kent border.

Brian Fellows was also out today and found a less dramatic increase in the number of Tufted Duck on Baffins Pond. These duck seem to have been scarce everywhere through the past month but where Brian only found 20 on Baffins Pond on Nov 21 there were 44 today (but very

little else of interest). At Broadmarsh slipway Brian also noted a pair of Swans which still has their four cygnets with them - he remarks that most Swan families have already split up, and while I agree with him in general this process of 'kicking out the kids before having another brood' can be spread over a long period. It is a long time since the cygnets of the Langstone Pond pair were seen (the two parents are back on the pond, no doubt tempted by the free bread on offer there, and their four young may be the ones recently seen at Eastney) but on the IBM Lake one family group remain in sight of each other (though the youngsters generally keep their distance to demonstrate their independence - or to avoid aggression from their parents?). One factor in this process must be the age of the cygnets, and the family which Brian saw today may be late nesters like the family of seven downy cygnets which only appeared on the scene as late as June 24 (they were seen at Broadmarsh slipway and may have come from a nest on North Binness, but they only had a single parent so are unlikely to be the current family there).

On today's trip Brian went on to Budds Farm but had nothing special to report from there, unlike Mike Collins who was there on Sunday (Dec 1) and saw the famous 'Dodgey Fudge duck' had returned - for those unfamiliar with this bird name it was coined by the 'late lamented' Lee Marshall (has anyone any news of him?) to describe what had previously been thought to be a Ferruginous Duck, though that had long before been discounted by the best observers who classified it as a Pochard x Ferruginous hybrid. This bird first appeared, at the Farlington Marshes Deeps, in Nov 1999 as a juvenile and if it is the same bird this is its fourth winter with us. Don't be confused by the word 'duck' as it is a drake and can best be picked out if you get a back view of it on the water when the white undertail area immediately separates it from the female Tufted Ducks. +++

Still at Budds Farm pools on Dec 1 Mike Collins also saw the dubious female Scaup, of whose parentage I remain unsure. It looks a good Scaup to me but my eyesight and expertise leave much to be desired, and the only support I have for the view that it is a genuine Scaup comes from Bob Chapman's comment in his weekly summary of Farlington Marshes news (dated Nov 25 but relating to the previous week) in which he said .. {{ In the Harbour a Common Scoter and a female Scaup have added to the variety }}. Since then the only people who have seen the bird on the pools, and made any public comment on it, have not been positive in the identification. Mike did see the bird and writes of it as a female Scaup but qualifies that by saying that he did not look at it closely to see if it might be a hybrid, while Kevin Stouse (who saw it when leading a HOS walk on Nov 25) tells me that .. {{ The bird I saw was a female. In the scope (admittedly in pouring rain) it looked very much like a female Pochard with a Scaup's bill - the white at top of bill was very noticeable, the head looked very russet brown. The bird was I think in moult - the back feathers were very bedraggled and it was constantly preening. The back feathers also looked too dark but I must admit I'm no expert on this species and having been caught out before I err on the side of caution! }}. Earlier, in his account of the walk, he said .. {{ One bird was initially identified as a Scaup but consensus amongst the 'experts' was that it was more likely to be a Pochard/Tufted cross. Bird is in moult, so who knows what it will eventually turn out to be, but I'm sure its not a Scaup. }} +++

Mike's third 'interesting bird' seen on Dec 1 was not on the pools but on the harbour shore off the nearby South Moors where he .. {{saw the Brent goose with solid white flanks again, this is probably a hybrid. It looked like a Brent in every other detail }}

MON 02 DEC

After standing motionless for six weeks (or so it would seem) the Goodwood White Stork suddenly took flight today, appearing later in the day by the River Arun at Pulborough (not in the RSPB reserve but by a bridge near that bringing the main road from the south into the town - I think the bridge in question is an old disused one just east of the current road bridge). Hopefully it will find more food there than it could on the golfcourse, and will still be able to watch the cars go by! +++

Checking on the history of this bird I find that it may well have been in southern England since Mar 8 when a Radio Solent listener reported a Stork standing on a Bournemouth rooftop (perhaps tired after a long distance flight to deliver a baby?). That sighting must be a little dubious as it came from a member of the public, and no questions were asked as to their familiarity with Storks (could it have just been a Heron?), but on Apr 16 there was a more credible account of

a White Stork over Brighton, then on Apr 20 one flew over Hedge End near Southampton. On May 13 two White Storks were reported from the Henfield levels, on June 1 one was seen at Pulborough and on June 27 one flew west over Farlington Marshes. +++

The first report from the Goodwood area was on July 19 but the bird in question was only seen distantly in flight by Mike Collins (without bins) and did not stop but seems to have headed to Essex where one was seen from July 21 to 25. By this time the bird had made its choice of favourite site and settled down at Goodwood from Aug 6 to Sep 9, during which period there were sightings of other Storks near Lewes on Aug 23 and in the Isle of Wight/Lepe/Christchurch area between Sep 4 and 7. From Sept 9 to Oct 15 the bird seems to have been roaming (west to Winchester on Sept 11, then east to Winchelsea on Oct 12, with several Sussex coast sightings in between, all consistent with one bird heading in one direction). On Oct 15 it was back at Goodwood, standing motionless within 6 feet of the road and refusing to move when a tractor gang mowing the golf course attempted to get access to the grass where it stood. Based on past experience I predict it's next move will be in January to Donnington near Chichester but we will have to wait and see.

Other news from the SOS website for today is of a Red-throated Diver seen within Pagham Harbour - maybe the same one that was recently exploring the River Ouse as far north as Southease Bridge. Another report was from the Chichester gravel pit lakes, where there was little room among the hundreds of Coots for other birds - other than 50+ Tufted Duck the other species counts were lower than I would have expected (20 Gadwall, 22 Pochard, 20+ Shoveler, 16 Wigeon and 16 Cormorant with only one Canada Goose and 2 Greylags). +++

Coots (52 of them) also dominate on the Emsworth Slipper Pond which Brian Fellows visited today. Most of that pond was bare mud as the sluice gates have been opened to let the River Ems flow out rather than flood the main road passing this pond, and Brian was amused to watch two Little Grebes mud-sliding like children on a newly frozen pond. The small water channel which carries the river out to sea has probably concentrated whatever fish are normally in the pond, and a Cormorant was making the most of this situation. Despite the prevalence of the mud the pair of Gadwall were still present, giving Brian his first view of this species on this pond. More water remains in Peter Pond, just upstream, and among 44 Mallard on it was one white 'Aylesbury' type duck, perhaps tactfully leaving the farmyard where it normally resides until the Christmas season is past! +++

Another list of waterfowl seen today comes from Kevin Stouse at the IBM Lake where the selection of gulls is more normal for the time of year than it has been in recent months (I think the determining factor here is the presence or absence of the falconer and his bird on the rubbish tip across the road - while they are present the gulls keep clear, but if they are not present the gulls soon return). Today there were 6 Greatblackback and 20 Herring Gulls, 5 Common Gulls and 70 Black-headed on the IBM Lake.

The computer at Farlington Marshes is at last working again (as is Barry Collins machine) enabling Jason Crook to bring us up to date with his news and to confirm that his first sighting of a returning Goosander was in Langstone Harbour (Broadmarsh) on Nov 29, one day before I saw what was probably the same bird in Chichester Harbour at Langstone. Yesterday three new Pale-bellied Brent appeared in the Farlington Marshes area where only one had been seen previously this winter, and on the previous Sunday (Nov 24) what was almost certainly the Emsworth/Thorney Island based first winter Spoonbill flew west to Farlington Marshes, paused there for half an hour then flew on, probably exploring further west before flying back east over the south of Langstone Harbour and south Hayling +++

PLANTS:

SUN 08 DEC

Church Lane leading to Warblington Church had one plant of Cow Parsley in full flower today, not entirely unexpected at this time of year but a delight to see. The leaves of Cow Parsley are now visibly growing along many waysides, and I was interested to see that this plant seemed to have sacrificed the normal leaf development to concentrate its growth on a single plant stem with many flower umbels and few, relatively small, stem leaves. Much more surprising were a couple of plants of Stone Parsley showing fresh growth and covered with minute unopen flower

buds with about three tiny white flowers actually open to qualify it for my flowering list. Not the first for the new season, but the best specimens I have seen so far, were a good show of wild Primrose flowers on a grave in Warblington cemetery. The pale colour of the flowers and the look of the plants suggested genuine wild plants (though they may have been planted on the grave perhaps fifty years ago!). Another plant perhaps worth noting was Pellitory of the Wall on which I could still detect anthers to count it as flowering.

SAT 07 DEC

I did not spend much time looking for plants when at the IBM Portsmouth site in today's drizzle but it may be worth mentioning that Small Scabious is still putting on a brave show of flowering there, while the Winter Heliotrope flowering is coming on strongly. Whether the flowers were 'open' or not I could not tell but I did note a good show of the tiny yellow flowers/buds on the tips of the branches of a couple of Nootka Cypress. Red Clover and Creeping Buttercup were also flowering along with the Gorse.

THU 05 DEC

Passing the ornamental wooden mill wheel in the Langbrook stream on the north side of the A27 here in Havant today I was surprised to see Meadow Sweet still in full flower, surrounded by flowering Water Mint and Water Forget-me-not, but even more surprised to see a tall flowering plant of Perennial Sowthistle (*Sonchus arvensis*) near the other plants.

Another good plant find for December come from John Goodspeed who has found Blue Fleabane still flowering on Portsdown

WED 04 DEC

A quick walk round the Hayling Oysterbeds this afternoon gave me my first flowering Sweet Violet since the spring, and I also found Gorse was now flowering abundantly in the Stoke Common area.

MON 02 DEC

Last Wednesday John Goodspeed told me that he had just seen a couple of plants of Cowslip flowering on Portsdown (west of the hilltop roundabout and south of the old ARE site). That report slipped my memory last week but I was reminded of it by John's weekly poster of nature notes today (the date of sighting was probably Nov 26 or earlier). +++

Also during last week at least 22 plants were flowering in the Emsworth Brook Meadow site, among them Purple Toadflax and Wood Avens. While most of the plants listed are dying back one at least is only just starting to flower extensively and that is Common Gorse, while the Winter Heliotrope is less blatantly increasing its number of flowers.

INSECTS:

SAT 07 DEC

At the beginning of November Bob Chapman still had Speckled Wood on the wing at Farlington Marshes in the week up to Nov 1, and Graham Roberts told me of some in his Cosham garden on Nov 3, but today Theo Roberts told me that the last date for one in their garden was in fact Nov 11 and I have heard of none later than that.

FRI 06 DEC

Tony Wilson was surprised to see a large Bumblebee flying through his garden in the Hove area of the Sussex coast today - surprised more because of the gloomy weather than the month of December. Mated Queen Bumblebees are the only ones which survive the winter, and they are occasionally seen on sunny days in the coldest months (probably they, like all other hibernating species, have a need from time to time to exercise their muscles and void themselves of toxins accumulating in their bodies) but today was hardly the best opportunity to do so. +++

Also today an update to the national Migrant Moth website records yet another Red Admiral on the wing - this time in Devon on Dec 4.

TUE 03 DEC

A brief postscript to Mike Rafter's bird news for today tells us that he saw a Red Admiral flying in New Milton (in Hampshire but near Bournemouth) today.

MON 02 DEC

Having read my notes (see Friday 29 Nov) on Clouded Yellows Mike Gibbons has sent me further

confirmation that larvae of this species have been found overwintering in the Southbourne Undercliff area of Bournemouth, and tells me that the first of these emerged as butterflies on April 12 this spring (a lot earlier than the May 1 date recorded by Matthew Oates on the Isle of Wight for what was probably a genuine migrant). Mike also saw his first Common Blue on May 7, four days earlier than Theo Roberts sighting of one on Portsdown on May 11, so I have a couple of updates to make to my first sightings table! +++

More recent sightings from Mike Gibbons are of a Red Admiral in his Christchurch garden, just in Dorset, and of a Peacock which seems to have had the idea the a shop selling beds was a good place to hibernate - Mike found a rather dozy Peacock on the pavement outside this shop on Nov 24 and successfully transferred it to his garden shed where it can hopefully complete its hibernation in peace. His last Painted Lady was seen in Southbourne (Bournemouth) on Nov 17, and on that same day he saw what appeared to be a tired Red Admiral attempting to set out over the sea on return migration but not having the strength to do more than soar up into the air, then drop onto the surface of the water.

A more seasonable sighting was of the first Winter Moth, seen yesterday (Dec 1) on the kitchen window of Barry Collins' house in Havant by his wife Margaret

WEEK 48 NOV 25 - DEC 01 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 01 DEC

A highly probable sighting of a Pallas's Warbler in Stansted Forest was made today by John Chapman who tells me that when he was in The Sling (area of the Forest nearest Rowlands Castle) and searching for a Firecrest among a tit flock ..

"I got a bird in the bins (very briefly) with a double wing-bar and (most noticeable) a very prominent yellow stripe over the eye, contrasting with what appear to be a very dark broad stripe above it (i.e. there was something lighter on the crown). I am not familiar with Pallas's Warbler, but I don't see what else it could have been. I know both Firecrest and Yellow-browed Warbler reasonably well, and it wasn't either (yellow where the former would have white above the eye, and too dark on the crown, and too crest-like for the latter). If you haven't had any other reports, it might well be worth people having a look."

Although John did not clearly see the yellow crown stripe nor the yellow rump, and did not comment on the dark eyestripe below the yellow supercilium, I must agree with him that there is no other likely candidate (Hulme's Leaf Warbler is not only very unlikely but does not have a noticeable darker area above the yellow supercilium)

After this propitious start John walked on all the way to the Forestside area where one larch contained Crossbills, Redpoll, Chaffinches and a male Bullfinch.

SOS outing to Sheppey mentions thousands of Lapwing and Golden Plover there, and while I do not know how long the plovers have been present I sense a recent mass invasion of of Lapwing and Golden Plover into southern England. One sign of this comes in a report from Rye Harbour recording 1000 Golden Plover and 2000 Lapwing there yesterday, when the Havant Wildlife Group at Pagham estimated a good 500 Lapwing there. Here at Langstone there has clearly been a marked increase in the number of Golden Plover in the past two days (whether new arrivals or a move of some from Thorney Island I do not know)

SAT 30 NOV

My choice of today's best bird must be a drake Smew which arrived at Rye Harbour today (is it worth checking out the Chichester Lakes yet?).

On the east side of Thorney Island today Barry Collins was doing his stint at the mid-tide counts for Chichester Harbour and recorded a total of 427 Knot which, with the 60+ I had on the Langstone shore and a count of 150 seen off the Milton shore in the south-west of Langstone Harbour, seems to indicate a significant influx of these birds. Barry also had 2 Short-eared Owls over the Thornham Marshes and 2800 Dunlin on the mud but I was particularly pleased to see that he also had 18 Avocet.

Anne de Potier, covering Nutbourne Bay for the mid-tide counts, also saw 16 Avocet which surprisingly arrived in the bay together swimming in deep water - these may or may not have

been the same birds that Barry Collins also saw further down the Thorney Channel which ends in Nutbourne Bay

Over at Pagham Harbour the Havant Wildlife Group saw a further 12 Avocet (a total of 16 were reported to be in that harbour), and they too were using alternative means of locomotion rather than flying - Jim Berry tells me {{ They were to be running at high speed on the mud up-stream for several hundred yards, and I remain curious as why they ran rather than flew - any thoughts? }}

Other birds seen at Pagham today by the Havant group were a wisp of 10 Snipe flying together plus 1 Kingfisher, 2 Reed Buntings and 10 Stonechat (their walk also proves that the shore path from Sidlesham to Church Norton is once again open after being closed for repairs).

The redhead Goosander which I saw in the Chichester Harbour channel immediately east of Langstone today (see yesterday's notes !!) was not the only one to arrive on the south coast as I hear from two different sources that a drake appeared in the Pagham lagoon today. Whether these two birds were genuinely the first to reach the coast this winter may never be resolved, though I may be able to get confirmation from Andy Parfitt of a rumour reaching me from John Goodspeed that Andy saw a Goosander some two weeks ago on South Hayling. Certainly if we exclude the coast there have been multiple sightings in the lower Avon Valley recently (maybe birds that were involved in the confirmed breeding there this summer, but maybe new arrivals from afar). Of these John Clark reports sightings in the Bisterne area of the Avon Valley of 2 redheads on Oct 26, 2 males and 1 redhead there on Nov 16 and 1 male plus 1 redhead there on Nov 24 on which date 1 male and 1 redhead (the same birds?) were also seen on Ibsley Water further up stream. +++

Turning to the regular haunts of Goosander in north east Hampshire (where they have always outnumbered coastal birds) John Clark reports that 7 males roosted at Eversley on Nov 17 (and heard that some had been at Tundry Pond a few days earlier). Since then numbers have increased and today there were 9 Goosander at Tundry Pond (7 of them also appearing on Fleet Pond), and the evening roost at Eversley had 24 Goosander (probably the highest November total for that site).

Another bird that seems to have decided it is time to arrive on the south coast is Bittern. We all know that at least one Bittern has been present at Titchfield Haven since Sept 15 (and it was seen again today), but 1 at Fleet Pond yesterday was I think a newcomer. There was also one at Rye Harbour yesterday.

Another message received today was from Richard Greer telling me that the pair of Gadwall which he had seen on the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth arrived there on Nov 27 and were seen again both yesterday and today.

FRI 29 NOV

Before finishing these notes for Friday, writing them on Saturday, the tide table called me to the Langstone east shore for the scheduled 'mid-tide counts' designed to show which parts of the shore are used by the birds during the period of rapidly falling tide between three and four hours after high tide. Watching the birds in this period on Sat 30 Nov made a memorable experience but the most interesting observation was of what I think is the first Goosander to return to the Hampshire shore this winter - a redhead seen closely on the water between Pook Lane and the Northney marina area. With it on the water were at least 5 Goldeneye and two Great Crested Grebe (but no Merganser), and a total of 24 Shelduck were also seen. On the mud the Golden Plover started to drop in as soon as the mud appeared and where there had been 110 yesterday there were more than 260 today. Numbers of Knot were also up, at around 60, and there were probably 500+ Dunlin but not much more than 50 Bar-tailed Godwit at this stage of the tide. Just 3 Egrets were seen - the great majority have now abandoned the coast for inland fields - and few Brent were to be seen until over 200 exploded from the Northney Marsh fields on Hayling Island to fly east.

Much further west, on the Hampshire border at Emsworth, the long staying Spoonbill was seen again by Barry Collins who also found a Yellow-legged Gull, 5 adult Med Gulls and 26 Lesser Blackbacks all in Emsworth Harbour. In previous notes I have said that this first winter Spoonbill arrived in the area on Nov 5 but Barry Collins did see what was probably the same bird roosting in the Thorney Deeps as early as Oct 19, and it could well be that this is the same

bird that was first seen at Rye Harbour on Oct 11. If so it may have flown west along the coast, dropping in at Thorney on Oct 19 but then, after flying further west, deciding that Thorney was the best place to be, returning east to be seen passing over Bedhampton on Nov 1.

Today Brian Fellows, watching from the Emsworth promenade (separating the Town Millpond from the Harbour) also had good views of the Spoonbill in the harbour though neither he nor Barry spotted a pair of Gadwall which, according to Richard Creer, were on the nearby Slipper Millpond the previous day (Nov 28) - maybe there will soon be a small flock of Gadwall on the Thorney Little Deeps as quite a lot of them have recently returned to this area (e.g. 115 on the Chichester Lakes on Nov 10 and a pair on Bedhampton Mill Pool on Nov 11, though surprisingly none on Aldsworth Pond on Nov 17)

Glorious sunshine in the late morning brought at least 110 Golden Plover back to the Langstone east shore at low tide - the first flock of more than 25 seen there this winter. A few more Bar-tailed Godwit were also in the shore (but at most 200 of them) and hardly any other shore birds until 150 or so Brent flew off the Warblington fields. Further along the shore, where the main stream flows out from the Warblington fields, a line of 28 Shelduck were on the mud - double the number seen at any time earlier this winter. On the wet meadow south of Wade Court the Teal numbered over 100 and a Dunnock sang repeatedly for several minutes. Three people passing me told me they had just seen the Kingfisher in the outflow of the Lymbourne stream between the Royal Oak pub and the Mill +++

Another Dunnock was in full song today at Emsworth Brook Meadow, where other songsters were Robin, Wren, Blue and Great Tits, Song Thrush and distant Mistle Thrush. Here in Havant Song Thrush song can now be heard daily (I have heard up to three singing simultaneously) but I have not yet heard the more unpredictable Mistle Thrush.

THU 28 NOV

As I said in yesterday's notes (which I actually wrote this morning) a single Fieldfare was in my garden first thing today, but only briefly, and later (not in yesterday's notes!) I had what must have been a winter Blackcap hidden in a thick yew hedge along my front driveway. The very quiet and varied song could only be heard if you were within a few yards of the hedge, but when I first heard it I could not believe the song was coming from so close at hand and thought it must be a distant bird well out of sight, but even though it was so close there was no way of seeing it. The bird seemed to know this as it carried on singing even when my wife and a neighbour joined me and were talking normally within a yard of where the bird continued singing undisturbed.

As noted above (in Friday's notes) Richard Creer today had a pair of Gadwall on the Emsworth Slipper Millpond to remind me of the great expansion of this species during the 35 years I have lived in the Havant area. John Taverner's Wildfowl of Hampshire (published in 1962) described Gadwall as a rarity appearing only occasionally in the county during hard winters. Nowadays they are not only present throughout the year but breed in the Avon, Test and Itchen valleys among other places (this year a female was seen with 15 ducklings on Woolmer Pond in East Hampshire on July 27). The latest overall picture from the 2000 Hampshire Bird Report is of 22 pairs breeding in the county in that year. Flocks seen this year include 113 birds on the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood in September with 30 on Alresford Pond earlier that month and 54 at Stratfield Saye in the north of the county on Aug 28. Until the last few years they have been uncommon on the coast but they are now appearing on Isle of Wight.

A couple of recent observations at Titchfield Haven come from Richard Carpenter - it seems that before the Peregrine drove the Black-tailed Godwits from the reserve there were 310 of them present as recently as yesterday (Nov 27), and the Bittern is almost certainly still present though no sightings have been reported since Tuesday (Nov 26) - unlike the Marsh Harrier it probably enjoys a high water level among the reeds where it can fish without emerging into the open.

WED 27 NOV

My reason for starting today's notes with Fieldfare is that (on Thursday morning, before writing these notes) a single Fieldfare was chacking away on the tip of a Beech tree at the end of my garden, looking lost as if he had just arrived in the area and had become separated from a flock that it had been travelling with overnight. Much better proof of their presence along the

south coast in large numbers comes from the SOS website which reports hundreds of both Fieldfare and Redwing on the Pevensey Levels near Bexhill today (i.e. Nov 27) where they were feeding on abundant Hawthorn berries. In north Hampshire today Mike Wall noted a flock of more than 80 Fieldfare going west in the Basingstoke area, and last Monday Tony Gutteridge had more than 1000 Fieldfare and hundreds of Redwings in the Arun valley from Amberley to Pulborough Brooks. Within the past fortnight other reports have been of some 400 going north east over the Finchdean area and a total of over 1500 Fieldfare in the New Forest, and I myself found a small number in the Stansted Forest area on Nov 17

Both John Shillitoe and Bill Marjeram were at Titchfield Haven today and both reported good views of the male Marsh Harrier and described how it was seen to pick up reeds or small branches and carry them off upstream as if nest building (though no one is suggesting that was the purpose of the behaviour). John did suggest it might be practicing for the coming spring but also suggested it might be building itself a roosting platform now that the water level has risen to submerge its previously dry roost within the reeds. Bill's suggestion is that, in his words ... {{ I wonder if this is the same behaviour as shown by predatory fish, snapping at or taking twigs in aggression? }} ... and if so I think any feelings of annoyance on the bird's part are fully justified (as are those of human householders evicted by flood water). The long recent period when the bird was not seen by birders probably indicated a period of good feeding and dry roosting, all concealed within the reeds, while the recent 'good showing' of the bird may well be a response to its 'homelessness' due to rising water - forcing it to walk the streets all day (like our human homeless). The fact that Bill saw the Harrier bring a prey item, possibly a rat, and eat it in the open fields where it would normally dine in seclusion, seems to re-inforce this theory.

I was on the Warblington shore this afternoon and saw my first Slavonian Grebe of the winter in the main channel near the entrance to Northney marina on Hayling. Also on the water were 3 Goldeneye, 3 Merganser and 2 Great Crested Grebe, with 8 Shelduck and 30 Wigeon in the stream channel off the outfall of the main Warblington Farm stream. The tide was too high for many waders but there were some 20 Knot with the Dunlin in the still exposed mud and around 60 Black-tailed Godwit with 30 Lapwing on the Saltings near Langstone Pond (plus 80 Teal in the Wade Court south meadow pools). Bar-tailed numbers were once again very low - only an estimated 40 birds seen by me, and no Golden Plover.

When I set out the Wade Court north meadows had 19 Egrets and another 13 were in the field adjacent to the Warblington farmhouse. On my way home these had all presumably joined forces in a pre-roost flock of 35 Egrets in the Wade Court north meadows, feeding on worms driven to the surface by the rising water table.

Also today Brian Fellows was at the Budds Farm pools where the Pochard count was up to 14 (but only two Tufted Duck were seen). A female Goldeneye was a newcomer to the pools, on which Brian saw the possible female Scaup which Kevin Stouse dismissed as a hybrid last Sunday. If this is the same bird which I saw there on Oct 27 I cannot feel certain that it is not the genuine article - what I wrote then was that I saw ... {{ what I feel sure was a female Scaup - slightly bigger than the Tufties, not closely associating with them, and having a big rounded head with no sign of a tuft and a large white round face mask - she also had a uniform rich chestnut brown colour to the head, neck and breast feathers which was different from the nearby female Tufties, and my confidence in this bird being a Scaup was increased by Bob Chapman's report a couple of days ago that a female Scaup had been in Langstone Harbour during the week }}. I am not sure if Kevin had a close look at the nail on the bill of this bird (and he did not tell us if what he saw was a male or female) so as far as I am concerned the jury is still out on this one.

Having just quoted information from Bob Chapman this is an appropriate place to say how much we miss the news from himself and Jason Crook, and to apologize if my comment in last Monday's notes (re the possible Curlew Sandpiper) seemed to imply that this lack of recent news from them was deliberate 'suppression'. Martin Gillingham tells me that the real reason is that a new computer has been installed in Bob's building at the Marshes, but is refusing to work properly. Similar forbearance is necessary if we do not hear much from Thorney Island in the near future, as Barry Collins has also been smitten with computer problems. I wish both computers a speedy recovery

Ken Hearne offers an excellent example of evolution in progress from his Worthing garden, where a Lesser Whitethroat has been present since Nov 17 and looks set to stay the winter. This bird is clearly a mould-breaker, but if it is to pass on its adaptation it must survive the winter, so the following quote from Ken is very relevant. He says .. {{ A point of interest on the Lesser Whitethroat which has been in the garden for some days. It has become increasingly aware of the greenfinches and sparrows on the seed feeders and yesterday made an unsuccessful attempt to perch on the niger feeder. This behaviour is similar to that of the blackcap that wintered in the garden a year ago. The blackcap gradually learned how to use the feeders and eventually was seen eating sunflower seed regularly. I am not sure if it digested the seed or it passed straight through. It will be interesting to see if the Lesser Whitethroat persists or gives up when it discovers the feeders are not full of greenfly! }} My own feeling is that the bird will have no great difficulty in changing its diet, and I base this on the example of the Blackcaps which have a very similar summer diet but which in the winter adapt their diet to seed, bread, cheese and many other items that are neither fruit nor insect based.

Another example of evolutionary change come from Tony Hale (from Romsey), who writes .. {{ For many years, during the autumn I have noticed Blue Tits poking around under the eaves and gutters of local houses presumably looking for spiders. This year my attention was drawn to a Magpie doing the same thing with, it must be said, a certain amount of difficulty due to its greater size and lack of dexterity. Persistence paid off, because it was seen doing it for about a week before all action ceased. It had obviously been watching the Blue Tits and was copying their behaviour. Has anybody ever come across this? }}

TUE 26 NOV

Not far from Rye 2 Tree Sparrows were seen at Pett, causing me to look back over what I have heard of this declining species in the past year. Here in Hampshire I have heard of no Tree Sparrows at all this year, even at Odiham RAF station where they bred as recently as 1999 (?). None showed up at Odiham this year and in 2001 none occupied nest boxes recently put up for them (just four observations, involving only five birds, were recorded in Hampshire in 2000, none breeding, and only five records were reported in 1999). Sussex has a few more records, but there also the tide is ebbing fast. This year saw one report of 10 Tree Sparrows in Hastings in January, and one of 20 birds at Icklesham in February, then nothing until two appeared by chance at Selsey Bill on Aug 31. None were reported in September, and in October there was one bird at Newhaven on Oct 1 and five at Rye Harbour on Oct 24 with no other mentions until today's two birds. +

MON 25 NOV

Writing my 'garden gate' weekly poster of wildlife news this morning I commented on the return of Bewick's Swans to the south coast, and this led my thoughts on to the decline in numbers of both Bewick's Swans and Whitefront Geese in the Avon Valley. Birds of Hampshire records the presence of 2000 Whitefront Geese in the Avon Valley in the 1947 hard winter (when lessons at my school were suspended and we were sent out into the local woods to collect firewood!), and as late as 1982 the peak count was around 1500, but last winter the maximum count from the Avon valley was only 5 birds (I think one family) and the only other records came from the fringes of the county (8 landed on Farlington Marshes on Dec 13, 13 flew from Sussex over Emsworth and Warblington on Dec 15 and there were 22 on Tundry Pond in the far north on Christmas Eve). Sussex still had a fair number last winter, and today what I think are the first to return there were seen at Rye (but only 8 of them). +++

As recently as five years ago a count of around 100 Bewick's was expected each winter in the Avon valley, but the peak count last winter up to year end was just 11 birds. So far this winter the Hampshire score is Whitefront nil, Bewick's 4.

Going back to Sussex, where the Whitefront have arrived, I see that the Arundel Great Grey Shrike is still present on the river banks near Warningcamp (where it was first seen on Nov 7), The absence of Golden Plover on the Warblington shore at Langstone has been noticeable this winter (maximum count of 25 so far where there have been around 1000 in recent past winters) but I feel sure these birds have always been part of a large flock operating across the county boundary - sometimes on Thorney airfield, sometimes on the fields north of Southbourne, sometimes at Verner Common on the east coast of Hayling Island, and sometimes at

Warblington. We know that around 700 were on Thorney Island on Nov 4, and one theory of mine (unbased on evidence) is that the removal of the concrete runways from the Thorney airfield has reduced the disturbance to the birds (no vehicles and people using the runways as roads) thus allowing the birds to stay there for their daytime roost. In other words the apparent catastrophic decline in Golden Plover at Warblington does not imply any reduction in the number using the area as their winter quarters, though it may appear so in statistics based on artificial county boundaries.

Ian Thirwell was one of the few birders out today, and he tells us that a Shag was back on the sea off Southsea Castle and a Rock Pipit was on the shore there - but no Purple Sandpiper as yet though an unidentified Diver flew past in the distance.

There were also no Sanderling reported at Southsea today, providing a link to comments on the subject of the evolutionary advantage to this species of having no back toe (see notes for Nov 22 when Derek Hale raised this question). Brian Fellows adds to this discussion today by pointing out that the Sanderling is not unique in following this evolutionary path, saying that "Stone Curlew, Little Ringed Plover, Ringed Plover, Killdeer, Spur-winged Plover and the famous Lesser Sand Plover also have no rear toe"

Ed Griffiths was at Farlington Marshes yesterday with a group of Buckinghamshire Birders. They came on an Avocet there, watched a male Goldeneye 'show a leg' as it waddled ashore, and heard a couple of Bearded Tits. Intriguingly one of their party saw a flash of white when a large flock of Dunlin took off, and he is pretty sure it was the rump of a Curlew Sandpiper. As this is a very late date for their passage he would welcome news of other reports of this bird but I have heard nothing (and Bob Chapman seems to have ceased putting out his weekly reports, while it is a long time since Jason gave us any news). All I know is that Curlew Sandpiper have occasionally wintered in Southampton Water (but only in half a dozen years of the past 50), and that 1999 brought a report of one at Farlington Marshes on Nov 25.

On the pagers there was news of a Great Northern Diver off Farlington Marshes along with the Red-necked Grebe (presumably the one which has been in the harbour since Sept 21 when it arrived at the Milton Lakes), and of a Dartford Warbler. +++

Also out around Langstone Harbour on Sunday was the HOS walk party led by Kevin Stouse from Broadmarsh to Langstone and back. They started with two Greenshank, one Knot and a Rock Pipit near the Broadmarsh carpark, then saw both the Common Sandpiper and Kingfisher in the Hermitage Stream before finding one Chiffchaff in the Budds Farm area and a possible (but unlikely) Scaup on Budds Farm Pools. Kevin does not say whether the Scaup was a male or female, but does think it was a hybrid.

Other news for yesterday away from the shores comes from David Parker in Forestside where he had 8 Redwing and 2 Marsh Tits in his garden, and also saw two Crossbills in larches within the northern edge of Stansted Forest. The fact that the Crossbills were a pair (i.e. male and female) and on their own, coupled with the fact that Crossbills often start nesting in January, stirred unfounded thoughts of even earlier nesting in my mind, but I have nothing to justify those thoughts!

Still keeping away from the shores I see that David Thelwell visited the Fishlake Meadows, just upstream from Romsey, and found much flooding had attracted a range of wildfowl including 60 Teal, 50 Tufted Duck, 30 Wigeon, 25 Pochard, 15 Shoveler and 2 Pintail. No wonder the Shoveler have not returned to Baffins Pond when there is so much on offer for them on inland floods. +++

On Nov 9 I passed on some comments on wintering Blackcaps from David Harper at Sussex University. In response to requests from a number of people who had seen Blackcaps in October and early November (for tips on distinguishing late departing summer Blackcaps from arrivals of the population that winters in Britain) David told us two things from his experience. Firstly the new arrivals seem to spend some time in country hedgerows feeding on autumn berries before they start to appear in gardens, and secondly he told us of a more scientific way of distinguishing them through trapping and ringing. Birds that are trapped or identified in the winter months can be used to determine the limits of the 'wintering Blackcap' period by recording the first and last dates on which these 'known to be wintering' birds were found. Using this method David's earliest date was Oct 11 and the last was Mar 11. Today Glynne

Evans, based at Chilbolton in the upper reaches of the Test near Andover, has given us his dates based on the same method, showing that in his experience the birds arrive and depart a month later than they do in Sussex. Glynne's earliest winter bird was found on Nov 21 and his latest on Apr 2. Glynne writes {{ These figures tend to confirm David's suggestion that the birds tend to be in rural areas (feeding on wild fruits and berries) early in winter, and move to gardens later on. }} and {{ No less than 13 of my winter-caught birds were also caught after 10th March, suggesting that this is a time when wintering birds make considerable use of gardens. And their weights suggest that they often fatten up on my bird table before migrating back to the east! }}
+++

I hope this helps, but in my opinion this difference of around a month actually makes it less easy to distinguish winter from summer birds. No such problem for Brian Fellows who yesterday had two Blackcaps, male and female, feeding on colourful 'apples' on an ornamental Malus tree in his Emsworth Garden - they were safely in the winter period whichever version you use.

In telling me of the Blackcaps Brian also corrects my statement (see my notes for Nov 21) that the four cygnets which Brian found at Eastney Lake (on Nov 21) without their parents might have been the offspring of the pair that nested in Eastney Lake and which lost one parent when the male was killed by dogs soon after the cygnets hatched this spring. While it is true that four cygnets hatched in this nest one of them disappeared between June 25 and July 9, and the family continued to be seen as mother and three cygnets through the summer. So I withdraw my suggestion that the mother has now been killed by the same dogs, and apologize for not checking my facts. All I can suggest now is that the appearance of the four (maybe from the Langstone Mill Pond nest or maybe a family which nested on North Binness island??) without a parent is just a sign of the normal separation of juveniles from adult parents before the next nesting season starts. The appearance of an unaccompanied lone cygnet on the IBM Lake this month is a similar sign.

PLANTS:

SUN 01 DEC

Heavy rain first thing presaged a day indoors, but by mid-morning the sun was shining to tempt me out so I took a short walk around the streets of Havant during which I listed 36 flowering plants which included Dove's Foot Cranesbill, Red and White Campion, Annual Wall-rocket, Herb Robert, Scarlet Pimpernel and a cluster of Spear Thistles covered in fresh flowers. Although there were few if any insects to enjoy it in the wet air Ivy was among the commonest flowers and both Nipplewort and Smooth-Hawk's-beard were equally prevalent.

SAT 30 NOV

The Havant Wildlife Group were at Pagham Harbour today, finding relatively few flowering plants but among their list was Black Knapweed. Also on that list were Wild Carrot, Red Clover and Gorse. Although Gorse will soon be in abundant flower everywhere it seems a little slow in getting started this winter.

FRI 29 NOV

Martin Rand rightly points out that when, in my headline for Nov 27, I described Conyza bilboana as a plant 'unique to Hampshire' I revealed that I had not read all of what he said about it. Those of you who are more careful in your reading than I am in my writing will have noticed that in Wednesday's notes I did contradict my headline when I said that Martin had seen the plant in Dorset, but I did not then pick up the facts that Martin gave me about it's presence in Ireland. not to mention Surrey and Kent as well as Dorset and Hampshire. +++

Writing to point this out Martin also now says ... {{ By the way I managed to miss out the one character that really makes it stand out from a distance, which is its very dark green colour. There is a note from N Hants BSBI recorder Tony Mundell in BSBI News 87, published last year, which has a very full identification guide to the three species.

In Emsworth Brian Fellows today found more Winter Heliotrope in flower, this time in Brook Meadow by the river, and he also found fresh Wild Angelica in blossom

WED 27 NOV

In my notes for last Saturday (Nov 23) I wrote about two of the *Conyza* species, Canadian and Guernsey Fleabane, but avoided mentioning a third species which appears in the Hampshire flora under the strange name of *Conyza* cf. *bilbaonana* (I take it the cf. means "looks like *C. bilbaonana* but we are not quite sure") and I was further put off entering deep waters when I read in Stace, under the entry for Canadian Fleabane, that {{ Robust, more hispid plants with a larger capitula, 5 lobed corolla on the disk florets, and having a subcorymbose inflorescence, first found in 1992 in the Southampton area, have been called *Conyza bilbaona*. Their true identity, distinction from *C. canadensis*, and relationship to other species needs further study }} +++

Martin Rand, who is no doubt more up to date than I am with the results of the further study of these plants, comments that I did not mention *C. bilbaonana* which he says has now been recorded in Hampshire since 1994. going on to say about it that it is ... {{ worth looking out for - I've most recently seen it on an industrial estate in East Dorset a year or so ago, and meant to do a trawl for it round Southampton this year, but other commitments and the weather intervened. There was a guide to the plant in BSBI News Issue 73, written by local botanist Paul Stanley. Its disk florets have a five-lobed corolla, like *C. canadensis* and unlike the other two. It has quite hispid stems compared with *C. canadensis*, rather rougher leaf hairs and a tendency to produce serrate or even pinnate leaves. The phyllaries are dark centred with a pale margin and help to distinguish the plant from a distance - as does the purple colour of the outer florets and the yellowish colour of the inner when well-developed. The ligules of the outer florets are barely visible. The whole plant does look strikingly different from *C. canadensis* once you've picked it out. }} +++

Martin also tells me that the origin if the English name Guernsey Feabane (when the scientific name *C. sumatriensis* suggests an origin in Sumatra) is the result of the plant being first identified and named by an English botanist after it had already made the long journey to Guernsey. Martin adds that 'garden escape' Sweet Violets are now flowering in Chandler's Ford, whereas the Stinking Hellebore that had been flowering in his garden for a good ten days by this time last year is only just coming into bud this year. Conversely Dwarf Gorse, normally long over by now in normal years, still has a few flowers to show on Baddesley Common this year. +++

In my own garden here in Havant Thyme-leaved Speedwell has just started to flower again, Procumbent Yellow-sorrel (*Oxalis corniculata*) is still flourishing, and a tree full of Almond Blossom can be seen in a neighbour's garden. Passing Wade Court today several more flower heads had come up on the Winter Heliotrope.

INSECTS:

TUE 26 NOV

Three Red Admirals were seen today. One was in Sussex, nectaring on *Viburnum bodnantense* in Ken Hearne's garden at Worthing, another was at Brook Meadow in Emsworth at the extreme eastern limit of Hampshire, and the third was close to the Dorset border, just in Hampshire at Barton on Sea.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 01 DEC

Walking a suburban pavement in the Denvilles area of Havant this morning I came to a large Lime tree whose roots have forced up the tarmac of the pavement, and a number of moderate sized fungi had grown through the cracks but all had been knocked over by boot or wind and rain. I did not immediately recognize them in this habitat, and could not be certain if they were growing on the wood or the surrounding soil so I took a specimen home to discover that they were *Tricholoma ustaloides*.

WED 27 NOV

The exposed roots of a large Sycamore tree, growing on an eroded bank beside Wade Lane where it approaches the Langstone shore, caught my eye last week when an orange coloured

fungus appeared on the soil among the roots. I had seen it in the same place last year but it was only when I saw it again today that I had a good enough look to re-identify it as *Melastiza chateri* +++

While I had my fungus books out I also had another go at identifying a new fungus that has been prolific in my lawn this autumn, and I am now certain that it is the Meadow Waxcap.

MON 25 NOV

Yesterday Ed Griffiths, scanning the Chalkdock area of Langstone Harbour from Budds Mound, is pretty sure that he briefly glimpsed the round head of a Common Seal in the water around boats moored off Broadmarsh, and wonders if there have been other sightings there recently. While I cannot quote any firm sightings I would have no difficulty in accepting this sighting as genuine - not only is there a small permanent (?) colony of around ten Seals usually to be found in Chichester Harbour, but in recent winters one or two seals have usually been in Langstone Harbour (sometimes catching and eating diving duck). Back on Nov 9 I had a similar sighting to Ed's in the same area - what I saw was a group of Mallard taking off in panic from the water, attracting my attention in time to see what I described in my bird notes for that day as the 'curved back of a small grey whale breaking the surface where the Mallard had been' - while I saw no more of the 'whale' the patch of water where it had surfaced remained distinct for some time as ripples spread out from a large patch of disturbed water. The general impression was that a large underwater creature was hunting the area, failed to get a Mallard, but remained underwater in the hope of taking other prey by surprise. +++

Excluding reports of Seals from the Sussex and Isle of Wight coasts the only report from Langstone Harbour that has reached me this autumn was of one off the Hayling Oysterbeds on Sep 27. Hopefully this absence of reports does not mean that the Phocine distemper which was threatening to exterminate British Seals during the past summer has had an effect on the south coast population - my only information on that was that while it was having a serious impact on East Anglian colonies it had not spread to our area.

WEEK 47 NOV 18 – 24 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SAT 23 NOV

Off the Milton shore in Portsmouth the Havant Wildlife Group saw 20 Shelduck in this south west part of Langstone Harbour (presumably further new arrivals in addition to the now established flock in the north west of the harbour).

FRI 22 NOV

In the Portsmouth area the winter high tide wader roost has appeared again on the shingle of Eastney Beach visible from the Eastney Esplanade road. Ian Thirlwell drove along here today, seeing an estimated 500 Dunlin, 70 Ringed Plover and an unknown number of Sanderling (which regularly use this beach in winter, though the exact place where they settle is variable between Southsea Castle and Fort Cumberland).

Incidentally I must thank Derek Hale for pointing out that one feature of Sanderling is the total absence of a back toe. He says this contributes to the speed at which they run along the sand (do they, without a prop at the back of the foot, have to go fast all the time to stop themselves falling over backwards?). More seriously I believe the almost complete absence of a back toe is what distinguishes a non-passerine from a passerine (which has a back toe capable of grasping a branch and enabling the bird to perch safely even when asleep). What I do not know is if the total absence of this toe in the Sanderling gives it a real evolutionary advantage - can anyone give me the scientific view of this?

A very minor Hampshire observation made by myself in Havant was of three different Song Thrushes singing concurrently near my home in the morning, while for a more significant piece of news that may account for the decline in Cuckoo numbers in the past few years see today's entry on my Insect News page concerning the demise of the Garden Tiger moth in the south of England.

Having commented above on statistics applied to birds (re 'average last dates' for summer visitors) I can't resist expressing my view of one item in the November issue of the 'English Nature' magazine which reached me today. The item purports to be a conservation success

story showing a 'dramatic comeback' in the breeding success of the very much endangered Hen Harrier in Britain, and it does have facts to show a 30% increase in the number of successful nests this year when compared to the year 2000. To be fair the article is headed 'Staying Alive' and English Nature do not use this percentage, but actually say "English Nature is keeping it's fingers crossed that endangered Hen Harriers can sustain their dramatic comeback after seven out of eleven nesting attempts have been successful this year." They then say that in 2000 only five pairs were successful with their nests, going on to say that there were 13 attempts to breed in that year (as against 11 this year). I suppose it is better to be optimistic rather than pessimistic, but as a born pessimist I see this story as showing that there were two less pairs attempting to breed this year than there were in 2000 (I know the words do not exactly say this), and the increase in breeding success may have been just a matter of luck. +++

To me this story sums up my view of Nature Conservation in Britain in the 21st century. Despite our best efforts, which do show successes if looked at from an optimistic point of view, the overall trend wherever we look is downward as the human species grabs more of the overall cake of resources that the earth has to offer, leaving that much less of the cake for the millions of other species on which our lives ultimately depend.

THU 21 NOV

In Portsmouth Brian Fellows visited Baffins Pond, perhaps motivated by the fact that on Nov 22 last year a record 83 Shoveler were on the pond but today there were none at all, and only 20 Tufted Duck, while the gang of 11 Barnacle Geese, with the Snow Goose and Bar-head hybrid, were also missing - presumably now settled in for the winter at Titchfield Haven where they arrived on Oct 31. Today's interest at Baffins consisted of 76 Mallard, 11 Canada Geese, 7 Cormorant and 1 Heron (so apparently there are fish in this pond even if there are none now in the North Sea).

Yesterday (Nov 20) Peter Hughes from the Pulborough RSPB reserve found an astonishing 45 Avocets feeding on the east side of Amberley Wild Brooks. He says they could only be seen from the path which runs along the south east edge of the wetland in the Rackham Woods area. I suspect these were on their way to Poole Harbour for the winter, but they would make a welcome addition to the Wild Brooks area should they stay.

Brian Fellows was out birding both yesterday and the day before that. Yesterday (Nov 20) he had a look round Emsworth Harbour where 24 Shelduck were the first good show of this winter for the western end of Chichester Harbour - with them Brian found 5 Greenshank that will presumably stay the winter here (during this month up to 26 have been on Thorney Island - these five probably being part of that group - and another 11 at Farlington Marshes, and as Birds of Hampshire says passage ends in early November these are all probably wintering birds)

On Nov 19 Brian found a Shag at the mouth of Langstone Harbour near the ferry where up to four juveniles were seen at the end of July and beginning of August. As there have been no further reports of those juveniles I assume the bird Brian saw was the first to arrive of the adults which usually winter there, maybe coming from farther afield than the Isle of Wight which I presume was the origin of the summer juveniles, and of the birds regularly seen recently in the Hurst area near the Needles. Also at Eastney were four Mute Swan cygnets, and as Brian does not mention an accompanying adult I am left wondering if they were on their own because they felt it was time to become independent or because their mother has suffered a similar fate to their father (who was killed this summer by dogs belonging to a lady who 'did not like Swans'). +++

Finally for today I find that the Titchfield Haven website has recently been updated to carry news up to Nov 2. Most of the information is stale by now but I did see that there was a Whinchat there on Oct 19 which I had not heard of from other sources - that seems to be the last one in Hampshire this year, though there was one at Pevensy near Eastbourne in East Sussex as late as Oct 29. Also of interest was that no sightings of Marsh Harrier are recorded since Oct 23, so my comments when Ian Watts saw a male Marsh Harrier there last Monday (Nov 18) still stand (where has the bird been in the interval between Oct 23 and Nov 18?). The continuing presence of one Bittern is confirmed by sightings on Oct 19, 28 and Nov 2, and I see that my recent comment on the re-appearance of the local Barn Owl (which John Shillitoe heard was seen by some on Nov 20) did not take into account that it was already to be seen hunting at

dusk on Oct 19.

WED 20 NOV

Two Swallows flew determinedly out to sea at Titchfield Haven when Bill Marjeram was there this morning, and with this news came an interesting item (which has apparently appeared in the national press) from Ed Griffiths, who writes .. {{some juvenile Swallows are refusing to leave, having taken up residence in the roof space of a factory near High Wycombe. They've apparently resisted all attempts to net or lure them out and are living on 'cluster flies' (whatever they may be). There were 4, I think 3 are still there (and they may be making forays - a swallow was seen over the railway tracks half a mile away this weekend). }} Michael Chinery illustrates Cluster Flies in his Collins Guide to insects, where they appear among the Blowfly group and are like small Bluebottles but distinguished by golden hairs on the thorax and a chequered pattern on the abdomen. The proper name of the species is *Pollenia rudis*, its grubs parasitise earthworms, and the adults hibernate in dense clusters in the roof-space of outhouses. +++

Back at Titchfield Haven Bill saw one Green Sandpiper (these seem to be in short supply so far this winter) and John Shillitoe saw an Eider and half a dozen Scoter offshore in a choppy sea which prevented him from confirming the presence of more than one Velvet Scoter among them. Others at the Haven reported a Spotted Redshank, a Greenshank and a Barn Owl as present. Back at home in Hundred Acres near Wickham yesterday John managed to find in his own garden the Firecrest which Trevor Carpenter had seen in a neighbouring garden on Nov 18

Another comment, this time on the subject of when Song Thrushes sing, comes from Brian Fellows who quotes from two sources as follows .

Ludwig Koch (in Nicholson and Koch: 'Songs of Wild Birds', 1936, p.139): "I have heard as many as half a dozen individuals singing in a few minutes in the middle of November. Often, however, this revived autumn song is perceptibly less loud than the spring performance, and dies down again, to leave a gap before the real spring song picks up strongly about Christmas or the New Year."

BWP on CD-ROM: "Where some males are resident (e.g. southern England), song begins when territories are re-established in late autumn, usually late October or November; becomes intermittent in winter, restricted to periods when weather mild; intensifies in early spring, then declines sharply from May to end of song-period (Davies and Snow 1965; Simms 1978)."

My own birding today consisted of spending an hour on the shore east of Langstone preparing for a series of 'mid-tide' bird counts which Anne de Potier is organising, in conjunction with the BTO WeBS team who run the High and Low tide counts of shorebirds. The methodology for these mid-tide counts is still under development, but the aim is to record the pattern of feeding as the tide drops and exposes the middle shore, when the birds are hungry after their high tide roost period (or conversely rises and revives the creatures living in the mud which has been exposed for several hours). As hundreds, maybe thousands of birds rush to feed and move rapidly from one section of the mud to another as the fast moving tideline ebbs, it is difficult to record them all and note where they are feeding, so what I was doing today was to define sections of the shore that were visible from my fixed viewpoint. Having found markers to define distinct areas which are visible at the end of the hour long mid-tide period (in my case ten 'sections') I can then prepare a grid with ten columns and four rows (these are not fixed numbers) in which I can record the species and numbers feeding in each section in each quarter hour period. The four rows represent the four quarters of the hour, and while it would be more satisfactory to record shorter intervals, the practical limit to the shortness of the period is the time it takes to scan through, and record the birds in, the overall area exposed at any one time - I don't think I can do this adequately in less than 15 minutes.

While doing this I did note some of the birds present, and highlights were the arrival of over 300 Dunlin as soon as any mud was exposed, wading in the shallow water where necessary, and the flight of a similar number of Brent from shore fields at the end of the period - they are not concerned with the tideline and its effect on the marine organisms - what they want is a nice dry expanse of mud on which to graze any plants that can still be found. Another species which flew in early was Wigeon, some 30 of them arriving to feed on plant life in the shallow water before the mud was exposed (presumably, as we use shaving cream to get our beard hairs to

stand up the more easily to shave them off, the Wigeon like the weed they are after to be held up by the water and not contaminated with mud as it would be when the tide had fallen). Four species of plover were seen, all of them waiting for the water to fall before they arrived. Grey and Ringed Plover came to feed, Lapwing and Golden Plover (27 of them seen today) came mainly to rest in the safety of the open shore. Another impressive sight on this shore is the parade of some 200 Black-backed Gulls (mainly Great but with probably 30 or more Lessers) and a similar number of Herring Gulls - these like to roost on the exposed mud banks, unlike the Black-headed Gulls which actively seek food from the shore, particularly in the early stages of the tide fall. One surprise today was the very small number of Bar-tailed Godwit which have recently been present in hundreds, feeding at low tide or arriving to roost at high tide. Perhaps at this stage of the falling tide they had all flown from their roost to feed elsewhere, or maybe they have transferred their allegiance elsewhere. Other birds present were Oystercatcher, Redshank, and a few Curlew plus at most half a dozen Shelduck. The presence of 7 Knot was a surprise as was the sighting of only 1 Egret - they really have deserted this shore for inland feeding on fields by now (13 were in the pony fields north of Wade Court before I reached the shore). Also surprise was the absence of Cormorants - there were perhaps 10 Merganser and 1 Goldeneye but no Great Crested Grebe.

TUE 19 NOV

The Emsworth Spoonbill was seen today in the Warblington church shore area by Nick Searle, and then found by Barry Collins roosting on the Thorney Island Deeps before flying back to the Emsworth Harbour area.

To the east of Thorney Island Tony Gutteridge found the Canada Goose flock was still in the Nutbourne Marshes (I had been told of it last Sunday as having then been around for some time), and Tony counted 58 geese in the flock. He also found around 150 Pied Wagtail on the shore there at dusk, presumably about to head for a local night roost (would that be at the Thornham Lane sewage works? or in reeds on Thorney Island?) +++

West Sussex observations for last Sunday (Nov 17) include one from John Simons who saw some 400 Fieldfare, 150 Redwing and 50 Song Thrush (in small groups) heading north east over the Finchdean area towards South Harting. In most winters the first winter thrushes which are seen in our coastal area vanish soon after they are seen and do not return until hard weather forces them back to the coast from frozen inland areas. Whether the birds John saw were coming across the channel from the south, then continuing north in search of berried hedgrows, or birds which had come across the North Sea, continued overland until they reached the south coast and then turned north with the same intention, I cannot determine, but this is the first time I have heard of such a diurnal movement of these birds going north (though I have more than once seen them coming south down this route at this time of year). +++

Also in this part of West Sussex Richard Ives today saw a Red Kite in the West Dean area, and adds that he had another sighting of one recently over Colworth Farm (between West Dean village and the West Dean Woods). Also today, on the road passing the Goodwood Golf Course, he drove to within six feet of the White Stork that refuses to budge from this spot +++ Hampshire news for Sunday comes from Tony Gutteridge who was in the Hawkley-Empshott area between Petersfield and Selborne, hearing song from Mistle Thrush and Skylark, Robin, Wren and Dunnock plus Great Tit and Tawny Owl

MON 18 NOV

Last Saturday (Nov 16) at least 27 volunteers set out to search for Great Grey Shrikes in 25 areas of the New Forest where these birds have been reported in three or more past winters. The survey was organised by John Clark and already, thanks to the speed of email communication, John has more or less complete results which exceed his expectation - the total of Shrikes being 7 where he expected 5 at most. +++

31 bird species figure in the results (though not everyone recorded everything they saw) which show that there were 5 (maybe 6) Hen Harriers, 10 Buzzards and 1 Goshawk seen by the observers (who were mainly out on heathland, so no doubt missing lots of Buzzards sitting quietly in trees and counting the birders going by). Interestingly only 1 Woodlark was recorded presumably showing that the breeding population has almost completely abandoned the Forest for the coastal market garden/tree nursery sites where they are now being found. Birds

that have moved into the Forest for the winter include 1510 Fieldfare and 1157 Redwing (plus, I think, some of the 90 Stonechat on the list). Other counts of interest to me were of 5 Ravens, 66 Crossbill, 72 Reed Buntings, 56 Dartford Warbler, 6 Brambling and 2 Hawfinch.

Barry and Margaret Collins visited the west side of Stansted Forest this afternoon in search of Crossbills and found 16 of them (I suspect there are more to be found there if a thorough search was made of the whole estate). I think Barry found them in the larch plantations on the north west fringe of the forest, and with them were 40 Goldfinch, 20 Siskin, 12 Redpoll and 16 Goldcrest. Also seen were 2 Marsh Tits and 1 Buzzard, and the calls of 2 Tawny Owls were heard. +++

Just before dusk I called in briefly to The Sling area of Stansted Forest - I was looking for fungi but could not help hearing loud Song Thrush song here. I have heard another Thrush singing in my garden at least three times since Nov 13 and a number of other reports indicate that Song Thrushes generally have started singing regularly about a month earlier than I would normally expect.

Earlier in the afternoon I had been at Old Idsworth Farm where it was encouraging to see a flock of up to 40 Skylark back (as they have been in past winters) in the stubble of one particular field which they always favour. Looking at the field from a distance there is nothing to be seen. but when you start to walk through the stubble groups of Skylark fly up, chirrup to each other in annoyance, then land again (which makes it very difficult to get an accurate number but on this occasion I counted 27 in the sky together and suspect there were more than my estimate of 40 as I could not cover the whole of this large field). +++

In the farmyard the open barn which has a Barn Owl nest box had a fair number of fresh pellets on the ground under the box where at least one owl currently roosts, but in the same barn I also found some smaller pellets (cylindrical where the Barn Owls' are round) which puzzled me. Later I met David Uren, the farmer, and he told me that recently a Kestrel has also taken to roosting in this barn (perhaps to enjoy the warmth from the adjacent grain dryer?)

Kevin Stouse had a look round the IBM Lake today and tells me that a single Great Crested Grebe is back, and also confirms something that I thought I must have imagined when I carried out the WeBS count there last Saturday - namely that a single Mute Swan cygnet was on the water in addition to the established pair of adults with their two cygnets. On Saturday I thought I saw an extra bird, but I was never able to see all five birds together at once so I could not be sure of the newcomer. What I did notice was that the none of the cygnets I saw could be distinguished as young birds from a distance (all now having a white plumage) and I guess that with the adult looking plumage comes adult independence - the newcomer having decided to leave it's parents and fly off alone to seek its fortune.

Also around the lake Kevin located the Cetti's Warbler and came on a Chiffchaff, while the gulls were again on the lake (which has been empty of them for most of the past summer and autumn), this time with a single Herring Gull and one Lesser Blackback among the Common and Black-headed.

PLANTS:

SAT 23 OCT

The Havant Wildlife Group visited Milton Common on the south west shore of Langstone Harbour today, and Brian Fellows listed 24 plant species in flower plus one unidentified species which may have been the Guernsey Fleabane that has recently spread like wildfire around the harbour and throughout Hampshire. If you were not aware of its existence you might well mistake the plant for the Canadian Fleabane that has long been common everywhere but this species has an overall greyish look (being hairy overall) and is positively identified by looking at the leaf edges with a hand lens - the Canadian Fleabane has a few hairs which stick out at right angles from the leaf edge, the Guernsey species (*Conyza sumatrensis* - is Guernsey in the East Indies near Sumatra?) has hooked hairs which stick out and then curve to follow the line of the leaf edge). I see there is also a similar plant called Argentine Fleabane which has many small hooked hairs around the leaves but also has red-tipped phyllaries around the outside of the involucre or flower head but this has not to my knowledge yet been found in Hampshire. The commoner plants found included Bladder Campion and Weld.

FRI 22 OCT

Just back from South Africa and its spring flowers Richard Carpenter still managed to take note of Marsh Thistle and White Water Lily flowering at Titchfield Haven today. Here in Havant I found a freshly flowering plant of White Campion among eleven flowering species seen locally between the showers - none of the others were new but they still include Herb Robert, Annual Wallrocket and Green Nightshade.

WED 20 NOV

Hardly worth noting, but pretty to see and perhaps marking a minor step towards spring, was a single fresh bright blue flower on Greater Periwinkle seen near Langstone today.

MON 18 NOV

At Old Idsworth Farm this afternoon I was surprised to find a freshly flowering plant of Thyme-leaved Sandwort but less so to find a number of other old stalwarts still soldiering on. Among these were Field Scabious, Wild Mignonette, Blue Fleabane and Sharp-leaved Fluellen. It was no surprise to find Field Madder and Field Pansies in the stubbles, nor many Corn Marigolds, Cornflower and Anthemis austriaca (the Corn Chamomile look-alike) in the wildflower sown field edges. The purpose of my visit was to collect a specimen of the Anthemis to check its seeds (achenes), which under a microscope differentiate A. austriaca from A. arvensis. While many of the plants had fresh buds and flowers, and there were a few very dead seed-heads, I could not find a specimen with fresh seed heads but I did take a specimen to the evening meeting of the Havant Wildlife Group where Pete Selby was making a special appearance to talk about the recording of plants in Hampshire, and Pete immediately said that my specimen did not look like the true Corn Chamomile. In the past Eric Clement said the same and gave me the name Anthemis austriaca - being so confident in the name that he asked me to take a specimen to Delph Smith so that Delph could draw it as an illustration to be included in Eric's forthcoming book on Alien Plants in Britain.

INSECTS:

FRI 22 NOV

With a dearth of hard current news Derek Mills has used the space on the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website to put out a precis of a discussion which took place at a Zoological Society meeting held last week. A speaker at this meeting demonstrated a steep decline in the number of Garden Tiger moths being found in southern England in recent years, while numbers are holding up in the north of England. He attributes this to warmer, wetter winters here in the south. The disappearance of the moth means that its caterpillars are now rare, and as they once were a major part of every Cuckoo's diet their absence may account for declining numbers of Cuckoos (and no doubt the conditions that are unfavourable to this particular moth are equally bad news for many other species).

OTHER WILDLIFE:

WED 20 NOV

Jim Berry was in the north east section of Stansted Forest today, finding more good fungi, in particular an example of the very edible Hedgehog fungus which uses spines, rather than gills or pores, as the launch pad for its spores. Among his other finds were the Wood Blewit and two large fungi from the Clitocybe tribe (C. geotropa and Leucopaxillus giganteus) and the tall stemmed Tricholoma fulvum.

Jim remarks that he has noticed a dearth of the usually abundant Russula species so far this autumn and I would concur with this - they normally appear in late summer when the ground remained dry, and it seems they did not have the patience to wait for the now abundant rain! Those interested in marine matters might like to see the story of the dead Dogfish and the dying Guillemot recorded in my Bird News page among the entries for Nov 19. My only furry animal sighting for today comes from John Goodspeed who, on Monday, saw a Weasel dash across the road as he was heading from Havant to north Emsworth.

MON 18 NOV

In the Huckswood trees on Old Idsworth Farm this afternoon I found my first troop of Clouded Agaric toadstools, and in the stubble of one of the fields were many Volvariella speciosa, both species being expected at this season. On the dead limb of a big Beech many Porcelain

fungus were growing and at the foot of the same tree a cluster of Milk Caps were hiding in the leaf litter - I did not recognise the species, which had short stems and greyish caps around 7cm across and with concentric rings of various shades of grey, the prominent feature being that they did not have a central depression (as do most Lactarius species) but were slightly domed or flat. Elsewhere in the woods I found what was almost certainly a Rufous Milkcap.

+++

Calling in at The Sling (Stansted Forest) late in the day I did not find the Bird's Nest fungi that I was hoping to see but did find fresh Velvet Shank on an old tree stump which was covered with a huge collection of a small whitish/yellowish coloured Pholiota which I think must be the species which Rosemary Webb found yesterday and gave me a name which I did not record properly but which does not appear in any of my books.

John Goodspeed has in the past day or so had news from Havant of a recently dead Stag Beetle being found. This reminds me of a gruesome home video I was once shown (by Eric Castle, who also lives in Havant) which he took in November a couple of years back. It showed a Stag Beetle, moribund but still feebly waving its legs while a number of small animals crawled over the body looking for a way in to a meal. These two examples once more illustrate our failure to see the wildlife around us - once the Stag Beetles cease flying and crawling over the roads as they do in the spring and summer no one seems to see them in the next two or three months that elapse before these November sightings - though to be fair these individual beetles may have only recently emerged as adults through some fault in their biological clocks.

WEEK 46 NOV 11 – 17 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 17 NOV

120 Sanderling were seen on Pilsley Sands by Barry Collins today - the first substantial flock for this winter. With them in the high tide roost were 2000 Dunlin, 465 Bar-tailed Godwit, 190 Knot and 138 Ringed Plover - the Knot too were the first real arrival of this winter in Chichester Harbour. Over on the east side of the island a flock of 10 Avocet may well be settling in to stay - there were 5 there on Nov 15, 10 yesterday (Nov 16) and still 10 today.

In Hampshire top of the bill was a singing Blackbird, heard by Colin Bates near the River Itchen in the Brambridge area.

Also in today's Hoslist messages is a brief note from John Clark to say that he has now received most of the expected reports from those who took part in yesterday's New Forest Shrike survey. John thought the result might show five Great Grey Shrike in the Forest but in fact it seems that at least six were present, and reports of other raptors include up to 6 Hen Harriers plus singles of Peregrine, Merlin, and Goshawk.

A pleasant walk around the east park of the Stansted estate this morning gave me my first Fieldfare (perhaps 30) and Redwing (just one or two) of the winter. One Redwing was with seven Fieldfare flying north over Rosamund's Hill on the east edge of the Forest, more Redwing were heard near the Middle Lodge (guarding the main driveway to Stansted House) where I also heard a little Dunnock song, and the majority of the Fieldfare were heading east along Woodlands Lane. Near Lumley Seat a flock of Goldfinch were busy in the larches with at least one Goldcrest among them. At one point some loud and excited calls which I could not identify (nor see the birds making them) may have come from Crossbills, and in an Ash tree I'm pretty sure I saw half a dozen Redpoll. Other birds heard with certainty were Marsh Tit, Nuthatch, Green and Great Spotted Woodpecker, Jay, Bullfinch and Yellowhammer.

Chatting to two other walkers I found they came from Nutbourne Farm Lane and they told me that a flock of 50 Canada Geese have recently arrived there, and that the 11 Bar-headed Geese which Mike Harris saw in the Chidham area stayed on for some time and were seen at Nutbourne Bay but now seem to have left. +++

On my way home I had a look at Aldsworth Pond which surprisingly had no birds other than one Mallard and a heard only Moorhen. The pond is full but the wooden 'sluice gate' retaining the water (close to the road) is beginning to collapse - the top beam has been pushed away by the force of the water and the rest of the ancient woodwork cannot last much longer.

SAT 16 NOV

When I reported the sighting of some downy Mallard ducklings seen on Nov 9 at Storrington village pond in West Sussex I assumed this was a one off oddity, but today Derek Hale reports the presence of five more on a pond near the path (old rail track) leading south from Newport to Blackwater (they were actually seen yesterday, Nov 15). Other news for today from the Island is of a Black Redstart on the West High Down and a single Pale Bellied Brent with 100 Dark Bellies Brent in Newtown Harbour.

Barry Collins was on Thorney Island today and spent some time watching the juvenile Spoonbill which seems to have been in the west of Chichester Harbour since Nov 5 (when it was first seen at Thorney Island by Barry Collins). Today it was roosting in the Thorney Great Deeps before it flew to Emsworth and spent some time in the channel running south from the Emsworth Sailing Club. It then flew into the main channel of Emsworth Harbour before it was disturbed by a boat, at which point it flew to the Fowley Island area.

Also in the Thorney Deeps today 26 Greenshank were still present and 71 Knot had arrived in the Emsworth Channel off Marker Point (close to the west end of the Thorney Deeps). On the east side of Thorney Island Barry Collins found 1 wintering Whimbrel and 10 Avocet (where there had been 5 yesterday)

The Havant Wildlife Group were at Farlington Marshes this morning, and also visiting was Will Walmsley. Brian Fellows was with the Havant Group and tells me they listed 58 bird species with good views of Bearded Tits being the highlight. They also saw 80 Shelduck to the west of the reserve (first report of a substantial flock having returned), 4 Black-necked Grebe, 1 Eider and 12 Stonechat (plus Redwing in the bushes). Will added to this his own sightings of a juvenile Great Northern Diver off the Point with the Red-necked Grebe nearby plus one Whimbrel and 1 Sandwich Tern also in the harbour. Will also heard of, but did not see, a male Ring Ouzel in the bushes area.

Thanks to Brian I learn that the reserve sightings board lists the presence of 2500 Brent, 600 Wigeon, 280 Canada Geese, 250 Black-tailed Godwit and 90 Pintail with an estimated 15 Bearded Tits, 14 Stonechat, 11 Greenshank, 6 Pheasants (newcomers to the reserve this autumn), 2 Dartford Warbler in the Point Field, 1 Jack Snipe, and 1 Salvonian Grebe (seen by Jason Crook off Broadmarsh).

I was at the IBM Lake at Portsmouth this morning for the monthly WeBS count and was pleased to find that all the Canada Geese have left, and that 100 or so gulls were back on the lake, bathing and resting on the relatively fresh water (most were Black-headed with perhaps 15 Common but no other species). Coot now number at least 56 and Tufted Duck were up to at least 20 birds, plus 4 Pochard. I saw 11 Teal but not a single Snipe. The Swan pair were still present with their two cygnets, now almost white. On the outer island six Reed Bunting were feeding on Pampas Grass seeds and from here I heard a Cetti's Warbler once. Best of all was an eye to eye encounter with a Firecrest working through some young willows - the bright moss green back and white eyestripe being seen clearly with the naked eye.

Recent news from Sussex includes two reports by Barry Collins from Thorney Island. On Nov 15 he saw two of the four Twite which had appeared on the island on Nov 10 and then vanished, and also on Nov 15 he listed 6 singing Cetti's Warblers, 5 Avocet in the Thorney Channel, 2 Kingfishers and several Short-eared Owls. Back on Nov 13 Barry counted 65 Egrets entering the night roost at the Great Deeps, and found 6 Corn Buntings on the island. In all previous years Corn Buntings have been present on the island more or less throughout the year with several pairs breeding, but no breeders were present this year and today's arrivals were the first seen on the island since Apr 8.

FRI 15 NOV

In my own garden at Havant a Song Thrush suddenly burst into full song in the late afternoon sunshine and when I went out into the garden to enjoy it I found a small Tit flock passing through with a winter Chiffchaff flycatching from small tree tops as it accompanied the flock. I also noticed that some of the gulls coming south from inland fields to their night roost in the harbour were flying in 'V' formation - one passing over head consisted of some 20 Black-headed Gulls with their leader (doing all the hard work at the point of the V) being a Herring Gull - so these big brutes do have their uses!

Brian Fellows enjoyed a visit to the Wildfowl Trust centre at Arundel today, being specially pleased to find 11 species of genuine British wildfowl in one pool, among them Gadwall, Pintail, Pochard and Goldeneye. The notice board, purporting to list today's list of birds on duty to entertain the visitors, read ... Cetti's Warblers (up to 30), Water Rails (40), Kingfishers (5 or maybe 7), Snipe (20), Jack Snipe (1), etc with Chiffchaff (3) and House Martin (1). Not pretending to be present today was Ring Ouzel (1 - seen on Nov 12). Further persuasion to feel you have had a good day for your money came in the list of peak counts of wildfowl so far this autumn ... Pochard (103), Tufted Duck (112), Gadwall (75) and Shelduck (22). Why bother with the Great Grey Shrike which has been just the other side of the river at Warningcamp since Nov 7, apparently giving great views daily and on one occasion heard singing.

THU 14 NOV

House Sparrow decline: In view of the scare stories concerning the imminent demise of the species *Passer domesticus* one Hoslist contributor, who believes that shortage of nest sites may be a major factor in their decline, has contributed this suggestion ... {{ With House Sparrow now unbelievably on the Red List and the exact reason not known perhaps we could help by creating Sparrow nest boxes, or converting our Blue Tit boxes. Sparrows prefer a 6" x 6" box with 6" up to the 32mm or 1 1/4" entrance hole. I had an unused Blue Tit box and within hours of opening up the entrance it was occupied by Sparrows, indicating a possible local lack of nest sites }} Sounds well worth a try, though this could lead to the demise of yet more Sparrows if these boxes with their fairly large entrance holes are sited in places where Squirrels, Magpies, Great Spotted Woodpeckers or Cats can reach the goodies inside. I am sure that Sparrows do have fewer nest sites available to them than they did in the past but I can recall evidence that the shortage of indoor sites need not frustrate their breeding. Years ago I was very surprised to find a thriving colony of nests in a small bush in the Boarhunt area north of Portsdown, and both my latest Collins Bird Guide and my 1940s Kirkman and Jourdain both mention that House Sparrows will nest in trees or other foliage, so I don't think shortage of cavities in buildings is the main cause of decline.

Dave Unsworth has now received most of the results of the Portsmouth Harbour low tide count carried out in rain and wind on Nov 2, and has sent out a very informative spreadsheet of the sector by sector counts. Perhaps the most interesting figure was a count of 66 Grey Plover feeding along the north shore with the majority just south of Horsea Island and the figures dropping off to just ten on the Wicor shore at the west end of their favoured zone. The interest lies in the recent discovery of one or two in Fareham Creek where they are most unusual, and in commenting on those sightings I quoted from the high tide counts of the past few years which appear to show that the birds are absent from Portsmouth Harbour. In fact I'm pretty sure Grey Plover have always found good feeding in Portsmouth Harbour and before 1988 a good high tide roost of them could be found in the area where Port Solent now stands. Construction of Port Solent, and the draining of shallow lakes on the nearby area where tall mountains of human waste now dominate the approach to Portsmouth from the M27, both took place in March 1988, eliminating the only major high tide roost area for waders in Portsmouth Harbour. The result has been that many of the birds which feed in Portsmouth Harbour leave it as the tide rises, and they join the Langstone Harbour high tide roosts, returning to feed as the tide falls - this ties in well with the majority of the Grey Plover being on the mudflats nearest Langstone Harbour, with few flying further east.

Another figure which interested me was the total of 93 Mute Swans in the harbour - 66 of these were in the Gosport Cockle Pond (in view of the town centre car parks) with 6 more in Fareham Creek. What surprised me was the presence of 15 Swans close to the Stamshaw shoreline (south of Tipner Ranges and inboard of the north of Whale Island). I wonder if this is a regular Swan site nowadays? Less surprising was the presence of 52 Cormorant in the central area of the harbour west of Whale Island. A couple of other figures which interested me were the presence of two Pintail close to the Portchester shore and six (then newly arrived) Goldeneye in the centre of the harbour.

WED 13 NOV

When Martin Hampton walked along the Warblington shore last Saturday he found some 300

Brent feeding on one of the shore fields of the Castle Farm, and this afternoon I decided to check up on them and set what was growing in the field concerned. After passing the path from the shore to the church, going east, I looked over the concrete seawall into the grass meadow immediately south of the cemetery the only field on which I saw a substantial flock of Brent last winter, and here I saw just one lone Brent on the grass (and a single Egret in the adjoining SSSI marshy field).

Continuing along the shore to where the main stream runs out I paused to check out a flock of 27 Wigeon and as I did I noticed what I thought was an Egret with its head down in the water of the stream channel. This Egret did not lift its head but continued sweeping it from side to side so I quickly got my scope onto it and saw it was a Spoonbill. I knew Barry Collins had seen a juvenile Spoonbill on Thorney Island (which is in sight of where this bird was feeding) but I was not aware of what to look for in a juvenile so I checked the features of this bird and noted black tips to the closed wings and saw yellow on the bill when it raised it out of the water to swallow a food item (the yellow seemed to be on the underside of the bill only - the spoon was definitely black), and the white plumage of the wings had a greyish tinge. When I got home I found that the black tips and yellow bill were signs of a juvenile so I guess this was Barry's bird still around since he saw it over a week ago on Nov 5. +++

Coming back to my original quest for Brent I found that the two shore fields east of the main stream were both sown with winter wheat - the first one had at least 220 Brent on it and the second had around 400 (which all took off when they saw me). around the field edges the wheat was well up but more than 60% of the fields looked bare of any crop! When they have taken the whole crop they will probably move to the next field north (the one south of the Emsworth to Warblington Church path) which also has winter wheat. +++

Coming back from Nore Barn on that path I found two Egrets in the grass field immediately east of the farmyard and church, and near the old Rectory one Little Owl was in its usual winter hideout (and springtime nest hole) in the big oak on the north side of the road serving the rectory and Pook Lane stables. +++

Before going home I called in to tell Tony Gutteridge of the Spoonbill (a new addition to his 'seen from the Warblington CBC plot' list) and he told me that he had been down to Warblington church a few minutes before me and had added another bird to the plot list which he has been keeping since 1977 - a Merlin which made sure he was aware of its presence by calling loudly and repeatedly.

In addition to these birds Tony had seen 20 Egrets in a pre-roost gathering in the pony fields north of Wade Court, and I had seen (on the Langstone east shore at low tide) 8 Shelduck, 2 Knot and 13 Ringed Plover among the shorebirds (dominated as usual by the number of Bar-tailed Godwit). Other birds present were some 30 Wigeon, 7 Merganser and 1 Great Crested Grebe, 5 Cormorants, 3 Egrets, around 25 Great Black-backed Gulls with Herring, Common and Black-headed, Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover and Black-tailed Godwit

Brian Fellows today heard Song Thrush song in Brook Meadow at Emsworth, just one day after another Thrush gave voice at Soberton in the Meon Valley, and yesterday, also in Brook Meadow, Brian heard song from a Dunnock. I doubt any of these birds will be in regular daily song in the immediate future - Song Thrushes may well be heard generally before Christmas but Dunnocks not until February.

Brian recorded another local first today with a male Pintail on Budds Farm Pools, where another Pochard had appeared to give a count of four birds there today. +++

So far this winter there have been few Black Redstarts at Hampshire coastal sites but several are now present in Sussex. During November there have been 16 separate reports of them at 10 different sites ranging from 4 birds in the Hastings area on Nov 4 to the 2 seen at Selsey today and 1 that turned up at the Goodwood House stables yesterday (when another was on an Annandale Ave roof in Bognor). Several have been seen in the Shoreham area (do you remember the one that appeared in a marquee at a craft show on Shoreham airport on Nov 1?). I wonder if anyone has checked out the Sandy Point area on Hayling recently? +++

A new development in the discussion of the behaviour of Golden Plover in winter (how far do the flocks range? why do the flocks constantly seem to split up and re-unite?) comes today in messages from Dave Unsworth and Martin Gillingham. Dave suggests that we should take

account of the phases of the moon when considering their behaviour - this is based on the theory that the birds feed mainly at night and will be more successful when there is a good full moon (and after a good night's feeding they presumably settle down to roost during the day, whereas if they are still hungry they will be restless during the day). Martin's contribution is to quote an article which he had just read (written by some authority at the University of East Anglia - would that be Jenny Gill?) which said that the normal behaviour of Golden Plover is to feed by night in small groups (fewer bills to share the food among!) and then come together in large groups (more eyes to watch for predators and safety in numbers if attacked) to roost during the day.

TUE 12 NOV

This morning a Song Thrush was in full throated song in Gwynne Johnson's garden at Soberton in the Meon Valley - Gwynne says this was not a brief salute to dawn or dusk but heard at 11am. I wait with interest to hear if the bird keeps up a daily chorus from now on or falls silent again after a sudden rush of hormones has subsided! +++

MON 11 NOV

Swallows are still an (almost) daily sight along the south coast. Yesterday Kevin Stouse saw 4 Swallows at Fishbourne near Chichester. Before that two Swallows were over Thorney Island on Nov 7 and Barry Collins had another one there on Nov 5

Here in Havant I took a quick bike ride to Bedhampton and Broadmarsh in the morning sunshine and found a pair of Gadwall back on Bedhampton Mill Pool, then saw one Common Sandpiper on the banks of the Hermitage Stream below the gravel quay near Broadmarsh slipway and had excellent views of a Kingfisher a little upstream north of Harts Farm Way. The Kingfisher was restless and noisy - maybe it was worried by an unseen Weasel in the grass by the stream but for whatever reason it kept flying up and down the stream (once perching quite high in a tree) and uttering not only its normal shrill whistle but also a harsh trilling sound which I took to be a predator warning note but my Shell Guide to Birds says 'song a whistled trill' so I wonder if for the first time in my life I heard a Kingfisher singing? Before getting carried away I checked the Collins Bird Guide and that says the song is a seldom heard series of call notes delivered in a jerky rythm. Unfortunately I did not get a view of the birds feet or bill tip to confirm that it was an adult (juveniles have black instead of orange feet and a white tip to the bill).

Kevin Stouse had just two people to accompany him on his HOS walk along the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester yesterday (Nov 10) but they enjoyed a fair showing of birds, stars being the four Swallows already mentioned above. In the channel were many Wigeon, ten Merganser, nine Goldeneye and two Teal but not a single Shelduck. One Golden Plover was seen looking a bit lost, but perhaps driven from companions on nearby fields (though none were seen) by noisy Brent - at least 250 were on winter wheat here (although Brent have been ashore on Farlington Marshes and various grasslands for some time this is the first report I have heard of them damaging crops). +++

Also on Saturday (Nov 9) Martin Hampton walked from the Havant area to Thorney Island and back, seeing a couple of Goldeneye on Thorney Great Deeps but of more interest to me was his observation of 320 Brent on one of the Warblington Farm fields (the first time this winter I have heard of Brent on these fields where there were few seen last winter but in previous winters there have been flocks of well over 1000). Martin also came on Redwing with a flock of tits in the small Nore Barn wood between the Warblington Farm fields and the western shore of Emsworth - again a first for the area. +++

Earlier in the past week Barry Collins was on Thorney Island on three separate dates, getting a good bird list on each occasion. By far the best of these lists was that of Monday Nov 4 when four Twite were present (but did not stay). With them were three Short-eared Owls, two Avocet and the regular flock of Golden Plover which numbered 700 on that day. On Tuesday Nov 5 Barry was back on Thorney with a single Spoonbill as star bird - along with it were 514 Black-tailed Godwit, 250 Ringed Plover, 35 Greenshank, 3 Spotted Redshank and 4 Whimbrel (possibly all four staying the winter as two have done in recent years?). One Peregrine and one Merlin were also seen, and both may stay the winter, but not staying was one Swallow. +++

Barry again visited Thorney on Nov 7 when two more Swallows went over and the winter birds

included 12 Stonechat, 12 Redpoll, 5 Cetti's Warblers and 14 Bearded Tits (I'm not sure if these latter have finished their autumn dispersal and settled down for the winter or not).

PLANTS:

SUN 17 NOV

There were few flowering plants to be seen this morning in a walk around the Stansted East Park other than at one point just west of the gates which separate the public stretch of Woodlands Lane (coming west from Walderton) from the private track which continues the lane west across the middle of the East Park to Stansted House. At this point the line of woodland going south along the edge of the East Park (the Park Slip) has been subject to a great clearance of the understory, leaving the mature trees, and the consequent recent admission of light to the ground is probably the reason for a cluster of Bifid Hemp-nettle plants being now in full flower, with at least one plant of Three-veined Sandwort also freshly flowering there. +++

As I came to the end of the path across the East Park and went through the non-existent 'Iron Gates' which once separated the open park from the grounds around Stansted House, I found one clump of apparently wild Primroses flowering outside the stone wall of one of the 'Iron Gate Cottages' and I was not going to mention this find as it seemed to be effectively a 'garden flower', but Rosemary Webb has since told me that she found wild Primroses flowering in The Sling area of the Forest close to Rowlands Castle when she was hunting fungi well off the beaten track so I guess spring has begun for these plants.

Brian Fellows weekly roundup of news from Brook Meadow at Emsworth adds an extra species, Cut-leaved Cranesbill, to those flowering during the past week. He also had Black Horehound still flowering and also noted Wood Avens (which I saw flowering near Warblington Church on Nov 13)

SAT 16 NOV

Just one flowering spike of Winter Heliotrope was to be seen on the IBM North Harbour site this morning when I was there to count the birds on the lake. Small Scabious and Ox-eye Daisies were still flowering in good numbers but there was nothing else unusual.

FRI 15 NOV

A short walk around the section of Hayling Billy trail behind my house in Havant today showed me that Green Nightshade is still flourishing by the newly installed decorative 'Level Crossing Gates' at the north end of this old rail track. The one Apple of Peru plant is still looking good and had two unopen flower buds while Annual Wallrocket is still flowering nearby.

WED 13 NOV

For some time now the Tamarisks which line the Chichester harbour shore at Warblington have been in flower though I have not mentioned them. I noticed them again today as I went along the shore, and coming back through the fields and past Warblington Church I found Wood Avens still in flower. Here in Havant Herb Robert is still in full flower near the Museum

MON 11 NOV

Spurred by my unexpectedly early find of Winter Heliotrope at Langstone yesterday Brian Fellows today checked several Emsworth sites for this plant and found flowers at one of them - beside the A259 main road just west of the roundabout. I was also out making a similar check in the Bedhampton area of Havant but found no more Winter Heliotrope flowers though I did make a good list of flowers including both Fleabane and Blue Fleabane, Ox-eye Daisy, Weld, Meadow Sweet, Water Mint and (just one flower among thousands of seed heads) Golden Samphire at Broadmarsh. Hedge Bedstraw, Buddleia, Feverfew and Pellitory of the Wall also went on my list but perhaps the most interesting find was of a lot of Cockspur Grass alongside the Harts Farm Way road at Broadmarsh - this is a long established site for this grass but it is heavily mown through the summer and crushed by lorry wheels at any time so it was good to find a healthy patch looking fresh and holding its flowerheads high. +++

In his weekly Brook Meadow (Emsworth) newsletter for the past week Brian Fellows lists several plants still flowering there which have gone out of fashion elsewhere - among these are Wild Angelica, Pepper Saxifrage, Black Horehound and Hedge Mustard.

INSECTS:

SUN 17 NOV

News for the past week from Barry Collins on Thorney Island includes sightings of one Red Admiral on Nov 15 and four Red Admirals plus a Peacock butterfly on Nov 13.

FRI 15 NOV

News of butterflies is getting sparse now but one record on the Migrant Moths website may be of interest - this is a sighting of a Monarch butterfly at Hayle on the north Cornish coast on Nov 12. Presumably it was a genuine trans-atlantic insect but as it was seen just outside a pub there is I suppose some doubt about the observer's state of mind (very little doubt, I'm sure).

WED 13 NOV

A significant sighting which I omitted from my last update was of a late Painted Lady seen by Andrew Brookes in his garden at Portchester, south of Portsdown, on Nov 11 - this could well be the last of the year (though it could also be found later if it attempts to hibernate as I think one was proved to do in a recent winter) Looking back to refresh my memory on hibernating Painted Ladies I see that when one was reported in March 2001 I then wrote {{ There have been at least six early year sightings of Painted Ladies that seem likely to have been emerging hibernants prior to this year, and Lee Marshall tells me one was seen at Hardway (Gosport) on Feb 15 this year. The most convincing local evidence that Painted Ladies attempt to hibernate came in 1997 when one Robert Coyne reported that, on 24 Jan 97, when a shed was being dismantled on an allotment at Purbrook, a Painted Lady fluttered to the ground. }}

Another interesting sighting on Nov 11 is taken from the SOS website which reports that Marc Read watched a male Red-veined Darter closely in a Crawley (near Gatwick airport) garden for ten minutes on that day.

MON 11 NOV

Butterfly news for last week comes from Barry Collins, who was on Thorney Island on Nov 4 when he saw 4 Clouded Yellows, 3 Red Admirals and 1 Peacock. On Nov 9 Barry added 5 more Red Admirals to his Thorney Island sightings.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 17 NOV

When, a year ago, Rosemary Webb persuaded the Hampshire Fungus Recording Group to step over the county boundary to visit The Sling area of Stansted Forest they were so impressed by the richness and rarity of the fungi they then found they were eager to return this autumn and today Rosemary Webb once more took them around the area, finding even more interest with two species of Bird's Nest fungus and a beautiful bright red *Mycena* (*M. adonis*) which Rosemary had never before come across, growing in moss, plus many other goodies. +++

The only species of Bird's Nest Fungus which I have ever seen is *Cyathus olla*. Today Rosemary found *Cyathus striatus* which has a pattern of stripes decorating the inside of the 'nest' (from which the 'eggs' - capsules containing the spores - had already been forcibly ejected by recent heavy rain), and also *Crucibulum laeve* (the Common Bird's Nest fungus). A few of the more interesting fungi from the rest of the long list of today's finds were The Goblet (*Cantharellula cyathiformis* - I'm not sure what *Cyathus* means but I guess it must be something to do with being 'bowl shaped' as that is what is special about the cap of the Goblet - instead of being flat or domed it is in the shape of a goblet, or a drinking bowl). Two unusual *Lepiota* species were *L. castanea* (which has a red-brown cap which the namer presumably saw as Chestnut coloured) and *L. griseovireus* (that spelling may be incorrect as this species is not listed in my books). They also found the less rare *L. mastoidea* which is a delicate small form of the Parasol Mushroom. Three more species on today's list were *Pholiota gummosa* and two species of *Clavariadelphus* (a strange group in which the very thin tall fruiting bodies look like the roots of trees which have decided to grow upwards out of the soil instead of down into it) - they were *C. junceus* and *C. fistulosus*. +++

While Rosemary was in The Sling I was in the eastern part of the Stansted estate and came on two fungi which interested me (needless to say they were also on her list). One was the Yellow

Cowpat fungus (*Bolbitius vitellinus*) and the other the Wrinkled Club (*Clavulina rugosa*). In my own garden now I have a good show of *Clavaria acuta* (looking like White Spindles but growing as individuals rather than in clusters) and a few black Earthtongues (probably *Trichoglossum hirsutum* as they look like Roger Phillips picture of that species but nothing like Stefan Buczacki's illustration) - both these last two species have put on a massed display in another garden in our street

Not seen today, but also mentioned among Rosemary Webb's recent finds where two fungi that she saw in Havant Thicket a week ago (Nov 9) - one was the small furry Earpick Fungus (*Auriscalpium vulgare*) which grows from fallen pine cones, the other the highly edible Chanterelle. Yesterday, driving on to Hayling Island, Rosemary saw an old friend on a conifer stump among the roadside conifers across the road from, and a little south of, the Texaco garage at the south end of Langstone Bridge - this is the bracket called *Phaeolus schweinitzii* which has appeared in the same place for several years.

In response to my request of yesterday for information on the swimming ability of Hedgehogs has already elicited three responses. The first is from David Thelwell who quotes a booklet on Hedgehogs written by Gavin Maxwell in a 'My Animals of Britain' series (Three shillings and sixpence a volume!). David quotes from this as follows .. {{ 'a hedgehog can swim and swims very well. I have seen this many times,.....they will take deliberately to water and are not merely driven to swimming because of alarm. A hedgehog can also climb very well..... }} The book has a photo of a swimming Hedgehog. +++

I can vouch for the climbing ability of this animal as I knew of one female which raised a family of babies in a garden shed in a small Portsmouth garden that was completely surrounded by a high brick wall which she had to scale daily to come and go in search of food for her babies, and I have no difficulty in accepting their ability to swim when necessary. +++

The other two responses seem to contradict Gavin Maxwell's view. From Bruce Archer comes a quote from a Field Guide to the Mammals of Britain which says the Hedgehog {{ swims rarely; not voluntarily }}. This book also contains an account of a Fox seen rolling a Hedgehog into a pond - the assumption is that the Hedgehog would unroll and be able to be taken by the Fox. In this account the Fox was accidentally frightened off by the observer and the Hedgehog was seen attempting to climb out of the pond. (My contribution to the subject yesterday showed that, from hearsay, foxes have simpler ways of getting Hedgehogs to unroll than carrying them to a pond and chucking them in - they just urinate over the curled up animal until it can stand the stink no longer. +++

SAT 16 NOV

Visiting the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site today to count the birds on the lake I waded out to the islands in the lake and found the intact skin of an adult Hedgehog, with no sign of any bone or flesh, lying on a pile of extra large fox droppings. I assume the fox droppings represent what is left of the Hedgehog but I was intrigued to find the skin out on the island. I know foxes regularly use the island, and probably have an earth there, but I have never come across Hedgehogs on this site, so the question is - did a wandering Hedgehog arrive on the site of its own volition, and then swim to the island, before the fox found it, or did the fox bring this prickly mouthful from afar? I understand that all animals can swim but do not think Hedgehogs would do so except in an emergency - do you know better? As to how the fox dealt with the tightly curled prickly ball of the Hedgehog when alive I again cannot be certain but I have read in the past that the Fox will urinate on the Hedgehog until it can stand the smell no longer and tries to make a get away

WED 13 NOV

On the SOS website I read that, while by the River Arun at Warningcamp (Arundel) today in search of the Great Grey Shrike, Philip Thompson had the following dramatic sighting, described in his own words ... {{ A stoat was actively hunting in an open marshy field, presumably by scent, when it flushed a rabbit and set off in hot pursuit! The rabbit easily outpaced the stoat and escaped to the other side of the field. The stoat then continued hunting by scent to eventually flush the rabbit again only for the same result. This went on for about 5 mins. until the rabbit seemed to tire and the stoat proceeded to bring the rabbit down like a lion on a zebra!! It then negotiated the rabbit to get at the back of it's neck where it took a minute of

intense biting to eventually kill the rabbit. The kill had taken place, unfortunately for the stoat, right in the middle of the field so it now had to spend about 15-20 mins. rolling and dragging this rabbit, which was at least 2-3 times its size, to the hedgerow where it could presumably feast on its prey in relative peace. I had seen 2 different foxes on the edges of these fields no more than 5 mins. before all this occurred so I guess like a cheetah always fears being robbed by hyenas or lions this little killer was taking no chances with his well earned meal! Who would have guessed we have our very own 'Serengeti' right on the edge of Arundel. }} +++

I am not sure what would be normal behaviour for a Stoat at this time of year but I do know from at least two personal experiences, and from hearsay, that it is quite normal for a Stoat to drag its kill for great distances when the kill is made on behalf of baby stoats in a 'nest/lair' well away from the kill site. My first encounter with this was in Stansted Forest when I tracked down a Stoat from about half a mile away through the prolonged piteous screams of the dying rabbit. When I eventually found the Stoat it was dragging the rabbit along the forest floor and had come to a large fallen tree and I must have watched for a good five minutes while the Stoat tried to get the corpse (much bigger than the Stoat's own size) over, under or round the big tree stump (a diversion around the trunk was the only solution). I don't know how far the Stoat had to go overall, but I do remember another early summer encounter with a Stoat and dead rabbit in West Harting Down woods. I was on a path near the woodland edge and the Rabbit must have been taken in fields at the woodland edge around 100 metres from the path, while the woodland in the area to which the Stoat was heading was bare and lifeless for as far as I could see - I doubt the Stoat had its lair less than 200 or 300 metres from where I saw it, maybe the journey carrying home the kill was up to a mile! My conclusion is that this Stoat, killing for itself in winter, probably had a relatively easy task of getting its food to a safe place to eat. +++

One other thought - Phillip's mention of Foxes makes me wonder if a Fox would attack a Stoat to hi-jack it's kill? I very much doubt it as I am pretty sure that a Stoat would have no fear of attacking and badly wounding a Fox - they seem to have no fear of anything, humans included, when hunting.

MON 11 NOV

Brian Fellows' weekly newsletter for the Emsworth Brook Meadow site today reports several interesting fungi seen there last week. Best of the list is Agrocybe cylindracea, which is an uncommon edible species first found last year on a fallen Willow and this week making its third appearance in the same place. The big grey and greasy Volvariella speciosa (quite common trooping in some arable fields each autumn) made its first appearance in the meadow during the week as did one of what I call (from their shape) the 'Bedpan fungi' - Peziza vesiculosa. Another item of interest was one of the delicate Crepitotus species - sometimes these appear as very small brackets on twigs, sometimes they grow on the underside of a piece of wood, attaching themselves to it by the centre of the top of the cap so that they gills hang down with no stem to support them.

WEEK 45 NOV 4 – 10 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 10 NOV

The Langstone east shore was crowded with winter birds when I visited just after midday with tide more than half way up but the best birds were on the water - my first half dozen Goldeneye of the winter. Presumably they were diving for shellfish or crabs and not competing for fish with the 15 or so Red-breasted Merganser and two Great Crested Grebes that were also actively diving in the same area. There was one Cormorant in the water but the other three which I saw had already dined and were hanging out their wings to dry. On the mud, and starting to roost on the saltings, were more waders than usual - I estimated the Bar-tailed Godwit at 1000 when two hefty Great Blackbacks flew low over the roost and put them all up, and the Dunlin must have numbered well over 500. Black-tailed Godwit were counted as 66 and an estimated 20 Turnstone were new to the normal selection but Curlew (just one or two), Redshank and Oystercatcher (both estimated at 40 or 50) and Grey Plover (only around 20 seen by me) showed no increase on recent visits, and just two Greenshank were seen where there have

been five. I saw no more than 2 Herons and a dozen Teal (plus 20 or 30 Brent where there have been 200) in the harbour but Lapwing were up a little to around 35 and Common Gulls had increased to 5 from the usual one or two. Teal were present on the pond and in the wet meadow behind it but I could not see more than 50, and the Egrets were mainly to be seen in the pony field north of Wade Court (8 of them standing around and looking miserable) with only two to be seen in the usual trees

SAT 09 NOV

Across the mouth of Chichester Harbour Brian Fellows was also out on WeBS count duty, covering the south east sector of Hayling from Black Point to Mill Rytte (once again the day chosen to do the count in Sussex differs from that chosen for Hampshire so the Langstone and Portsmouth Harbours will not be counted until next week-end). The weather was kind to the counters today but there was nothing spectacular on Brian's list - the only unexpected bird that I could see was just one Sanderling at Black Point, though his Dunlin count was up to 1260 and there were 17 Merganser and 333 Brent.

In Bishopstoke (Eastleigh) Colin Bates had a male Blackcap feeding from an apple in his garden, and also in today's mail there is an interesting comment from David Harper (who teaches at Sussex University and studies birds professionally) in response to my comments on separating summer Blackcaps from winter ones (see yesterday's notes). He agrees that separation is very difficult, if not impossible, without catching ringed birds that are known to have been present during the real winter period (or originated in eastern Europe) and gives the earliest date for arrival of a winter bird as Oct 11 (year not given) and the latest as Mar 11 - to prove these were wintering they had also to be caught and checked during the December to February period in the same winter. Further complication comes from the fact that when they first arrive most of the winter birds do not immediately report to the watchers waiting for them in urban gardens, but spend a period in the countryside feeding on berries. where they are usually undetected.

Pochard had returned to Budds Farm Pools when I visited late in the afternoon - just one male and two females but otherwise the pools were fairly empty - my count was of 6 Shoveler, 14 Mallard, 10 Tufted Duck and 15 Teal with one Little Grebe, four Coot and six Moorhen (out on the grass north of the pools). On the sea the tide was high and all I could see were some 20 Wigeon, ten Great Crested Grebe, two Cormorant and a large number of Brent in the far corner of Chalk Dock. On the slipway were a pair of Swans with four cygnets (when one of these spread its wings they looked mainly white), and on North Binness at least 11 Egrets were roosting. At one point a group of Mallard on the sea off the small west carpark at Broadmarsh seemed to take off in panic and looking at the water there I seemed to see a huge circular disturbance of the surface with a shape like the curved grey back of a whale just breaking the surface before it disappeared and was never seen again - I guess a Seal was looking for a duck dinner but have no real evidence.

FRI 08 NOV

I was not expecting to have any birding reports for today, as who would want to go looking for them in the continuous rain, but Paul Winter did spot a male Blackcap in his garden at Rownhams (Southampton) today, raising the unanswerable question of whether it was a late departing summer bird or a newly arrived winter one. +++

Graham Roberts' paper on wintering Blackcaps (in the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report) indicated that the summer birds have normally departed by mid-October and there is then a gap of a few weeks with no Blackcaps around until the winter birds start to arrive in mid-November, but with global warming changing our seasons you can no longer rely on the calendar in such matters. +++

Looking at this autumn's reports it is clear that summer birds were pouring out up to Oct 2 when 30 were reported from Beachy Head (and on Sept 22 there were 53 at Titchfield Haven). In the 36 days since Oct 2 Blackcaps have been reported on 13 days evenly spaced through the period up to Oct 31 when there were 3 in the bushes at Farlington Marshes, but Paul's is the first report for November and a gap of seven days with no reports is longer than any gap in October records (the max gap in that month was four days). One other factor to take into account is that none of the recent records have been of birds staying in one place - they have

all been on the move. I reckon that, short of ringing recoveries of eastern European birds, which must be arriving for the winter, the best test is to find a bird that first shows in November and stays in the same area (and with birds as elusive as winter Blackcaps which sit in thick bushes for about 23 hours out of every 24, only coming out to feed, you need to put out a liberal supply of favourite foods and watch your feeding station constantly in order to monitor their presence). +++

THU 07 NOV

There is an easy bird to spot at Goodwood Golf Course - yes, that White Stork is still present and this week it was seen refusing to move even for a tractor towing mowers to cut the grass all around it. Mike Collins is concerned that it may not find enough food during the winter but supplying it with food may not be easy as I suspect that it will only be interested in things that move (the Collins guide lists Frogs, Snakes, small mammals and young birds plus insects as its diet, and my only thought about a regular supply would be day old chickens - maybe the bird would move a bit more, and so keep warm in the winter, if it had to chase tiny chicks over the grass?). Personally I do not think it will be necessary to resort to artificial feeding - in 2001 a White Stork turned up in fields south of Chichester at Donnington on Jan 14 and was seen several times thereafter, including Feb 18 at Pagham Harbour - that one seems to have survived our winter (and the current bird may well be the same one). If we have a big freeze it will be in trouble but so will thousands of other birds - my feeling is that we should let nature take its course, and if the bird does die that will be good news for our rapidly diminishing Frog population.

Bob Chapman's weekly bulletin of news from Farlington Marshes has nothing to draw the twitchers and he admits that his greatest thrill was to see 4 Mistle Thrushes fly over the bushes as this species hardly ever turns up at the reserve. Most of us would be much more excited by what to him is a commonplace sight of a Merlin perched on a fence post on the south marsh (looking back to Sept 20 I see that a male Merlin arrived on the reserve so I guess this is the same bird). The Merlin was seen on Nov 2 as was the Dartford Warbler in the Point Field and a Green Sandpiper somewhere on the reserve. Bearded Tits have been seen this week in the small belt of reeds at the Deeps as well as in the main reedbed by the stream. On Nov 3 one Avocet and one Sandwich Tern were in Chalkdock and 8 Black-necked Grebe plus the first local Slavonian Grebe of the winter were in Russell's Lake between the east seawall of the marshes and the islands (John Goodspeed had four Sandwich Terns in the harbour on Nov 4). On Nov 5 what may have been the last two Swallows of the summer flew over and today the first Pale Bellied Brent was spotted among the Dark Bellied birds. The single Red-necked Grebe and one Eider are still in the harbour now (but the Common Scoter does not get a mention - has it left?) and more Merganser and Goldeneye have arrived.

I have a vague recollection that in the summer of 2001 Alistair Martin found, on the shore of Hayling Bay, a Med Gull with a blue ring on its leg. In the same group was a white ringed Med Gull, and Alistair reported both to P L Meininger in the Netherlands, getting a reply thanking him for the white ring details and saying that the Blue ring was not one of his birds but had been ringed by a group in France, and that he would pass on the details but Alistair had no feedback from anyone. I only mention this because Andrew Howard recently saw a Blue ringed Med Gull in the Pagham Harbour area and has just had an email from a group in Italy (the bird was ringed at Ravenna) thanking him for the record and saying that it is the first report of one of their Blue ringed birds from mainland Britain (though they have had one from the Scillies). I cannot find the details of Alistair's sighting but I hope he can and will be able to claim a 'first for Britain' to go alongside his unawarded trophy for the first Lesser Sandplover in Britain (also at Pagham).

WED 06 NOV

Heavy rain all day kept most birders at home but John Shillitoe was one of those who ventured out in the afternoon when the rain had abated and at Titchfield Haven he at last glimpsed the Bittern which has been there since Sept 15 (on that day two Bitterns were said to be present but all subsequent sightings have been of single birds - as the sightings are infrequent there could be two present all along). John also found an Avocet still present and saw a Buzzard as well as the Baffins gang of feral geese.

TUE 05 NOV

A personal highlight was achieved in my Havant garden today when for the first time I counted 20 House Sparrows feeding on the bird seed I put out on my front driveway - normally I have about a dozen there but they are difficult to count as they are for ever flying up in panic, then returning to feed in ones and twos. My main feeding station is in the larger back garden which backs on to the Hayling Billy trail and would seem to be a more attractive area for seeing birds but the Sparrows hardly ever visit it - they seem much happier to be subject to the continual disturbance of traffic on the busy road and hundreds of parents and school children walking by within a few feet as they go to and from the two schools in our road. It's not only the Sparrows that can be found more frequently in the front rather than the back garden - Woodpigeons, Collared Doves, Magpies, Jackdaws, and Starlings are more frequently seen on the rooves and chimneys overlooking the road than they are in the more rural back garden, while Greenfinches, Robins, Dunnocks and Tits (Long-tailed as well as Blue and Great) are regularly seen - admittedly the front gardens along the road have plenty of trees and bushes. Last year a Buddleia bush in my front garden was used by Goldfinch as a successful nest site and when the leaves fell in autumn the nest could be seen to be within reach of anyone walking on the pavement outside the garden. Blackbird and Dunnock nests have also been found there in the past.

On Sunday (Nov 3) it was not particularly windy but a hefty thundershower may have been the trigger for the first Mistle Thrush song of the autumn, heard by Theo Roberts in his Cosham garden at the foot of Portsdown.

MON 04 NOV

Today's big story is that the great autumnal Woodpigeon invasion of Britain is now taking place, and one indication of its size is a count of 22,500 Woodpigeons seen flying over Christchurch Bay this morning. First indications of this movement came yesterday morning when Gwynneth Wilkey in Farnham watched many of the birds flying southwest over her garden, and Ian Pibworth at the Testwood Lakes (head of Southampton Water) saw 4000 go west over that site, while 3000 were noted at Beachy Head. This morning a relatively small number of them (485 including an albino) flew over Hastings and 4800 were seen going west over the Pennington Marshes in less than one hour. At the mouth of the Hamble Trevor Carpenter logged 9350 in two hours. Most of these birds fly very high and would not be noticed by a casual observer, but for those who are on the lookout for them they provide one of the great spectacles of the birding year (the current Hampshire record was set in 1999 when 25,000 passed over the Lower Test reserve). Although the observations I have quoted come from the south coast one message about them comes from Kevin Sayer who was on the Suffolk coast, at the Landguard Bird Observatory, in the last week of October last year and saw thousands of Woodpigeons high in the sky apparently coming in from Scandinavia, but it seems that some people still think these are just British birds moving to winter quarters by round about routes.

More local and less dramatic news comes from John Goodspeed who saw four or more Sandwich Terns in the north west corner of Langstone Harbour (off the Tudor Sailing Club/Portsmouth Outdoor Centre) - when last seen they were heading for the harbour entrance, probably leaving us for good but the number of winter sightings is I think growing and they have been seen in Hampshire in all months of the year. On Oct 31 I noted that Andrew Howard had seen a Sandwich Tern but the entry of this on the SOS website gave no location - I have now heard from Andrew that his sighting was at Church Norton. +++

At dusk the conditions seemed good for a check on the Egret roost at Langstone Wade Court and this time I got there before any of the birds had arrived so my count of 77 Egrets arriving at the roost was more accurate than usual, though I may have missed some as, while the majority flew in high from the south and were silhouetted against the evening sky, some came through the trees from the west and would have been missed had I glanced away for a couple of seconds while others interestingly came over the trees from the north east, indicating that they were inland feeding birds, and they also were only in sight for a few seconds before they settled. While I was there I heard a very brief burst of song from the Cetti's Warbler on Langstone pond, and the growing pools in the pony field just north of the pond had attracted at least 20 Moorhen and 30 Teal while 5 Pheasants were feeding in the rough grassland.

Two more Swallows were seen on Saturday (Nov 2) - one over Farnham and one at Church Norton and here in Havant that day brought a Moorhen to the small pond in Kevin Stouse's garden - probably a bird that has flown some distance to swell local numbers for the winter and which thought it would drop off and find its own private winter quarters - Kevin says it was around the pond all day but we'll have to see if it stays. +++

PLANTS:

SUN 10 NOV

Winter Heliotrope normally starts to flower in November but I was surprised to see the first two spikes up and showing the colour of their flowers (although they were not fully open) beside Wade Lane outside Wade Court at Langstone today. In previous years I have come to expect that the flowers will never appear until the first frost has somehow stimulated the plants, but they have not waited for any frost this year. (Similarly I do not normally look for flowers on Butchers Broom until December but this year the plants have been flowering since Sept 22 when I saw them on a bush in Stansted Forest - maybe that is a normal date and the reason I have not seen them before December is that I have not looked for them, but that is not the case with the much more obvious flowers of Winter Heliotrope).

MON 04 NOV

From Brian Fellows weekly bulletin for Brook Meadow at Emsworth I see that Pepper Saxifrage is still flowering there - a good potential tick for anyone making a list of winter flowering plants now that we are in to November.

INSECTS:

On Sunday (Nov 3) Bob Chapman found a Clouded Yellow, several Red Admirals and a few Common Darters at Farlington Marshes. +++

As a footnote you might be interested to know that, as I write these notes on Saturday morning (Nov 9) in warm sunshine, a big Queen Common Wasp has flown into a spiders web outside my window and made frantic efforts to escape which eventually let her break free - during the struggle the spider twice came out to see if she could deliver the coup de grace but on both occasions she retreated smartly after the tail end of the wasp came close to her. I must check if Queen Wasps can sting - as they actually lay the eggs I suspect that their ovipositors are not stings.

WED 06 NOV

On Monday (Nov 4), at the Goodwood Trundle on the downs just north of Chichester, Derek Mills saw a Peacock and his wife saw what must have been a Clouded Yellow, and in Cosham at the foot of Portsdown here in Hampshire Theo Roberts had a male Brimstone, four Red Admirals and a Speckled Wood in his garden +++

On Sunday (Nov 3) Theo again had a Brimstone in his garden but this was a female. With it were single Red Admiral and Speckled Wood.

TUE 05 NOV

Barry Collins had his moth trap running here in Havant this evening and took his first Chestnut moth and also the first specimen of the Epirrita family which includes the Autumnal and the November moths - these are both variable in their looks and could be confused for one another, and what's more they both have 'little brothers' called the Small Autumnal and Pale November moths, so Barry cannot be entirely positive as to which species he found (and consequently I am not adding it to my first sightings list under one name when it may prove to be another). Despite the name of November moth all species of this family are 'autumn moths' which my book says are on the wing from September to November. One which does start to emerge in November for the first time is the Winter Moth, but maybe these are not easy to find nowadays as they are fruit tree pests and no doubt have a hard time in these days when the 'double standards' of the western nations allow them to manufacture and use chemical weapons of mass destruction against such defenceless creatures - the female Winter moth is minute and cannot fly though the male is a more normal small Geometer moth.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 09 NOV

John Goodspeed, who is the 'volunteer in charge' of a conservation group looking after the area (called 'The Sling') of Stansted Forest nearest to Rowlands Castle, today organised an expedition there to find fungi, and Rosemary Webb, our local expert in this matter, came along to identify the finds. Although John has only sent me a brief list of those which impressed him I see that they found one of the specialities of the site - the Hedgehog Puffball (*Lycoperdon echinatum*) - not to be confused with the very edible *Hydnum repandum* which is commonly called the Hedgehog Fungus because of the spines which hang from its toadstool type cap, replacing the gills or pores of most other toadstools). A proper toadstool (rather than a puffball) but grey and very greasy was the *Verdigris* Toadstool (I cannot really see a resemblance between it and the 'verdigris' that you get on old car batteries, though both are grey/green in colour, but maybe the name has another association). Another good find was the Split Gill bracket, and also on trees was a lichen like resupinate which John names as *Phlebia radiata* (presumably getting the name from Rosemary) but if you want to look it up in the popular Roger Philips book look under *P. merismoides*.

In the Hollybank Wood on the northern fringe of Emsworth the Havant Wildlife Group had a special guest, Rod Stern, well qualified to lead them on an expedition in search of Bryophytes (Mosses and Lichens). This is a subject in which I admit great ignorance so I am very grateful to Brian Fellows, who was with the group, for his account of what they found ... **** Report on next page**

TUE 05 NOV

John Goodspeed today found the first Dog Stinkhorn fungus of the autumn in the Sling area of Stansted Forest and may have other interesting finds to report when he has identified them. +++ John also tells me that he had a telephoned report of a Roe Deer on Hayling Island two weeks ago - almost certainly the same deer which was seen by Tim Lawman at Sinah Warren on Oct 26.

MON 04 NOV

Also in today's messages is one from Brian Fellows saying that last Saturday (Nov 2) his daughter was among a group of people walking the shore from Emsworth to Langstone which, when passing Langstone Mill Pond at lunch time, had good views of two Water Voles swimming close to the path behind the Mill.

REPORT OF WALK BY THE HAVANT WILDLIFE GROUP IN HOLLYBANK WOODS WITH ROD STERN ON SATURDAY 9TH NOVEMBER

“Starting from the Hollybank Lane entrance we took the first small path to the west into the very wet area to look for Sphagnum. We stopped at a mature Oak tree where Rod identified several mosses growing on the bark, including Cyprus-leaved Plait-moss (*Hypnum cupressiforme*) and Slender Mouse-tail moss (*Isoetecium myosuroides*) which only grows on trees. On the ground by the Oak tree were growing the male plants of the very common Swans-neck Thyme-moss (*Mnium hornum*), so-called from the curved Swan-like stem holding the capsule. Also, on the ground near the Oak Rod found Common Feather-moss (*Eurhynchium praelongum*) and Silky Forklet-moss (*Dicranella heteromalla*). +++

In the very boggy area north of the Oak tree Rod found Overleaf Pellia (*Pellia epiphylla*) which is a liverwort with large irregularly lobed leaves and the very attractive feathery-leaved Common Tamarisk-moss (*Thuidium tamariscinum*). We then came across a large area of Cow-horn Bog-moss (*Sphagnum denticulatum*) growing on the ground. Rod believes this is the only Sphagnum growing in Hollybank Woods and he bemoaned the fact that so few Bryologists are interested in Sphagnum. We need to form a special Sphagnum study group! +++

Moving further north Rod found some Bank Haircap (*Polytrichum formosum*) growing on the trunk of a tree. This plant has a single unbranched stem which grows to 6 inches and its leaves have small teeth. On a nearby tree stump Rod found Mamillate Plait-moss (*Hypnum andoi*). Elegant Silk-moss (*Pseudotaxiphyllum elegans*) was found by an old coppiced Sweet Chestnut tree. +++

We returned to the main central track through the woods where we stopped to study the many bryophytes on the tall Beech tree on the east side of the track before where the new track branches off. On south side of the Beech Rod found White-tipped Bristle-moss (*Orthotrichum diaphanum*) whose narrow leaves have short silvery hair points and on the north side Lesser Yoke-moss (*Zygodon conoideus*) and Capillary-moss (*Bryum capillare*). On the eastern side of the Beech tree Rod found three Liverworts: Forked Veilwort (*Metzgeria furcata*), Minute Pouncewort (*Cololejeunea minutissima*) which is the smallest liverwort with strings of tiny green algae-like beads, and Variable-leaved Crestwort (*Lophocolea heterophylla*) which has lobed leaves and sometimes has an aroma. The next Beech tree along the track was far less interesting and here Rod found Common Pincushion (*Dicranoweisia cirrata*). +++

We had a short break on the old Holly Lodge site where we found Springy Turf-moss (*Rhytidiadelphus squarrosus*) and Pointed Spear-moss (*Calliergonella cuspidata*) both growing on the ground. From the Holly Lodge site the group walked back to the main central track and then went up the new track to the east where we found a tiny yellow fungus growing on a dead log by the side of the track which was identified at the time as Yellow Stag's Horn though I have not been able to find this one in the books. Stag's Horn or Candle Snuff Fungus is white in colour. Further along Rod found some Rough-stalked Feather-moss (*Brachythecium rutabulum*) which he said grows commonly on lawns. Clustered Feather-moss (*Rhynchostegium confertum*) with long-stalked capsules was found growing a sheet of asbestos. +++

At this point I had to leave the walk to get down to Hayling Island for the WeBS count. My list for today contained 17 mosses and 4 liverworts from the 33 mosses and 12 liverworts that Rod had on his bryophytes list recorded on 7 Feb 2001. There were at least 3 others that Rod found today which were not on last year's list.”

WEEK 44 OCT 28 - NOV 3 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 03 NOV

Knowing that there was a strong breeze over the exposed harbour shores I thought I would get a bit of fresh air by cycling to Langstone and scanning the mud from a spot on the seawall where I would be sheltered from the wind but when I got there at midday I found the tide still well up so I carried on to Hayling Oysterbeds where I did at last find 15 Merganser in the shelter of the pools but the wind was too strong to make it worth using my scope to scan the harbour waters.

Two pairs of Stonechat looked bright in the sunshine, and I'm pretty sure I heard a few practice notes from a Song Thrush in the Stoke Common area (similarly I was frustrated by a short burst of Goldcrest song from conifers beside the Hayling Billy trail in Havant). +++

At the Oysterbeds I met David Ball, who had come to check the Longhorn Cattle that are currently in the 'Brick Field' (the old fence around the meadow west of the rail track here has been torn down and is about to be replaced). Amongst other things David told me that this summer the County Council Rangers had been sent, for identification, a photo of a bird which had been in a Hayling Island garden (also this summer). The photo was of a stunning adult Rosy Starling, but the people in whose garden it was seen told no one at the time and waited until the photo had been developed before doing so - by which time it had moved on...

SAT 02 NOV

David Parker saw 50 Redwing pass over his Forestside garden in the mist and saw at least 6 Crossbill in the northern fringe of Stansted Forest which abuts his garden. Over in East Sussex 8 Swallows were reported from the coast at Cooden near Bexhill.

At Titchfield Haven it appears that the feral geese which arrived from Baffins Pond on Oct 31 have decided to stay as John Shillitoe found them still there today with a more graceful new arrival, an Avocet. Also still present according to reports but not seen by John was the Bittern.

This afternoon the first of this winter's Low Tide Counts in Portsmouth Harbour was scheduled, and from the forecast of gales and heavy rain I assumed it would be a total washout, but in fact the wind was relatively light and the only problem was continuous light rain making it impossible to use optics to look south into the rain (and difficult to look in any direction without getting rain on the lenses). I did my stint around Paulsgrove Lake but saw nothing of great interest - some 200 Brent along the north shore, a few Oystercatchers, Redshank, and Black-tailed Godwit and just half a dozen Dunlin. +++

A more unusual sighting came after I had got home and had tea, when the phone rang to ask for advice on what to do with a large bird sitting on someone's garden wall in Havant and looking very bedraggled in the rain. The description was vague but I got the impression it was quite a large bird, possibly an Oystercatcher as it was said to be black and white and with a long red bill. Intrigued by such a bird turning up in a residential street I collected a large cardboard box and an old towel with which I hoped to catch the supposedly sickly bird, and when I got there I had no difficulty in throwing the towel over the bird and getting it into the box, but the bird in question turned out to be a juvenile Collared Dove, so bedraggled that it was difficult to recognise in the light of the street lamps. When handling it I sensed that it was well fed and uninjured so I left it in the box for the finder to put in his garage overnight (and next morning when he opened the box it flew out as if nothing had happened). Presumably the young bird had not encountered rain before and got its feathers waterlogged ... I hope it learnt its lesson though I suspect it to be mentally deficient and expect to hear of it in trouble again if the cats don't get it first.

FRI 01 NOV

At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter heard that others had seen one or more Swallows and that one Brambling had been seen with Chaffinches. +++

Bob Chapman today put out his weekly summary from Farlington Marshes and he tells us that there are still 5 Greenshank and one Spotted Redshank at the Marshes today - his other news is listed below by date.

Today I thought I should check out the lie of the land around Paulsgrove Lake in Portsmouth Harbour where I am scheduled to count the shore birds tomorrow for the first of this winter's Low Tide counts in the harbour (although the weather forecast for Saturday is atrocious with promise of gales and heavy rain). The only birds of interest today were Brent Geese grazing on the close mown grass of the open space between Port Solent and Horsea Island - the flock numbered 242 birds and I counted 25 juveniles among them, a very good percentage but no doubt this was a 'family flock' (perhaps having come as a unit from an area where breeding conditions were better than average), and other flocks around the harbour are of non-breeders or tried to nest in areas where the weather and predation was worse than average. Another thought that occurred to me was that the birds which are 'intelligent' enough to choose this excellent feeding area are perhaps 'more intelligent' than the average Brent when it comes to

other decisions affecting their lives (such as choice of nest site). The flock were certainly very much awake to potential predators, seeing me half a mile off and moving away from my approach, then taking off instantly when a Heron flew over them.

THU 31 OCT

5 Avocet made a one day visit to Farlington Marshes today according to Bob Chapman, and a Spoonbill was seen in the Broadmarsh area and is thought to have then flown west - perhaps going to join the Avocet in Poole Harbour, which seems their most likely destination. +++
Just west of Farlington Marshes the first Pochard of the winter was seen on the IBM Lake by Kevin Stouse, and four more Pochard, with two Tufted Duck, arrived on the river at Titchfield Haven - these Pochard were also first arrivals here. Also at Titchfield Haven, according to Richard Carpenter, both Swallows and House Martins were seen by some visitors, but I was more interested to hear that the feral geese from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth had turned up at the Haven today (10 Barnacle Geese with 1 Snow and 1 Bar-head hybrid) - they usually move to the Haven for the winter but there may be a bit of toing and froing before they settle down there. +++

Over in Emsworth Brian Fellows spent some time checking out the birds in Emsworth Harbour, and his count of 30 Common Gulls shows that these have at last started to be 'common' again along the coast (during the week I heard their frantic 'mewing' somewhere over Havant, probably a group of them chasing a Black headed Gull which had been lucky enough to pick up a food item). Other gulls at Emsworth were some 2000 Black-headed, 200 Herring and singles of Great and Lesser Blackback. Among the waders were 6 Greenshank and some 400 Dunlin, with three Little Grebe in the harbour channel with two more (and 38 Coot) on the Slipper Mill pond. +++

Along with today's news Brian sent me an interesting summary of the decline of House Sparrows as seen in his garden over the past five years. Brian has noted the number of House Sparrows in his garden each week and has averaged these numbers for each year, giving the following result ... 1998 15.4 birds; 1999 14.1; 2000 10.8; 2001 8.5; and 2002 to date 7.7 +++

Still locally, but just in Sussex, Tony Gutteridge was in Stansted Forest today and saw 12 Crossbill and 25 Siskin.

At Farlington Marshes on Oct 28 a Red-necked Grebe was seen in Broom Channel (running close to the Portsmouth shore at Kendall's Wharf, close to the south west corner of the Marshes) - Bob Chapman thinks this is probably the bird that has been seen several times at the Milton Lakes and at Sinah Lake on Hayling.

On Sunday Oct 27 Pete Hughes summarised the birds present at Pulborough Brooks and among them were 75 Pintail. Others there were some 800 Wigeon, 600 Teal, 300 Lapwing, up to 10 Ruff, a Green Sandpiper and a Peregrine plus two Black-tailed Godwit which obstinately stay on there rather than joining the flocks of their species on the coast. +++

At Farlington Marshes Bob Chapman noted the return of the first two winter Water Pipits (they also turned up at Lymington and the Lower Test on Oct 27)

WED 30 OCT

Today some 20 Crossbills with at least 3 males among them could be seen in the northern edge of Stansted Forest looking from David Parker's garden in Forestside village. In early September both I and Barry Collins found well over 100 Crossbill in Stansted Forest but there have been no other reports of them from that site since then so these (and the birds which I found in Havant Thicket last week) may be part of a new wave of arrivals though I suspect they are the same birds moving about in the local area. +++

TUE 29 OCT

Today Trevor Carpenter visited the Hayling Oysterbeds and counted at least 30 female Merganser in the Langstone channel and 5 Black-necked Grebe in the Bridge Lake area north of the Oysterbeds. Presumably the Black-necked Grebes (which should now number more than a dozen - Bob Chapman gave a count of 11 on Oct 12) have now split into several flocks. +++

MON 28 OCT

This morning I went to the Hayling Oysterbeds, passing through a small flock (perhaps 20) of Blackbirds in bushes beside the old rail track (three of the birds were bathing in different

puddles) and a larger flock of Starlings (perhaps 70) feeding on elder berries (before I left home a Starling had been singing continuously from a chimney pot). From the bench overlooking the harbour south of Stoke Bay I counted sixty Great Crested Grebe on the water but never saw a Black-necked, and on the tide line close to me were some 1,000 Dunlin, perhaps 300 Oystercatcher and maybe 100 Brent with just two juveniles, plus the Curlews, Redshank, Grey Plover and ten Turnstone. A dozen Egrets and seven Cormorant could be seen from here before I went to the Oysterbed pools where the lagoon had just two Great Crested and one Little Grebe with some Brent (I still have not seen a Merganser).

The main pool was empty of water but full of birds though the only new species were 20 Black-tailed Godwit and a single Heron fishing by the channel breaking the outer sea wall.

Looking beyond the bund walls to the main Langstone channel (here called The Deeps before dividing in the two channels leading to Langstone Bridge and Chalkdock) I had excellent views of the female Common Scoter which has been in the harbour for some time though I have not seen it before. It was diving fairly frequently but I had plenty of time to take in the dark brown body and the elegant line of dark up the back of the neck, curving down to the bill but leaving the cheeks and front of the neck as a very light grey-white.

Before I left the area I scored two more firsts for the autumn - my first Rock Pipit and my first Dunnock song, the bird repeating its jingle many times to make sure I heard it. +++

Coming back over the bridge I stopped at the sailing club slipway to see what was on the Langstone shore. Here were another 86 Brent, again with only 2 juveniles that I could spot (my impression is that the percentage of young the birds have brought back with them is less than 2%, though if you only count the flocks in which juveniles are present and ignore the flocks with no young you can boost this figure!). As usual the Bar-tailed Godwits were the most numerous birds here - I reckoned I saw 400 - and other species were Dunlin, Oystercatcher, Redshank, Grey Plover and Lapwing plus 14 Black-tailed Godwit and what I am pretty sure was a distant Greenshank (seemingly one legged by the way it hopped!). From the bridge I could see the Lapwing lined up along the outer edge of the saltings but could only count 41 (the winter flock is still to arrive here), and today I saw no Golden Plover at all. Four Herons, two Egrets and 2 Cormorant completed the tally here. +++

On my way home, as I passed the Royal Oak pub with the tide low, I had an excellent close view of a Kingfisher perched against the wall of the Mill building where the Lymbourne stream emerges from under what is now the driveway into the Mill. This is a favourite fishing place for Kingfisher during the winter, and it tolerates people passing within ten yards of its perch allowing you very close views - the bird will normally be facing you so look for its orange breast, not its blue back.

Other people out and about locally today included John Shillitoe, who found a Peregrine back on a favourite winter perch on electricity pylons overlooking the north west shoulder of Portsdown (sometimes large flocks of Woodpigeon feed in fields on the hill slope here, and if there is no prey immediately to hand this is a good starting place for a foray down the Wallington river valley and Fareham Creek to Portsmouth Harbour or up the valley to check the woods and fields north of Portsdown). Later John went to Hill Head but only saw 7 Eider on the water though the Bearded Tits put on a good show at Titchfield Haven.

A couple more Eider (two drakes) were off Southsea South Parade Pier near the castle, seen by Ian Thirlwell (he has not seen them here before, and I do not recall others doing so) +++

In yesterday's gales Martin Hampton struggled over Langstone Bridge to be rewarded with the sight of a Firecrest in the small group of pines at the south west end of the bridge (the side which has the new railings whose vertical bars were giving off a loud and continuous high-pitched 'wind in the rigging' whistle that could be heard throughout the Langstone area). At the Oysterbeds ten Merganser were in the lagoon and at least 300 Dunlin were sheltering inside the bund walls - maybe these tempted the local Kestrel pair to see if they could pick one off, and Martin describes watched them trying to hunt in the storm force winds in these words {{ Kestrel pair hunting energetically despite the wind - 'hovering' (perhaps not such a talent against the wind!) but also very low (just 1 to 2 feet above the ground'), slow 'patrolling' of the banks of the lagoon. The male even passed directly below me as I stood on the eastern bank. Not seen this before - perhaps a response to the conditions? }} +++

News from Brian Fellows for last Saturday (Oct 26) is of a Kingfisher sighting in Dolphin Lake at Emsworth (the lake is the where part of the the River Ems flows out into Emsworth Harbour alongside the Slipper Mill Pond where the rest of the river water is penned in by sluice gates though the head of water is no longer used by the Mill). From now on this could be a good place to see a Kingfisher during the winter, and if you do not see it there is usually plenty of other interest on the Slipper Mill Pond where a pair of Little Grebe were back for the first time this winter on Saturday, and on Friday the caste list of birds included 40 Coot.

PLANTS:

SUN 03 NOV

Sunshine after yesterday's rain encouraged me to take a stroll round the short section of the old Hayling Billy rail track that runs behind my house before settling down to work and I am glad that I did so as I found that where a pair of 'ornamental' level crossing gates have recently been installed at the north end of the old rail track (where cyclists and walkers come suddenly on a busy road) newly disturbed soil had grown a crop of interesting plants. Of most interest to me among them were three plants of Green Nightshade, all in flower and one having some berries showing the distinctive enlarged calyx, but to my eye at anyrate the plants stood out from Black Nightshade by the hairiness of the stems, which were neither upright nor decumbent, but halfway between. With them was one plant of Apple of Peru with what I think was a flower bud rather than the enlarged calyx which totally encloses the poisonous berry, and also present and flowering was Annual Wallrocket

SAT 02 NOV

Walking around Paulsgrove Lake in the rain today (supposedly counting the birds for the co-ordinated Low Tide Count of the harbour) I came on Pellitory of the Wall still bearing flowers by the seawall across the grass from the main carpark for Portchester Castle, and going further north to where a board proclaims the County Council 'Castle Shore' nature reserve, I found lots of Chicory plants along the seawall which is I think outside the nature reserve. John Goodspeed had found these Chicory plants in flower on Oct 12, and I suspect that remnants will still be flowering in December if we do not have the week of hard frost that often comes at the end of November. Also flowering in this area was one fresh plant of Wild Parsnip.

FRI 01 NOV

This morning I went to reconnoitre the area around Paulsgrove Lake, in the north east corner of Portsmouth Harbour, in preparation for a scheduled visit tomorrow to count the birds there as part of a co-ordinated low tide count of the whole harbour. Parking outside the entrance to Horsea Island on the east shore of the lake I took a brief walk around the edges of the large public open space of close mown grassland, and immediately found two plants of Apple of Peru (Nicandra physalodes) still bearing their lovely blue trumpet shaped flowers. There were no other flowers of interest here.

WED 30 OCT

Walking round the Hollybank Woods in this morning's dull and damp weather I found very few flowers but one surprise item was a single raceme of Heath Speedwell flowers, admittedly the flowers were not open but the closed petals were fully formed and showing their colour. On my way to the woods a garden in Hollybank Lane had a flower on a Wild Strawberry plant still growing on a grassy bank, and in the garden of Holly Lodge (the buildings were long ago razed after the house caught fire and the site, well within the woods, is not obviously a human habitation) there was a great display of Quince-like yellow fruit on a low spiny shrub which must be the basic Japonica (Chaenomeles japonica). This basic shrub is very different from the ornamental cultivars that are commonly grown in gardens, growing to a most 1 metre high and 2 metres across, with small leaves and many very long and sharp thorns. One of the reasons for visiting the woods was to check on the show of Holly Berries, and while I did not see as many as usual along the line of Hollybank Lane through the centre of the woods there was a good show in one area at the west end (but no Redwings or other thrushes feeding on them).

MON 28 OCT

Around the Hayling Oysterbeds area this morning I found Greater Knapweed, Hawkweed Oxtongue and White Melilot still in flower - species I have not seen elsewhere recently - and in

Havant I noticed Ivy-leaved Toadflax still flowering. Passing near the Homewell spring I went to see if the Water Crowfoot was still flowering, which it was, so I took a specimen to see if I could work out what it is (last time I tried to determine what it was I came out with *R. baudotii*, but that is supposed to thrive in brackish water and this is fresh spring water though there is little or no flow in much of the pool around the spring, partly because it is totally choked with this plant). Also growing in the pool but out of reach from the sides, a Willowherb species was still flowering but I could not determine that either!

INSECTS:

TUE 29 OCT

Today a Monarch Butterfly completed its single-handed trip across the Atlantic and touched down in the Scilly Isles. This seems to be only the third to have made the trip this year - one reached Ireland on June 11, another was in the Shetlands on Sept 6, and now this one in the Scillies. This news came from the national migrant moth website which also lists two more Hummingbird Hawkmoth arrivals yesterday (Oct 28) - one in Kent, the other in Norfolk.

Yesterday a male Brimstone butterfly was in Stephen Harvey's garden at Chandler's Ford, presumably one that went into hibernation in early August and has now been disturbed or possibly come out of its own volition to clear its body of accumulating toxins (I gather that most hibernating creatures, probably butterflies and certainly bats, would die from poisons accumulating in their bodies if they slept right through the winter without moving, so they do wake up once a month or so, and take a little exercise to void the toxins from their bodies). +++
Another recent butterfly sighting that has only just come to me is of 5 Painted Ladies seen by Russell Wynn in the Lymington area last Saturday (Oct 26).

MON 28 OCT

Coming up Wade Lane from the sea at Langstone around midday a large dark butterfly brushed past me and I watched it for a few seconds as it flew off - I could see no markings at all and it seemed dark on both upper and lower surfaces in the reduced light of the lane so I guess it was a Peacock. +++

On Saturday (Oct 26) Richard saw a Common Darter in the Upper Hamble Country Park, and on the same day Brian Fellows reports both male and female Common Darters and a Peacock butterfly at the Emsworth Brook Meadow site +++

Last week (on Wednesday Oct 23) I see from John Goodspeed's weekly nature notes poster that a female Great Green Bush-cricket joined the Portsdown Hill Conservation Volunteers during their coffee break and John was able to photograph it from the rear to show off its fearsome sword like ovipositor

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 02 NOV

The Havant Wildlife Group visited Havant Thicket today and had a pretty good list of fungi including the very edible Cep (or Penny Bun). Another and commoner edible boletus was the Bay boletus and among the bigger finds were Clouded Agaric but I would have been equally pleased to find the tiny white umbrellas, growing on thin dead plant stems, of *Marasmius ramealis* or the bright yellow staghorn type *Clavulinopsis corniculata* growing in grass. These are just five of the 22 fungi in Jim Berry's list of their finds +++

A couple more fungi now growing on my lawn are the Parrot Waxcap and the Goat Moth Waxcap.

FRI 01 NOV

Walking across the large open space of close mown grass south of Port Solent today I found a very good show of fresh specimens of Weeping Widow toadstools but little else - some small *Mycena* (probably *M. leptocephala* - they had whitish edges to grey caps) and what were probably a couple of unopen 'buttons' of Field Mushroom.

WED 30 OCT

Walking away from the main paths in Southleigh Forest I disturbed a magnificent Fallow buck with a full set of antlers, and this reminded me that their rutting season is about to start - very likely he was already manning his rutting stand though I did not see the well trodden ground of the exact place he will stand (often it is at the junction of several paths in the woods so that he can be seen and heard by any passing does or challenging bucks). +++

Also in Southleigh Forest my fungal finds included *Entoloma porphyrophaeum* - a distinctive small toadstool with a dark brown shiny cap that splits at the edges and turns up to form a ragged bowl with a prominent umbo in the centre - my examples were about 3cm across the cap and the stem was 4cm high. A bigger and commoner fungus found for the first time (at least by me!) this autumn was a Clouded Agaric (surprisingly I could only see one rather than a big troop) in Hollybank Woods.

MON 28 OCT

I have never seen or heard of Roe Deer on Hayling Island, and there is no mention of them in Pete Durnell's recent 'Wildlife of Hayling Island', so I was very surprised to hear from Tim Lawman that he had come across one skulking in the grounds of the Sinah Warren holiday camp on Saturday (Oct 26). If there is anyone out there who does have any knowledge of deer of any sort ever having been on Hayling Island please let me know. Until then the Hayling Swamp Cat, of which we have proof in the form of a dead body, now stuffed and in the Hampshire Museum collection, remains a commoner denizen of South Hayling than does the Roe Deer. Incidentally the Swamp Cat was, I think, killed on the Ferry Road outside Sinah Warren so perhaps that is why there are so few deer there....

Last Saturday (Oct 26) Richard Carpenter had a rewarding fungal foray in the Upper Hamble Country Park (on the west bank of the Hamble just north of the M27). Firsts for the season were the Parasol Mushroom, Wood Blewit, Wood Woolly-foot, Common Funnel Cap, and both Common and Shaggy Inkcaps (I later saw that Shaggy Inkcaps had appeared in Emsworth's Brook Meadow in the middle of the week - say Oct 23). Richard also had only the second Fly Agaric that I have heard of this autumn and what I think was the first find of the very common Candle-snuff fungus. Oyster Mushroom was also on his list. +++

On the same day the Havant Wildlife Group were in Brook Meadow at Emsworth and there Jim Berry found the hallucogenic 'Magic Mushroom' better known as the Liberty Cap. It seems that Brook Meadow (now that the grass has been cut and people can access areas that were previously impenetrable) is already attracting treasure hunters with metal detectors, so I hope it is not now plagued with young people seeking 'new experiences' - they should by now be out and about on the Gipsies Plain fields south of Havant Thicket which is the traditional local venue for these Magic Mushrooms.

WEEK 43 OCT 21 - 27

BIRDS:

SUN 27 OCT

Despite the sunshine few birds were to be seen as I walked from Havant to Budds Farm in this morning's storm force winds. One Egret got up from the Langbrook stream near the Tesco store as I went under the A27, and a single Wren found something to sing about on the other side of the road before I saw another Egret fishing in the Brockhampton stream and heard both Grey Wagtail and Goldfinch there. At Broadmarsh slipway one pair of Swans with a single cygnet were on the Hermitage stream (both adult birds had orange stained heads and necks as if they had been dipping them in some oil-polluted water) - with them on this relatively sheltered water were a couple of Little Grebe and 25 Black-headed Gulls. Across the stream on the exposed Budds Farm shore 6 Brent, 10 Wigeon, and perhaps a dozen Oystercatcher were braving the elements but, as I expected, there was a much better showing of birds on Budds Farm pools. +++

Here were at least 38 Shoveler with perhaps 30 each of Teal and Mallard plus a dozen Tufted Duck and what I feel sure was a female Scaup - slightly bigger than the Tufties, not closely associating with them, and having a big rounded head with no sign of a tuft and a large white

round face mask - she also had a uniform rich chestnut brown colour to the head, neck and breast feathers which was different from the nearby female Tufties, and my confidence in this bird being a Scaup was increased by Bob Chapman's report a couple of days ago that a female Scaup had been in Langstone Harbour during the week. The usual Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe were also present as was just one Swan. +++

On the mud east of Langstone Mill there were the expected Bar-tailed Godwit but it was difficult to make out the distant waders though I think there was a flock of Knot on the exposed mud away from the tideline. Langstone Pond was surprisingly deserted by the birds that are normally there and I only saw one Mallard and one Swan. +++

North of the pond the pony fields had suddenly acquired a winter look with Moorhens exploring the developing pool that will soon attract many Teal, and near this pool, in the shelter of the trees lining the Lymbourne stream, were 11 Grey Herons and 10 Egrets 'all riding out the storm at anchor'. Walking up Wade Lane to the pony fields north of the Wade Court buildings there were another 20 Egrets mostly sheltering but some prospecting for food.

SAT 26 OCT

John Clark was in the Avon Valley at daybreak today watching at least 5,500 Lesser Blackback Gulls and an indeterminate number of Yellow-legged Gulls fly north from their night roost on Ibsley Water. He then drove south to Burton village near the Dorset border to tick four Whooper Swans which have just arrived there (no Bewicks anywhere as yet) before making a full count of what could be seen in the Avon Causeway-Wattons Ford area of the river. Top of the bill here were 2 redhead Goosanders with a supporting caste of 303 Greylags, 149 Canadas and, for variety, 4 Egyptian Geese, 2 Barnacles, 2 Barheads and 2 Snow Geese. Among the duck were just 3 Pintail - these are in short supply everywhere so far it seems. On his way home John checked out Alresford Pond where there was only 1 female Pintail with 27 Gadwall and 39 Shoveler. +++

In the south east of Hampshire Peter Morrison found a Sandwich Tern in Langstone Harbour (off Milton Common) and saw a Yellow-legged Gull there. On Southsea Common some ten Brent were grazing, seen by Ian Thirlwell, and at Titchfield Haven a Little Gull was reported, the message being passed on by John Shillitoe.

FRI 25 OCT

Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today when 4 Swallows flew over, and he says that up to 15 Bearded Tits, 4 Green Sandpiper, a Greenshank and a Dartford Warbler should be present - Richard saw the Dartford Warbler yesterday, and one of the Sandpipers today, though 4 were reported yesterday. If you are hoping to see the Bittern or Marsh Harrier Richard says that neither has been seen for a couple of days (since Oct 23) but I guess that better weather expected for Saturday this week might bring them out again. Birds that you are sure to see at the Haven are Wigeon and Canada Geese - today Richard saw some 200 Wigeon and 250 Canadas, including the white bird. +++

Yesterday, not seen by Richard, a Peregrine was reported to have taken a Moorhen from the south scrape. He does not say if it was taken from the ground or in flight but in either case this report shows that Peregrine will come dangerously close to the ground when hunting (I suspect the Moorhen was flying low over the water and was seized by chance as it happened to cross the falcons flight path).

Today's sightings of some interest include my observation of several Crossbills flying around over the trees in Havant Thicket (I kept hearing ones and twos throughout the hour I was there but did not get the impression of a big flock), and my first sight of an Egret feeding on the pony fields north of Wade Court rather than on the shoreline (admittedly this was during the high tide period). Of interest to me was a message from Kevin Stouse to say that the pair of Swans with two cygnets which were on the IBM Lake at Portsmouth when I was there for the WeBS count on Oct 5 are still present (the pair that nested by the lakeside earlier this year failed to raise a family so these are 'intruders'). +++

THU 24 OCT

Looking back through my notes of Corn Bunting for this year I see that in early April Doug Robertson was still finding up to 37 Corn Bunting in fields west of Hambledon, and up to 18 were still in that Hoe Cross area in May, but - other than one report of 9 birds at Cheesefoot

Head on April 22 - this is the only area of Hampshire from which a flock was reported on Hoslist. The only other Hampshire reports that I have seen were of one at Upper Swanmore on May 21, one at Old Idsworth Farm on June 19, one at Sutton Scotney on Mar 31 and at least one at Ashley Warren in the far north on Jan 16. +++

Over in Sussex things are not much better - Thorney Island has always had regular breeding birds until this year when the only report is of one bird on Apr 27. A few birds were still at a regular site just north of Chichester (between West Stoke and Lavant) where song was heard on Feb 24 and 3 birds were still present in mid May, 9 were at Pulborough Brooks on Mar 5, just 1 was in the Fishbourne area on Apr 29 and just 1 was recorded at Racton in the Ems Valley on May 23. The highest figure that might represent a breeding colony in Sussex was 5 birds on the downs north of Lancing on May 13. Before 1999 Colin Law expected to see a winter flock of around 150 birds on the downs between Brighton and Lewes (Castle Hill) and that number were there in March 1999, but although there were 120 there on Dec 31 that year they had been slow in returning, starting with 40 on Nov 27. In the winter of 2000 it seems that his peak count was of just 25 birds on Christmas Day (and the biggest flock recorded in the county Bird Report was just 35), and in 2001 the biggest count I know of in Sussex was of just 30 birds in the Ouse valley north of Newhaven. This autumn my only notes are of 15 in the Benfield Valley at Hove on Sep 2 and of 4 birds at Ditchling Beacon on Sept 19.

In Pagham Harbour Lawrence Holloway saw 2 House Martins as well as several Swallows on Oct 23. At Church Norton he found the Black Redstart showing well in the churchyard and watched a Great Spotted Woodpecker heading west over the Severals (there does seem to be an unusual number of records of these birds making long distance flights this autumn - is it the result of a population explosion?). +++

One interesting item in Lawrence Holloway's diary is his account of unusual Crow behaviour at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool. He writes {{ As we watched, a Carrion Crow harassed the resting ducks, putting them to flight in no uncertain manner. Several times the Crow dived into the crowd of birds, both when they were on the water and when they were in the air. It was an extraordinary spectacle. Eventually, the Crow broke off and all the ducks settled down again. }}. Earlier in the year we heard of a Crow thinking it was a Hobby and attacking House Martins in flight, now we hear of one dive-bombing ducks on the water - perhaps with delusions of being an Osprey?

Other recent reports that have only just come to my attention include the presence of two late Reed Warblers at Farlington Marshes on Oct 19, and on the same day of two Buzzards having some form of dispute over the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes - two birds seen talon-locking in flight. One Oct 17 there was a Jack Snipe with three Black-tailed Godwit at Pulborough Brooks - presumably the Godwits were just stopping off on their way south to the coast as they have not yet started to move from the mudflats to the meadows at Titchfield Haven.

WED 23 OCT

Another bird that has been in short supply on the south coast this autumn so far is Sanderling, and today Barry Collins had 17 of them on Pilsay Sands following the appearance of just one there on Oct 21. Elsewhere on Thorney Island today Barry had more than 300 Black-tailed Godwit and around 40 Greenshank plus a couple of Swallows. +++

Although there is no mention in today's reports of the flock of 265 Golden Plover that were in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight last Monday (Oct 21), nor of the similarly sized Thorney Island flock that was also seen on that day, I presume both are still in their respective areas. In addition to these the Eastleigh Wide Lane flock was today counted by Ian Watts as having 254 birds, and the Ibworth flock, west of Basingstoke, was also seen today and counted by Mike Wall as numbering 279. Without counting the 44 birds seen recently at Keyhaven and Holmsley (which may well be part of the flock counted at Newtown Harbour) this gives a total of just over 1000 Golden Plover in the Hampshire/ Isle of Wight area (I'm sure the Thorney Island birds regularly pop over the border from Sussex to Hayling Island). There may well be other flocks in Hampshire - perhaps in the Winchester/Alresford area or around Stockbridge and down the Test Valley.

Buzzard sightings are common and widespread but a sighting of three by John Simons in the Stansted Forest area today was highly unusual as the birds were high in the air and being

harried by a Crow almost an hour before sunrise. John saw them this morning in the half-light at 06:45 and the sunrise should not have been until 07:40. I remember that last winter Mike Collins saw one Buzzard at a similarly early time when he was driving to work, but that bird was perched in a dead tree by the bed of the River Ems just east of Aldsworth. I would agree with John in not expecting any Buzzard to take wing until the air was warm and the light was good and I can only think of three reasons for these birds being airborne so early - the obvious reason is that they had been forcibly disturbed from their roost perches, a second reason is that the air was unseasonably warm this morning (though hardly generating thermals for soaring!), but a third possibility intrigues me. This was suggested by something which Chris Palmer said when talking the Hampshire Wildlife Trust meeting in Havant this evening - as an aside he mentioned that he now commutes daily from the Portsmouth area to Winchester using the Morestead road passing through Pheasant shooting country and each day he is amazed at the number of Pheasant corpses to be seen by the roadside on his dawn run, contrasting with an almost total absence of bodies on his way home when someone (human or animal) has removed them. Could it be that, with so many Buzzards in our area competing for the available food supply, it is only the early Buzzard that gets some breakfast? (The Buzzards would not necessarily be relying on the corpses of inexperienced, pen reared, young Pheasants - I'm not sure they take feathered corpses - but there are plenty of similar road casualties of rabbits, badgers, and even deer which might be only injured on the road and die in quieter places where a Buzzard can feed on them without itself getting hit by a car).

On a less hypothetical note today once more brought several sightings of Swallows. I have already mentioned two seen over Thorney Island. but two more were seen by Colin Bates over Lymington and another two by Bob Marchant at Hook/Warsash. Going back to yesterday Mike Rafter had 25 Swallows at Hurst Castle, Trevor Carpenter had 12 at Gosport and Ian Thirlwell saw 3 at Portsmouth.

A short walk around the Printsted-Nutbourne circuit in today's sunshine and strong wind produced little bird interest, though before I set out Skylarks were moving west over my garden and a few more went over the fields at Nutbourne, as did 10 Lapwing and some 20 Starlings which were also moving into the wind as if their journey was really necessary. Not a sign of Redwing or Fieldfare in the Nutbourne orchard where the majority of the fallen apples are still hidden in long grass, but I heard and saw Stonechat in at least four places along the shore. Nutbourne bay was slightly sheltered from the wind which was whipping up white horses in the exposed harbour, but the only birds there were some 50 Wigeon, a couple of Great Crested Grebes and another 50 Black-headed Gulls with only one Common seen. A group of 17 Ringed Plover flew about restlessly as the high tide and wind gave them nowhere to roost in safety, and as I left 100 Brent flew into the bay from the Chidham fields where I assume they had been trespassing on farmland. One flock of 16 Linnets flew over the shore fields and just one Egret and an indeterminate number of Teal were by the Ham Brook in the wet meadow. +++

I see that some of my sightings were echoed by Bob Marchant at Hook/Warsash this morning. Groups of Starling, Greenfinch, Goldfinch, Meadow Pipits and Skylarks were to be seen there, but Bob also had a Rock Pipit (which arrived at Hook yesterday) and heard the pinging of Bearded Tits.

TUE 22 OCT

In the Portsmouth area 3 Fieldfare flew east over the main university area, seen by Martin Hampton, and Ian Thirlwell saw 3 Swallows fly south over Milton Common. In Fareham more winter thrushes were in Trevor Carpenter's garden (one Redwing and ten Blackbirds), and earlier in the day Trevor counted 12 Swallows over Priddy's Hard on the eastern shore of Gosport.

On Pilsey Sands in Chichester Harbour Barry Collins counted 3500 Dunlin, 540 Bar-tailed Godwit, 500 Grey Plover and 318 Ringed Plover plus 1 Sanderling and 2 juvenile Little Stint. On the nearby Thorney airfield area more than 250 Golden Plover were seen. +++

MON 21 OCT

Although Common Gulls have been seen along the coast in small numbers for a couple of months now I have yet to see more than half a dozen together so I was very interested to hear that John Shillitoe today found a large flock of over 350 in fields lining Long Road at Soberton, just east of

the Meon towards Hambledon. I'm not sure if they were spooked by the appearance of a Peregrine, but something caused them all to take off before John had completed his count, and a Peregrine did fly over at some point. +++

Earlier this year I had heard (on July 30) that two Black Swans had appeared on the village pond at West Ashling, some three miles west of Chichester and just south of Funtington (from which the pond can be reached by following Watery Lane south). Today Mike Harris arrived on my doorstep to ask about some geese he had just seen, and in the course of conversation told me that the Black Swans are a pair and now have a nest (it being spring in Australia, and the birds still suffering from jet lag that confuses their biological clocks). +++

The geese in question turned out to be a flock of 11 Bar-heads (new to this area I think) and had been seen somewhere in the vicinity of the village of Chidham - I wonder if anyone knows more about their origin?

David Parker is just back from a three day weekend at Portland and the Purbecks during which he logged 4 Ring Ouzels and a Firecrest at Portland, saw a Sandwich Tern at Studland at the mouth of Poole Bay, and watched a Hen Harrier over the Arne RSPB reserve. He was much less pleased with his visit to the RSPB Radipole Lake reserve at Weymouth, where he says that water levels have been raised with the sole purpose of making the site potentially attractive to Bitterns, but in the process removing muddy edges that previously attracted waders, and requiring the Water Rails to swim rather than walk in search of food. Maybe recent rain had raised the level beyond that intended, and maybe the end result will include other habitat changes that have not yet been implemented, but David for one was very disappointed in his visit which gave him a much reduced tick list compared to previous visits there.

Local news from John Goodspeed includes a sighting of the two Common Sandpipers that seem to be wintering on the Langstone-Broadmarsh shore of Langstone Harbour - he saw the two birds on Oct 18 in the section of the Hermitage Stream south of the A27 and north of Harts Farm Way, and while he was in that area he saw 10 of the Black-necked Grebe out in the harbour near the east end of Long Island (in the main channel just northwest of the Oysterbeds). +++

On Oct 17 Brian Fellows walked the Lower Ems Valley circuit from Emsworth to Westbourne and found at least 2 Green Sandpipers back there (north of the A27) - he actually put up birds four times but thinks there were only two or three individuals.

One other significant item of information concerning Portsmouth Harbour has come via the HOS Newsletter which reached me on Oct 22 while writing these notes - it seems that someone did make Egret night roost counts of Horsea Island in August and September finding 110 and 92 birds there respectively - much as expected from last year's figures. I still have no answer to a question I recently put out on Hoslist asking if the many Egrets seen daily around Farlington Marshes still go west to Horsea Island each night. Every time their direction has been mentioned in the past it has always been westward, and if they are still going to Horsea Island it leaves a big question mark over the origin of nearly 100 birds seen recently coming from the Langstone Harbour direction to roost at Wade Court in Langstone village.

PLANTS:

SUN 27 OCT

48 flowering plant species was a good list for a walk around Havant in the last week in October, and some highlights were Meadow Sweet (with Water Mint and Water Forget-me-not) in the Langbrook stream, Dove's Foot Cranesbill and Black Horehound by the Brockhampton stream, Round-leaved Fluellen on the South Moors, and Butcher's Broom, Herb Robert, and Green Alkanet in Havant. Ox-eye daisy was flowering in two places and Wavy Bittercress in one damp area.

FRI 25 OCT

Devil's Bit Scabious seems to be at its best at this time of year and there was a good show of it in Havant Thicket today, along with some fresh Goldenrod though most of that had gone to seed. Two unusual plant observations were, firstly, of Water Purslane which attracted my attention by its very pretty red stems and green leaves so that I picked up one strand to see if there were any flowers still to be seen. As might be expected, there were not, but where the flowers had

been (presumably almost stalkless in the leaf axils) there were three or more seed capsules dangling from the stem on filament thin stems a good 15mm long. Can anyone tell me is this is unusual? I know that on several plants the calyx expands in seed, but I do not recall any other cases of a pedicel lengthening in this way. The other observation was of a patch where there had been a summer fire and where new plant growth was enjoying the new light and recent moisture - lots of Common Figwort was growing fresh and tall and a couple of 'bushes' of Hemp Nettle looked as if they would soon be flowering.

WED 23 OCT

Dwarf Mallow (*Malva neglecta*) was still flowering in the orchards between Farm Lane at Nutbourne and Prinsted village today and this time I took a sample to check that it was not one of the less common related species but even without any fruit on my sample the flower size, flower stem length and growth habit of the plant told me it was the common species. Very little else was flowering but I did find Black Horehound and Herb Robert, while Red Valerian was in good health on the shore.

MON 21 OCT

Last Tuesday, when leading a walk starting from Purbrook Heath at the northern foot of Portsdown, John Goodspeed discovered Chamomile in the turf near the Purbrook Heath playing fields pavilion, and yesterday I paid a brief visit to see the extent of the plants' presence there. John said the plants were between the sports pavilion and the road so I first looked behind the pavilion near Purbrook Heath Road where it passes the entrance to the Rowans Hospice but could not find any plants. but I soon found them in fair abundance when I walked west from the pavilion along the top of the steep bank above the football pitches towards the minor cul de sac road serving a few houses on the west of the playing fields. In fact the Chamomile could be found in substantial patches on all four sides of the football pitches south of the club house, particularly on the steep banks along the north of the pitches which I feel sure were landscaped and turfed when the pitches were created twenty or more years ago.

+++

As the heath is suitable habitat for the plants to have occurred there naturally in the past I would welcome any clues from people with memories of the creation of the playing fields as to whether the plants were purposefully introduced (i.e. sown), whether they came naturally with the turf used, or if they spread onto the turf from surrounding natural grassland where they had previously established themselves naturally. +++

More news from John Goodspeed is of Devils Bit Scabious flowering by the Lavant Stream as it flows south into Leigh Park along the east side of the Bartons Road Playing fields. John saw the plants on Oct 17 when walking the path that follows the railway and the Lavant stream bed north from Bartons Road in West Leigh to The Sling area of Stansted Forest at Rowlands Castle.

INSECTS:

SUN 27 OCT

Despite the sunshine this morning the storm force wind had driven all thought of butterflies out of my mind when, in Langstone High Street, a Red Admiral swept by just over my head, apparently going into the wind. I can't swear to its identity (it might have been a Peacock), but Red Admiral is much more likely.

SAT 26 OCT

Walking by the Caker Stream south of Alton today Steve Mansfield saw a Comma as well as a Red Admiral and he also claims a Ruddy Darter (perfectly possible as these are still on the wing as late as the Common Darter) but I am not sure how confident his id was and male Common Darter can be very red. +++

On the south west shore of Hampshire at Barton on sea Steve Keen had just one Clouded Yellow.

FRI 25 OCT

Although I have hardly seen any Common Wasps in my garden during the summer the flowering ivy in the garden was covered in them today but no butterflies or larger insects appeared. Richard Carpenter, at Titchfield Haven, saw a couple of Speckled Woods and four Common Darters today, and yesterday 2 Clouded Yellows were still at Beachy Head while in Hampshire

on Wednesday (Oct 23) Simon Woolley had a Hummingbird Hawkmoth in his Winchester garden.

THU 24 OCT

A couple of good moth finds are listed on the national migrant moth website for this evening - in Yorkshire a Silver-striped Hawkmoth was taken, and on the Scillies a Cosmopolitan moth came to a light (at the same trap two less well known moths were recorded on Monday, Oct 21 - these were *Euchromius ocella* and *Palpita vitrealis*).

Lawrence Holloway, visiting Pagham Harbour yesterday (Oct 23) had a Peacock, a Red Admiral and three Painted Ladies along with Migrant Hawker and Common Darter dragonflies.

Going back to last Saturday (Oct 19) Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes noted Long-winged Conehead, Lesser Marsh Grasshopper and Dark Bush Cricket as well as the Migrant Hawkers, Common Darters, Red Admirals, Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows that others are still seeing.

WED 23 OCT

Single Speckled Wood, Small Copper, and five Red Admirals were seen today on Thorney Island by Barry Collins, and in the nearby Nutbourne orchards I added two Painted Ladies (one that stopped to nectar on a Dandelion was very fresh) and I also saw single Speckled Wood and Red Admiral. The path leading from Farm Lane at Nutbourne to the shore was well warmed by the sun and sheltered from the north west wind, and along it I put up at least four Common Darters.

On Monday (Oct 21) two more Clouded Yellow (in addition to the three already reported under that date) were seen near the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes, and in the evening Barry Collins ran his moth trap, collecting three species new to his year list (Red-line Quaker, Beaded Chestnut and Grey Shoulder-knot), though all three have been seen by others recently. The Beaded Chestnut was taken by Paul Boswell at Greywell on Sept 27 (but failed to get recorded in my first sightings list - now corrected!), the Red-line Quaker had come to Alan Dawson's trap in Southampton on Oct 13 and a Grey Shoulder-knot had been seen by day in Stansted Forest by Adrian Hoskins on Oct 4, giving Barry second find in each case.

Despite the pouring rain and wind last Sunday Steve Nash had a real treat when a Death's Head Hawkmoth came to light at Swanage in Dorset along with seven other moth species. Taken indoors out of the rain the Hawkmoth gave its unique squeaking sound when a hand was passed menacingly close to it.

In the course of casual conversation at this evening's Hampshire Wildlife Trust meeting in Havant I heard from Mark Wilson that he had found a Glow-worm still shining her light on the Rowland's Castle golf-course quite recently (in October). Interesting to see, but this very late record tells me that no male has managed to find her and mate during the past summer, thus severing another thin strand in the rope which keeps this species from extinction... Normally Glow-worms are only seen in June and July, and by August all the females should have mated and extinguished their lights.

MON 21 OCT

Today Steve Keen saw a Clouded Yellow on the Hampshire south west coast at Barton on sea, and last Saturday (Oct 19) a Butterfly Conservation work party led by Andrew Brookes at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown saw another (with several Red Admirals), and a third Clouded Yellow was seen on Oct 17 by John Goodspeed between Havant and Rowlands Castle where the main railway line runs under the Whichers Gate bridge on the Emsworth to Rowlands Castle road.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 27 OCT

As in the last couple of years Giant Polypore is once more growing beside 38 Wade Court Road in Havant, just north of the A27 bridge over the road before it becomes Wade Lane.

SAT 26 OCT

Colin Bates was by the River Itchen today in the Brambridge area and, in addition to birds, he {{ also saw 2 weasels cross a small bridge and disappear into the grass, minutes later exactly the same thing happened again. Not sure if they were the same two that crossed backed under the

bridge or another two following on. Don't see them very often but always surprised how small they are. }} I hope their search for food did not include the investigation of Water Vole tunnels, though I think there are few in this section of the river where Mink have been active. (On Aug 21 this year Colin told us that the local river keeper here had trapped some 20 Mink in the past year and I doubt the Voles have yet recovered hereabouts).

FRI 25 OCT

The first of several fungi that I found in Havant Thicket this morning, and which were not on last Saturday's list seen by the Havant Wildlife Group, was a Stinkhorn standing impudently by the trackside where vegetation had recently been cut back. The best looking example of fungi that I found was a fresh clump of *Lyophyllum decastes*, and the most colourful was the bright orange yellow of False Chanterelle. Much more drab was the Brown Birch Bolete (*Leccinum scabrum*) with a couple of fresh Brown Rollrims looking a bit brighter. One Earth Ball was seen but that had been torn from the ground and perhaps blown to where I found it. *Amanita citrina* (the False Death Cap) was found but no Fly Agaric and as usual there were some that I could not name, including a lovely patch of tiny *Mycena* species on pine needles and something that looked like Roger Phillips illustration of *Russula farnipes*, with its cap edges up turned to show the wide space white gills. +++

Earlier in the week my garden lawn has had a small display of what seem to be *Stropharia aurantiaca*, but that species is supposed to grown on sawdust and my examples are in a damp mossy lawn.

MON 21 OCT

The Havant Wildlife Group had a very successful fungus foray in The Sling area of Stansted Forest, with Rosemary Webb on hand to identify their finds. No one seems to know the origin of the name 'The Sling' (did David practice here for his Goliath encounter?) but it applies to the low lying land at the south west tip of Stansted Forest abutting the railway viaduct at Rowlands Castle, and has the bed of the Lavant stream running through it. This stream is normally dry but in wet winters takes a huge flow of water from the chalk hills north of Idsworth down alongside the railway line into Havant where it used to flood North Street before part of the flow was diverted through underground pipes from its natural outlet (via the Langbrook Stream) into the Hermitage Stream at Stockheath. +++

Jim Berry has given me a list of 33 species of fungi (found in The Sling area by the Havant group) of which a good dozen attracted my interest starting with the very edible Beefsteak bracket fungus which normally grows on oak and looks like raw meat, oozing drops of blood. Unlike many fungi its presence enhances the value of the oak timber for furniture making - the 'brown rot' staining the timber to a rich natural colour. Also edible were Oyster Mushrooms, Honey Fungus and Shaggy Parasol (beware of the latter, unlike its taller cousin the Parasol Mushroom, which is excellent to eat, the shorter legged Shaggy Parasol can upset some stomachs though it is not poisonous). The Giant Polypore which is regularly found along the main avenue near the Sling was present but despite a good amount of flesh you are not advised to eat it as it is very tough and tastes sour. Better to look at than to eat were the uncommon Split-gill bracket (the gills on the underside radiate from the attachment point of the bracket in a very pleasing way), the tiny but colourful *Mycena crocata* (its stem apparently filled with multi coloured liquid), and the pure white and very glossy Porcelain fungus probably growing high on a beech tree. Two other finds had their artistic merit - Magpie fungus (standing tall as a bold statement in black and white) and *Psathyrella hydrophila* (a many headed 'gorgon' in delicate shades of brown), but Slimy Milkcap was not attractive to the eye and not good to eat (but you can have fun by slitting its gills and getting a friend to taste the 'milk' which exudes from the cut - your friend will not die but may ask for a drink to get rid of the very hot taste!). The last species on my select list was *Typhula erythropus* which has a very minimalist approach to spreading its spores - it sends up the thinnest of black stems about an inch or less into the air, coating the tip of the stem with a whitish spore bearing surface to look like a fairy sized firework 'sparkler' (which remains unlit!) +++

To add to the list of fungi that are now appearing I have some good examples of *Stropharia aurantiaca* in the grass on my lawn - they are supposed to grow on sawdust! - with a few Parrot Waxcaps.

An unexpected addition to the fauna of Emsworth's Brook Meadow was discovered yesterday by volunteers using a strimmer to continue the clearance of this year's vegetation from the meadow in order to encourage next year's growth and biodiversity - a handsome fat Toad who was very lucky to be rescued before the strimmer got too close for comfort. This news came from Brian Fellows who, on Oct 17, had another good view of a Water Vole as it swam upstream under the footpath bridge taking you from Mill Lane past the south side of Lumley Mill towards Seagull Lane in Emsworth. A previous survey had found signs of Water Vole in this section of the Ems, between the railway and the A27, but this is the first confirmed sighting here.

WEEK 42 OCT 14 – 20 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 20 OCT

Persistent light drizzle was not conducive to bird watching today but nevertheless Barry Collins led a party of SOS members around Thorney Island to enjoy a good list of birds, starting with a count of 252 Golden Plover, putting a figure to yesterday's comment from Tony Gutteridge that there were many Golden Plover on Thorney now. Another big count was of 281 Ringed Plover, and 40+ Egrets with 30 Greenshank was not a bad showing. Other numbers may have been lower, but the quality was maintained with 3 Spotted Redshank, 2 Little Stint, 2 Kingfisher and 2 singing Cett's Warblers. In the reeds were an estimated 12 Bearded Tits and at least two calling Water Rails. Departing migrants were limited to 1 Wheatear and 7 Swallows (beating the 3 Swallows which went west over my garden in Havant as I was having a breakfast cup of tea).

SAT 19 OCT

Barry Collins had an immature Spoonbill at the Thorney Deeps and a Barn Owl hunting at dusk while he waited to check out the original Thorney Deeps Egret roost - counting just 9 Egrets arriving for the night. +++

This afternoon I walked the shore from Langstone to Emsworth after scanning the mud to the east of Langstone from the bench at the end of Wade Lane. The only new bird seen from here was Knot - just three of them, standing out from the Dunlin by their much larger size, pale faces, and plodding walk. Still only two Golden Plover to be seen here, though Tony Gutteridge (who happened to be passing) told me that there is now a substantial flock on the Thorney airfield. Four Shelduck were in the area but moved on west as I watched, and one of the colour ringed Greenshank was seen briefly but too far away to see its rings other than a flash of bright yellow from one of them. At the Emsworth end of the shore there was little to see other than Brent scattered over the weed strewn mud (bright green Sea Lettuce which they may or may not have been eating) but they were close enough to find three juveniles out of a flock of 78 (not a high proportion, and much lower if I added in the 140 Brent seen at Langstone, among which I could not spot a single juvenile).

On Oct 16 Barry Collins was on Thorney Island at dusk to count the 'new' Egret roost in Thorney churchyard but only recorded 32 birds - the Egrets do seem to have 'gone off' Thorney nowadays and it is a great pity that we do not have other birders along the coast prepared to check numbers arriving at other known Egret roosts such as Tournerbury on Hayling Island or Horsea Island in Portsmouth harbour to find where the birds have moved to..

FRI 18 OCT

Bob Chapman's weekly summary of news from Farlington Marshes tells me that sometime this week the first Brent became brave enough to start feeding on land, and by now around 200 of them come to feed on the reserve while others are using regular sites on the eastern side of Portsea Island. Bob also confirms that Dunlin numbers have increased considerably - where there were less than 1000 in Langstone Harbour for the WeBS count on Oct 5 there are now over 2000, but Wigeon numbers have dropped off a little as birds move on. Bob does not mention Shelduck but I feel sure they must have started to arrive in Langstone Harbour as well as Chichester Harbour where I first noticed them a week ago on Oct 11. +++

Up to 11 Greenshank, 1 or 2 Little Stint and a Spotted Redshank have been on the reserve this week and there are two or more Dartford Warblers in the Point Field. Song Thrushes and Blackbirds continue to arrive and outgoing birds this week have included a Ring Ouzel on Oct 15 and two Wheatears on Oct 17 with a few Swallows seen on most days.

When replenishing the bird table in my garden before breakfast I heard a few practice notes from a Song Thrush for the second time this autumn, but I do not expect to hear full song for a long time yet.

THU 17 OCT

Highest ever Little Egret count at Wade Court: This evening at dusk conditions were good for watching the Egrets come in to the Wade Court night roost at Langstone - the weather was good and the tide low meaning that the Egrets would continue fishing until the last moment and then all head for the roost at the last minute rather than arriving early and hiding away before sunset. I arrived on the seawall at sunset, found seven Egrets already present that I could see (others could have already hidden themselves), and in the next half hour counted 90 more Egrets flying in to give a total of 97 seen and almost certainly over 100 present allowing for those that sneak in through the trees without appearing in my field of vision. This is the highest count ever made at this roost and I doubt it will be beaten this year as the birds will soon be heading inland and using other roosts when the weather turns cold. +++

Earlier in the afternoon I had been to the Oysterbeds on Hayling but failed to see any Mergansers either in the lagoon or out on the harbour - as it was around 4pm when I was there I wonder if the birds had flown out of the harbour to roost on the sea as they did in past years? The Stonechat pair were still in the Brick-field, looking very bright in the afternoon sun (unlike the birds which I saw on the South Moors yesterday which I think were juveniles - although one of them had a black face to show it was a male it had no prominent white collar or reddish breast) but the lagoon was empty of birds other than one Great Crested and one Little Grebe (at least 30 Great Crested Grebe could be seen on the harbour from the Oysterbeds). A large assemblage of waders was feeding on the falling tideline south of Stoke Bay (conveniently opposite the bench where the coastal path comes back to the shoreline after rounding the bay) giving me my first sight of a winter flock of perhaps 400 Dunlin and many other waders (Curlew, Redshank, Oystercatcher, Grey Plover, Black-tailed Godwit and around 20 Turnstone). Earlier I had looked along the shore east of Langstone and seen a marked increase in the number of Bar-tailed Godwit (estimated 500) and noted at least 8 Shelduck, and had met Geoff Shilling who had been on the South Moors shore, finding a Wheatear and the Stonechat still present, plus a Peregrine fly-past.

Inland on Tuesday Mike Collins found the White Stork had returned to Goodwood Golf Course for the first time since Sept 10. During the month that it has been away it may or may not have been the cause of various Stork sightings in other parts of Sussex, though it could have remained in the Chichester area (Mike has heard of a couple of sightings at the Hunston golf course between Chichester and Selsey). The sightings that I heard of which may be attributed to this bird would indicate that it first went west to appear over Winchester (Olivers Battery) on Sep 11, then on Sep 15 it went back along the coast being seen at Felpham (just east of Bognor) in the morning (10:10am) and then over Cuckmere Haven around 1pm (still flying east when it left there). On Sep 25 it was back over Worthing, and on Sep 26 over Littlehampton. No more sightings until Oct 4 over Pagham Harbour, and around that time there was a sighting on the Isle of Wight. On Oct 12 a Stork was in the far east of Sussex at Winchelsea - was that the bird which returned to Goodwood on Oct 15?

WED 16 OCT

A few of the birds from this wave seem to have dropped off in Chichester Harbour, where Brian Fellows today saw 5 Shelduck and a pair of Pintail at Nutbourne Bay, though the Shelduck here may have come in last week when I found 14 of them at Langstone. Also in Nutbourne Bay Brian found 208 Wigeon, 96 Teal, 100 Curlew, 70 Black-tailed Godwit and the first real winter show of several hundred Dunlin. Brian also scanned the birds in Emsworth Harbour today, finding 16 Common Gulls - the first substantial flock of these back locally. 1 Med Gull was in the harbour, as were 7 juvenile Brent in a flock of 58.

Another major arrival today was a flock of 160 Golden Plover in Cams Bay where the previous

flocks in Hampshire this autumn have not exceeded 53 at the Lymington marshes, 33 at Cams Bay and 32 at Ibworth in north Hampshire. Also today Richard Carpenter saw 40 Golden Plover fly east over Titchfield Haven, but these may have been heading for Cams Bay in exchange for the Canada Goose flock of some 200 birds plus the 'albino' which is now based at the Haven and feeds on fields to the west of the reserve, and which was a notable feature in the Fareham creek area between Sept 11 and 24 (on Sept 15 this albino was with a flock that totalled 585 birds that were feeding in fields close to the M27 Fareham central junction). I don't know if anyone has had a close look at this white bird on the ground - the reports seem to be all of it being seen in flight - but I gather that Trevor Carpenter is happy that it is a Canada and not a Snow Goose or one of the other domestic/feral white goose species. It was not mentioned with the Oct 7 WeBS count details from Titchfield Haven which included 118 Canadas, though that does not prove it has only just arrived at the Haven (it could have been feeding on a field outside the reserve and been missed from the count). The absence of reports, between Sept 24 and Oct 16, of this big flock of big birds with the prominent white 'marker' bird is more evidence for my belief that we see and record only the tip of the iceberg as far as wildlife is concerned in our densely populated area with a widely distributed net of birders! +++

Two Common Sandpipers flew out from the mouth of the Langbrook stream this morning to land on the north pier of the old rail bridge to Hayling as I was looking at my first family of Brent with three young birds. Also at the mouth of this stream the Wigeon flock is already up to 26 birds. Walking west along the seawall I came on a flock of perhaps a dozen Meadow Pipits that seemed to have settled in for the winter, with a female Wheatear on the seawall and two or three Stonechat at the seaward end of the old IBM playing fields. Some 30 Goldfinch with a few Greenfinch and a couple of Long Tailed Tits were around the end of Southmoor Lane, while on Budds Farm Pools I counted over 50 Teal and at least ten Little Grebe with 24 Mallard, 11 Tufted Duck, 3 Shoveler and 2 Wigeon plus a pair of Swans. 3 Black-necked Grebe in winter plumage were on the water of Chalkdock and one Kingfisher flew from the mouth of the streams, pitched momentarily on the outfall pipe, then flew into Budds Farm. The only other birds worth a mention were two or three Chiffchaff around the sewage farm hedges.

TUE 15 OCT

On the Hayling Bay shore Alistair Martin had an adult Little Gull, an adult Med Gull and 1 Yellow-legged Gull.

Recent news that has just come in tells me that Mergansers can now be seen at the Hayling Oysterbeds - yesterday John Goodspeed saw five (including two males) on the lagoon where Alistair Martin had seen four last week on Oct 10. Alistair had his first juvenile Brent there on the same day - 6 young among a flock of 16, and yesterday John had two Stonechat back in the 'brick field' across the old rail track from the pools. +++

MON 14 OCT

One of the many things that I do not know regarding bird migration is why some species seem to make their long distance flights at night and others by day - the answer may well be that when the urge comes on them all birds fly whenever it is possible to do so with some chance of success, and flying at night when the weather is good (landmarks and stars visible) may be as good or better than flying by day. The reverse of this is that when the visibility is poor the birds either do not start a long journey or come down at the first opportunity, causing massive falls on coasts and ships. These thoughts are prompted by the first report this autumn of House Martins on and around a tall coastal building in the early morning - in this case Furniture World near the Southampton Docks where they were seen this morning by Adrian Martin. Unlike Swallows and Sand Martins which use coastal reedbeds as their preferred B&B overnight stops, and the many passerine species which are happy to crowd into any safe looking bushes or trees, House Martins still retain the instincts of cliff dwellers and, when away from empty nests of their own species, spend the night clinging to rough walls. Being insect feeders they do not wake at crack of dawn to get early worms for breakfast, but sleep on until the sun warms them and also tells them that it will have warmed the insects enough to enable them to fly and provide a chance of breakfast. Thus, each autumn, we get reports of clouds of Martins clustered on the south facing walls of large building in the early morning, and as the day gets under way more and more of them start to search for their breakfast of insects which - at this

time of day - are generally low flying and often have to be pursued low over busy coastal roads making it appear that the Martins are on kamikase missions dashing among the rush hour traffic. +++

In the quieter conditions of the afternoon, at low tide, I was again on the Warblington shore east of Langstone, and this time went to the outfall of the main Warblington stream which always attracts a number of sea birds wanting a drink of fresh water and a chance of washing their feathers in less salty water. Wigeon, Teal, Swans and a crowd of gulls were here (no Pintail yet) and more than 30 Great Blackback gulls (with only a couple of Lessers) indicated that the winter build up of the big brutes is underway - with them were some 200 Herring Gulls but there are still very few Common Gulls in this area. Coming back to the Pook Lane viewpoint I found the number of Golden Plover had increased to 7 (the Lapwing were equally scarce) but the Dunlin had increased though I only counted 75. Scanning through them I picked up a distant bird that happened to be sideways on and showed a distinctly down-curved beak though it looked very similar to the Dunlin if a bit longer legged. Watching it I found it did not probe the mud like the Dunlin but picked at items on the surface, and when the light gave me a view of its face I could see a clear supercilium above a dark streak through the eye, confirming that it was a Curlew Sandpiper though it never flew to show its rump. Other waders were still dominated by the Bar-tailed Godwits, many of which feed here but, when the tide comes in, are joined by others that feed elsewhere but roost here. Three Great-crested Grebe were on the water, and around 100 Brent were along the water's edge (none of them showing the wing stripes of juveniles). Only four Shelduck were seen - presumably the larger number seen here recently have moved on - and I see that one Shelduck was back on the Eversley Gravel Pits in the north of Hampshire on Oct 12 (the day after they arrived back at Langstone).

PLANTS:

THU 17 OCT

A visit to the Hayling oysterbeds this afternoon gave me a few unexpected flowering plants such as Greater Knapweed, Common Comfrey and Evening Primrose by the coastal path and a big patch of Strawberry Clover at the southern end of Langstone Bridge. Hawkweed Ox-tongue was still in general flower as were the Ribbed and White Melilot on the Oysterbeds bund wall but I had to look hard to find any Golden Samphire with fresh flowers. I had a look in the carpark immediately behind the Esso Garage to see if the Goat's Rue still had flowers but could only see seed-pods - I wonder if this is the last year that this plant will flower there in view of proposals to close the shoreline carpark on the site of the North Hayling Halt station and extend this as the only carpark, probably eliminating the Goat's Rue plants in the process. If the reasoning for this proposal is to remove the 'offensive sight' of vehicles from the 'natural scenery' of the harbour shoreline I hope the borough of Havant remember this intention of preserving the natural look of the harbour shore (so often stated in Borough Plans) when it comes to consideration of the Broadmarsh development proposals. As an aside I see that the Australian lady who was featured in the Portsmouth NEWS this week as favourite for the post of Havant Borough's 'Managing Director' (the title of Chief Executive has gone out of favour along with Robin Smith who was the last to hold this post) has as one of her qualifications experience in handling conservation projects (but not wildlife conservation), so I wonder which side of the fence she will come down on when it comes to deciding between making money for the borough, and employment for its residents, against the preservation of the natural scenery for the less financially obvious benefit of the human community, both local and global?

WED 16 OCT

In the summer Pepper Saxifrage seemed to flower much later at Emsworth's Brook Meadow than at other sites but this has had the advantage that some Pepper Saxifrage is still flowering at Emsworth. This news comes from Brian Fellows who has also responded to my request for details of local sites where Chicory can be found with the news that he found it flowering around Montreal when he was in Canada recently - he says that over there it is definitely classed as an alien, whereas it may well be native to Hampshire (did the Canadians have to resort to growing it as a coffee substitute during the war?)

TUE 15 OCT

Despite the weather John Goodspeed's walk in the fields to the north of Portsdown went ahead this morning and was amply rewarded not only with the first good show of fungi (see news of Other Wildlife) but with the finding of Chamomile growing near the Purbrook Heath playing fields. This seems to be a new find as it is not recorded there in the Hampshire Flora but its presence near a playing field is in line with the comment in the Flora that it thrives on being trampled, and many of its sites (especially in north Hampshire) are playing fields where it is regularly mown and trampled. Unlike the plants which I found this summer on the Westbourne playing fields near Emsworth these plants seem to be away from the actual playing field pitches - John says they were {{ in the grass between the Purbrook Heath sports field pavilion and the road. }}

MON 14 OCT

Chicory is a pretty plant to see and flowers over a long period but on hearing that John Goodspeed had come across it on the shore of Paulsgrove Lake last Saturday I realised that I had not seen it anywhere so far this year - I wonder if it will still have any flowers on Nov 2 when I have to be at the place where John found it to cover Paulsgrove Lake as part of the first Portsmouth Harbour low tide bird count of this winter? +++

The Hampshire Flora is undecided about the status of Chicory and has a question mark both against its status as a native plant and as a casual, though it is more positive about its status as a 'Denizen' (the delightful name given to plants that arrived in the county as crops or garden herbs and which have long established themselves as a permanent part of our flora). The Hants Flora describes it as an {{agricultural relic, having been both a fodder-plant and a salad crop.}} +++

I suspect that the plants which John found (at around SU 622052 between the big Vospers shipbuilding sheds and Castle Street in Portchester) probably originated in market gardens that were once here before the housing development of The Keep was built. If you want to see the plants I suspect they can be found near the seawall on a walk north from the big public open space north of Portchester Castle to Hamilton Road which gives access to Vospers from the A27 Southampton Road. +++

Two other places where I have regularly found it in the past are on the east shore of Hayling Island at Mill Rytte (at about SU 727009 on the seawall just south of the yachts), and inland to the west of Catherington down near a minor road junction at SU 684148 - in the hedges of both roads going south from this junction. I would be interested to know of other places where it may be found in the Havant area.

INSECTS:

THU 17 OCT

At least three Migrant Hawker dragonflies were active over Langstone Pond this afternoon But, more interestingly, in warm sunshine around midday a fresh female Brimstone appeared in my garden fluttering around a small ornamental shrub. Eventually she landed on a sunny leaf and stayed for some time with closed wings but with the forewings moving up and down as if she was 'rubbing her hands' to warm them (or maybe just shivering). Many butterfly species spread their wings to absorb warmth and energy but I believe that Brimstones are one of the species (including Grayling and Green Hairstreak?) that always keep their wings closed when at rest, so I wonder if anyone can tell me if this means that they (like some other insects such as Bumblebees) have to warm up their muscles by doing exercise 'on the spot' before taking off? +++

A subsidiary question concerns why she was there in the first place - my RSNC Guide to Butterflies (Jeremy Thomas) shows that all Brimstones emerge from their pupation in a short period around the beginning of August, and I know that the majority of them then go straight into hibernation in August, so was the appearance of this fresh looking butterfly the result of it having been disturbed from hibernation, or do some Brimstones occasionally disobey the rules and mate in the summer in which they emerge (rather than waiting till the next spring? As the cycle of egg, caterpillar and pupa in this species can be completed within two months that would mean that an egg laid in July would result in a butterfly emerging about now. +++

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 18 OCT

Margaret Baggs has lent me a fascinating study of 'The Rabbit Warren at West Dean near Chichester' which was published by Ruth and Andrew Tittensor in 1986 and not only gives us the history of this particular warren but also a general outline of the history of rabbits in Britain. +++

This substantial booklet tells us that in historical times rabbits are native to southern France, Spain and north west Africa, but back in the interglacial periods of pre-history they could be found in Britain (proved by many finds of rabbit bones), having got here via the land bridge that connected Britain to Europe at the time when so much water was locked up in the ice cap covering great part of the northern hemisphere. As the climate warmed and the landbridge was lost Britain ceased to be clothed in the sparse grassland which the rabbits liked, and as trees took over so the rabbits vanished. +++

Rabbits did not re-appear in Britain until they were imported by the French after the Norman conquest of Britain (although some believe the Romans brought them in there is no evidence of their bones in Roman middens). Once here they were farmed as domestic animals on a vast scale in enclosed warrens - that at West Dean was about 900 acres in area and had a rabbit proof surrounding wall 14 km long (over 8 miles) which had to be continually renewed as the rabbits tried to dig a way out. The land within the warren, or Coney-garth, was kept clear of trees, and was grazed by cattle as well as by the rabbits (the name rabbit was then applied only to the baby rabbits - the adults were called Conies). As with any domestic beasts their breeding was managed by controlling the number of rabbits per acre (normally two to eight per acre), controlling the number of males in relation to the number of females (one male for four to six females), and by providing breeding chambers - in some cases hutches, in others by digging out a substantial part of the warren to allow the rabbits to make their own breeding chambers in the loose earth. These dug out areas were called Pillow Mounds and one found in Gloucestershire measured 255 feet long, 24 feet across and the mound was 3 or 4 feet high (at last I know what the Pillow Mounds at the northern foot of Butser Hill are!) +++

Coming back to the question of the origin of Black Rabbits (see notes for Oct 9 and 16) this study tells us that colour variation is natural, but as with different breeds of cattle the rabbit farmers in different areas selectively bred for the type they preferred - thus Black Rabbits were favoured in the west of England and on islands, and silver grey were preferred in East Anglia. Most warrens were stocked with the normal grey brown rabbits, but the warrener often imported some black rabbits as markers to detect poaching. It was not easy to see if rabbits were being taken from the warren if they were all the same colour, but by placing a few black rabbits around the extensive warren it was much easier to see when they disappeared, and to be on the look out for poachers in the area from which they had been taken. +++

Finally this study made me much more aware of the more recent history of rabbits in Britain. From their first importation in the 10th and 11th centuries the rabbit farming business grew to a peak in the 16th and 17th centuries, but in the 18th and 19th centuries it declined through competition with increased grazing by sheep and cattle (which supplied the meat which had previously come from rabbits causing a decline in the market for rabbits), and through competition for land which yielded much greater profit from corn and wool than from rabbit. Rabbits still survived as game for shooting, and for reasons that remain unknown their numbers expanded dramatically from 1840 to around 1940 by which time they were a major pest despite concerted efforts to eliminate them, especially after 1880 when the Ground Game Act of that year made it legal for tenants to kill rabbits. Myxomatosis reached Britain in 1953 and very substantially reduced the population of rabbits but as we know it did not eliminate them (my understanding is that the species was saved by a change of habit - instead of spending long periods underground in close proximity to each other, allowing fleas to rapidly pass the disease from rabbit to rabbit, some of the rabbits began to stay above ground, living in more open situations under dense bramble patches where the fleas had further to jump and cooler air to quieten their urge to

leave their current host. Nowadays myxomatosis has run its course and been succeeded by the new Viral Haemorrhaging Disease which was thought to be even more potent in wiping them out, but I have neither seen nor heard of any dramatic reduction in rabbit numbers so far...

+++

PS Margaret Baggs adds her own note to the discussion of the status (wild or domestic) of Black Rabbits in Britain by pointing out that most counties have at least one or two pubs named 'The Black Rabbit'. I wonder if these pubs hold a clue to the origin of the term 'Black Market', having been used by unscrupulous poachers as places in which they could sell Black Rabbits to the Warreners who wanted them to use a 'poacher detectors' as described above - it might have been difficult in a community where everyone knew everyone for the poacher who had taken the rabbits from the local warren to sell them back personally to the Warrener from whom he had stolen them but I am sure the wily poacher would find some way of turning a profit from this 'commercial opportunity'.

THU 17 OCT

This afternoon I was chatting to Eric Castle at the edge of Langstone pond near the 'mill race' bridge and watching dragonflies hawking over the water when I scanned the pond with my binoculars to see if a Kingfisher might be sitting motionless around the edge of the water. By pure chance my field of vision picked up the sight of a Water Vole swimming from the streamside bank of the pond to the island alongside which a floating pontoon is moored. Although Eric did not see it and I only had a brief view I am sure it was a Vole rather than a Rat by its dark brown colour and 'oblong' shape.

WED 16 OCT

Ed Griffiths has just sent me a thought to add to the recent discussion of why it is that numbers of Black Rabbits seem to be increasing in the wild population despite the fact that their colour should pick them out as targets for predators, and (assuming they originate as dumped pets) they should be less successful at surviving in the wild than the true wild rabbits. +++

What Ed has to say is that he remembers hearing that the black rabbits are more resistant to Myxomatosis, and perhaps to the new viral disease that currently afflicts them - I can't comment on this but on looking at my Reader's Digest Field Guide to Animals I see that they believe that Black Rabbits are a natural variation in the wild population, and occur where pet dumping is rare - in fact they say {{ Black rabbits are not uncommon, particularly on offshore islands where populations are isolated. Albinos are rare, except on some offshore islands. }}

TUE 15 OCT

The walk which John Goodspeed led in this morning's rain through the fields and woods at the northern foot of Portsdown came on the first general appearance of autumn fungi, giving them a list of at least eight species. Among these were Honey Fungus, two Russula species (the Charcoal Burner and the Common Yellow Russula), Spotted Toughshank and Gymnopilus penetrans, plus the less common Verdigris toadstool

WEEK 41 OCT 7 – 13 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SAT 12 OCT

Reports of Jack Snipe sightings are occasionally dubious but it is clear that a wave of them arrived on the south coast today as four different reports of them are in the news. Two of these were in Hampshire, one at Farlington Marshes seen by Martin Gillingham and the other at Eastleigh Lakeside seen by Simon Ingram. The other two were in Sussex, one in the Rye Harbour area and the other at Saltdean, just east of Brighton, where Keith Callister reports (on the SOS website) {{ 1 Jack Snipe landed in the road in front of my living room window in Saltdean and stayed there for more than 5 minutes despite cars passing near to it. Eventually I went to it to check that it wasn't injured and it flew off. }} +++

Hampshire news from Farlington Marshes is summarised by Bob Chapman, who tells us that a reasonable number of Brent Geese families started to arrive on Monday (Oct 7), giving hope that they have not had another disastrous breeding season - at least one pair has brought six

juveniles with them. A few more Merganser have also arrived but there are still only 10 or 20 in the harbour. The number of Black-necked Grebe is now up to 11 and Pintail number over 100 (Shoveler just under 100). +++

Walking round Farlington Marshes today Martin Gillingham, in addition to the Jack Snipe reported above, saw 2 Little Stint, 1 Whimbrel and 1 Spotted Redshank, 9 Merganser, 1 Whinchat and 6 Stonechat. +++

A short outing to Broadmarsh at dusk gave me the first sight of a substantial number of Pied Wagtails heading west to roost, possibly in the reeds at Farlington Marshes, possibly at some warmer location such as the Q A Hospital at Cosham. On the shore of Chalkdock at high tide I disturbed a Kingfisher which had been fishing from the concrete outfall half along the north shore, and from there I could see 49 Great Crested Grebe, many Brent, and a large number of roosting waders, mainly Redshank, on the shore of North Binness island. A small flock of 20 Ringed Plover flew over the water and made as if to land on the shore near us but sheared off. The only other bird on the water close to me was a single Wigeon (had it been sleeping when the others flew off?)

FRI 11 OCT

I was down on the shore east of Langstone today with the tide rising, and saw a total of 14 adult Shelduck widely scattered over the area visible from Pook Lane (most of them on the north Hayling shore) - there may well have been more around but 14 was sufficient to tell me that these must be new arrivals back from the Dutch coast. +++

Close to me I had good views of three Greenshank in well advanced winter plumage, all three wearing colour rings.

On the mud nearer Langstone I saw two Golden Plover, my first back here but I hear that **John Gowen** saw a small flock here within the past week (on or before Oct 7) - no other details available.

I did not wait for the high tide to get a full count of the Bar-tailed Godwit but the number present was increasing all the time I was there. Another wader which had become more noticeable on the mud was Grey Plover (I saw less than a dozen but they were widely scattered and their calls are once more a part of the winter scene). Just three Ringed Plover could be seen (and still only one or two Lapwing). Dunlin were up to at least 80 and the Brent numbered over 120. At least two Sandwich Tern were still present and half a dozen Swallows flew east past me.

In Emsworth Harbour Brian Fellows was also checking the birds and found the first three juveniles among 94 Brent. Brent are back in this harbour (i.e. Emsworth, close to human activity, as opposed to Chichester Harbour in general) a couple of weeks earlier than usual - last year the first were not seen here until Oct 22 and then there were only 58 of them - leading me to expect the first report of Brent feeding on land any time now. Surprisingly there were no Dunlin at all to be seen in the harbour today but there were 38 Black-tailed Godwit (2 colour ringed) and 5 Greenshank (2 colour ringed but different to my three birds seen a mile to the west), along with Redshank, Oystercatcher and Grey Plover plus a couple of Little Grebe in the sea channel.

THU 10 OCT

Over the nearby Budds Farm pools Martin watched some 80 House Martins with a few Swallows. Around the pools were 8 Grey Wagtail and a Common Sandpiper, with the first local Rock Pipit on the shore and three (of the still 10?) Black-necked Grebe offshore. Later Martin saw a Kingfisher over Langstone Pond (where he has recently seen two) and from trees above the Lymbourne stream which feeds the pond came the tiny notes of more than five Goldcrest. +++

I am glad to see that Brian Fellows has not abandoned his visits to Portsmouth sites, despite the appalling traffic conditions along Portsmouth's Eastern Road while roadworks and bridge repairs continue.

Today at the Southsea Canoe Lake he not only found 35 Swans and 15 Canada Geese back on the water but was confronted with the sight of an estimated 500 Feral Pigeons waiting to be fed. They do say that no one in Britain is ever more than a few yards from the nearest rat (loveable creatures that they are) but I wonder if anyone has worked out the equivalent proximity of the nearest (equally endearing) feral pigeon? I suspect that rats to be the dominant species, patiently waiting to take over the running of the planet from us, as rats are present in both town and country while the pigeons are much more urban in their distribution, though I always point

out to those who feel that they must feed the 'starving birds' in the the town that these birds only turn up in the town relatively late in the morning (when humans begin to stir outdoors) after having a good breakfast in the fields - at least around Havant where I see them flying to and fro over my house at dawn. +++

Brian's next stop was at Eastney Lake, near the Hayling Ferry, where a pair of Brent with 4 juveniles were among a flock of 32 geese. Here Brian also renewed acquaintance with an old friend that he first met on 14 Dec 1999 - a Grey Plover distinguished by the number of red rings crammed on to its legs. This bird, which has spent the last three winters in Eastney Lake, is now back for the fourth. At the nearby Milton Lakes Brian could not see the Red-necked Grebe but did hear the Cetti's Warbler and see two more of the Grey Wagtails that are now common along the coast.

Finally he checked out Baffins Pond where the majority of the Canada Geese have departed, leaving just 15 on the pond with the regular Baffins Gang of 11 Barnacles, 1 Snow Goose and 1 Bar-head hybrid. Only 7 Tufted Duck were with 76 Mallard and the winter Shoveler had not yet arrived but there was some consolation in the presence of another 100 Feral Pigeon.

A walk around Old Idsworth Farm this afternoon found a dozen or so Swallows feeding over one of the large stubble fields as they moved east, and walking over another of the fields I put up at least 20, probably 25, Skylarks that have just arrived and are likely to stay here through the winter. Few other birds were seen but I did note the presence of four Pied Wagtails and two Yellowhammer. The best news was that there have been two or three more sightings of Grey Partridge around the farm buildings recently, showing that more than half of the 50 birds released last year at this time are still around - hopefully there will be more sightings of them when a game feeder has been set up in the farm. Another bird welcome here is a single Barn Owl that can still be seen occasionally at night.

From Lawrence Holloway at Pagham Harbour comes a warning that the much used seawall path from the Ferry Pool to Church Norton is to be closed for repairs for six weeks starting on Oct 14.

Walking the path today Lawrence saw a single Avocet in the main channel of the harbour where there are now many Wigeon and Pintail. A single female Merganser was on the sea off Church Norton and a male Ruff was on the Ferry Pool, with plenty of other good birds in between, including many Swallows heading east. +++

WED 09 OCT

Mike Wall today found the first flock of 32 Golden Plover back on the north Hampshire fields at Ibworth, north west of Basingstoke. Looking back to last autumn I see that the flock there reached 250 birds but could not beat numbers reported nearer the coast - Cams Bay also hosted a peak of 250, Winchester Sewage Farm had 460 at one time and the Eastleigh flock got up to 450 but an estimate of up to 600 birds by the river Hamble below Bursledon seems to have been the top score for Hampshire, easily beating the Isle of Wight's peak of 395 at Newtown. These flocks seem to move about a lot and to vary in size from week to week but even more so from year to year - here at Langstone I did not see more than 300 last autumn though in fairly recent years the low water roost flock on the mud has been over 1000 birds. These were not the only flocks in Hampshire - some 60 birds were regularly seen to the north of Alresford, and there may have been some on the fields to the east of Romsey (though that site seems to be used much more in the spring). In Sussex peaks of 500 were reported from Pagham Harbour and 700 from West Wittering, with at least one count of 400 at Rye Harbour. +++

I also had a quick look at the birds off Langstone just before the high tide, but the wind and waves made counting difficult so all I can say is that there were still at least 200 Bar-tailed Godwit and at least 61 Black-tailed, with a fair number (less than 100?) of Curlew, Oystercatcher and Redshank but still very few Dunlin, Lapwing and no Golden Plover. I saw four Sandwich Tern in the harbour and had a close view of Kingfisher over the Langstone Pond +++

Taking up my recent report of a big flock of Bar-tails now present off Langstone Mike Collins tells me that he has been seeing them in Langstone harbour to the west of Langstone for some time, starting with 30 off the South Moors on Sept 1, but I do not recall any other reports of significant numbers in the harbour so far (just counts of less than ten birds here and there among hundreds of Black-tails). Mike also reminds me that a few years ago there was a clear

distinction between the feeding places used by the two Godwit species - Black-tails on the mud in the north of the harbour, Bar-tails in the south on the sand - but that has all now changed. Looking back through my notes I think the changeover came between 1998 (when you went to the Kench to see Bar-tails) and 1999 (when the first big flock appeared on the mud off north Hayling).

TUE 08 OCT

Mark Cutts was among the birders visiting the Red-necked Grebe at Milton lakes today, and as he walked over the rough ground of the 'common' (actually a tidal creek only reclaimed for use as a rubbish tip within the past 50 years and more recently capped with earth to provide Portsmouth residents with much needed public open space) he put up a Short-eared Owl that had probably just put down for a rest on its journey to find winter quarters - I doubt it will stop here with so many dog walkers on regular patrol, let alone the Crows that immediately harried it. +++

MON 07 OCT

Widespread recent reports of Grey Wagtails on the move, and using communal roosts in reed beds and railway stations, may have surprised some people (including myself) who have always thought of these birds as tied to a few favoured sites on fast running streams, only moving (like Kingfishers) in response to cold weather, and the need of juveniles to find new territories. Reading 'Birds of Hampshire' however it is clear that the movements we are now seeing have always occurred, and in roughly the numbers we are now seeing (flocks rarely exceeding 10 birds), but I have a strong feeling that overall numbers of these birds have increased in the last few years when they have started to appear in towns and dry places where we have long been used to seeing Pied Wagtails. I have no evidence as to whether this is the result of a population explosion or just a behaviour change as the birds discovered that warm tarmac and hot rooves are just as good places to find insect food as are the traditional streams, but I rather suspect it is the latter (and, like the Blue Tits which just learnt how to open milk bottle tops before the practice of doorstep deliveries faded out, these habits may have to change again in future). In the meantime I will continue to enjoy hearing the calls of Grey Wagtails around town in Havant, and occasionally seeing them on my garden lawn, and I guess Trevor Carpenter shares this view - he tells me that one was in his Fareham garden today for the first time since 1996 - and at Shedfield in the Meon valley Will Walmsley today had five Grey Wagtails (maybe a local family?) on the roof of his house. +++

With a rising tide mid-morning I took my new scope to the viewpoint bench at the end of Pook Lane between Langstone and Warblington from where you have a view of the whole area east of Langstone Bridge between North Hayling and the mainland. From here I noted 22 species of wildfowl and wader of which the most impressive and unexpected was a roosting flock of at least 230 Bar-tailed Godwit on the saltings island off Northney marina. A big flock regularly appears here each autumn but this is the first I have seen of them and I think it may be the first substantial flock back in Hampshire. Alas, no Golden Plover here yet but it can't be long now! Another single bird which attracted my attention was an adult Shelduck, again the first here since the summer - I suppose it could have been an early returning bird but if so I would have expected to see several birds together so I guess it was one that had stayed the summer and was now roaming the harbour in its fine new feathers, perhaps looking for its returning friends? The last of the unusual birds were three Sandwich Terns, too distant to tell their status. Also in view were 86 Brent, 5 Canada Geese and an intruding pair of Swans causing the pair on Langstone Pond to bridle though the cob did not fly over the seawall to drive off the intruders. Perhaps 100 Redshank were the most numerous waders with slightly fewer Oystercatcher, followed by 20 or so each of Black-tailed Godwit, Lapwing and Dunlin and only a handful of Curlew, Black-tailed Godwit, Turnstone and Ringed plover that I could see. Egrets were scarce with less than 10 with only a couple of Heron while Teal were in surprisingly short supply - a couple on the water and only around 20 on Langstone Pond (but I'm sure that at low tide 100 or more will 'spring' out of the reeds to search the harbour mud for food). One female Tufted Duck was on the pond with the Mallards and a couple of invisible Skylarks flew west overhead as one Chiffchaff called quietly. The gulls were mainly inland at this time of day, leaving some 50 Black-headed, 15 Herring Gulls and 14 Lesser Blackbacks.

On Saturday Brian Fellows was making his WeBS count for the south-east Hayling section of Chichester Harbour where perhaps the biggest surprise was not a shorebird but a Buzzard which seemed to have settled on the Tournerbury Farm fields until he disturbed it - will a pair join the Herons nesting in the wood next spring? 19 Egrets were sitting out the high tide in the wood and Brian suspects that many more spend each night there but the only night roost count made there this autumn that I am aware of was my own brief and incomplete count on Aug 29 when I saw 34 birds arrive. Another surprise for Brian today was to find 10 Little Grebe on the Lakeside holiday camp pond - he also had a single Wheatear on the seawall. On the water were 252 Brent and 50 Canada Geese with 164 Teal and 6 Wigeon (no Merganser or Shelduck yet), and roosting waders were 147 Redshank, 54 Grey Plover, 24 Bar-tailed Godwit, 22 Dunlin and 1 Turnstone. +++

One final item of general interest taken from the Titchfield Haven website is that a total of over 100 different Cetti's Warblers have been ringed there this autumn (no indication of how many of these may have been local young).

PLANTS:

FRI 11 OCT

Ian Thirlwell today told me that he is doing the word processing for a new book on Alien Plants by Eric Clement that should be published in a little over a year's time. The plants will be illustrated by Delph Smith, another Portsmouth naturalist, and this explains why, when I found the *Anthemis austriaca* at Idsworth last year, Eric Clement asked me to take a sample to Delph for him to draw it. I also see that more of this plant was found last year in the Blendworth area (between Rowlands Castle and Horndean) by John Vigay. There was no similar request for a sample of the Green Nightshade as that already grows in allotments at Gosport near Eric Clement's home, and it was one among many plants discovered by Ian Thirlwell last year after soil disturbance caused by roadworks along Portsmouth's Eastern Road (both Red and Green Nightshade appeared there).

The origin of the *Anthemis austriaca* remains a mystery, but it now appears (in so far as the plants are indistinguishable by me from the sample that was identified by Eric Clement as *A. austriaca*) to be dominant among the wildflowers sown on Old Idsworth Farm. David Uren, the farmer, bought the seed mixture from a reputable supplier who lists only the native Corn Chamomile in his catalogue and promises that the seed which he supplies all comes from plants grown in this country, and I feel that there is a need for an unbiased expert botanist to investigate two main questions. Firstly, are the majority of the plants growing at Idsworth Corn Chamomile or its alien look alike? Secondly, if the seed comes from plants grown in this country, and assumed to be native Corn Chamomile, were the ancestors of this seed really native or alien?

All I can do here is to quote Stace on *Anthemis austriaca*. He says .. {{ *A. austriaca*, from East Europe, would key out as *A. arvensis* (Corn Chamomile) and agrees with it in habit and receptacular scale shape, but has scarcely ribbed achenes with a very short apical rim and the receptacular scales become rigid in fruit; it has appeared as a casual recently in southern Britain (probably from seed mixtures) and might be overlooked as *A. arvensis* }}

THU 10 OCT

The fields of Old Idsworth Farm gave me 70 flowering plants in this afternoon's sunshine. Quite a few of them were the deliberately sown wildflowers - Corn Marigold, Cornflower, Corn Cockle (only one of these among the hundreds of the others) and a mass of the Corn Chamomile look-alike *Anthemis austriaca*. - but there were plenty of others - masses of Round Leaved Fluellen in one area and single examples of Rock Rose and Long-stalked Cranesbill. Best of all were three Harebells still flowering on a bit of downland with Common Centurary and Yellow-wort, and the most unexpected was a good show of Burnet Saxifrage by the roadside.

INSECTS:

SAT 12 OCT

On what may turn out to be the last day of our prolonged dry sunny weather for the year at least 8 butterfly species were seen at Beachy Head. among them a single Common Blue and two Meadow Browns. The other species there were Clouded Yellow, Red Admiral, Small Tortoiseshell, Small Copper, Large White and Speckled Wood.

Only four species were reported from Hampshire, but Clouded Yellow were inevitably among them (and there were none to add to those seen in Sussex).

FRI 11 OCT

Derek Mills has not been able to update the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website since the end of September while the ISP which hosts the website has been undergoing repairs/improvements, but today this great news service has been resumed and lists a series of observations received by Derek during October.

The most recent news is of a dozen Adonis Blues still to be seen on the wing at Melbury Hill in Dorset on Oct 9 when Piers Vigus visited the site. More significant than the butterflies were the many eggs and baby caterpillars which should have a better than usual chance of surviving the winter after the warm dry weather allows them to feed up before cowering down to sleep through the winter on the ground at the base of the Horseshoe Vetch plants on which they feed (although ants enjoy sweet secretions from the caterpillars they do not invite them in their ant

nests for the winter). Those caterpillars which do survive start to feed again when the vetch begins to grow, then pupate in April and emerge as butterflies in May. +++

Three other unexpected news items all date from observations on Oct 2 when Ian Pratt was on Afton Down, Isle of Wight, and found two tatty Chalkhill Blues and an incredibly late Small Skipper, a good month later than the latest recorded date in recent years. Even more incredible was the find by Phil Budd of a fresh male Silver Studded Blue at Ober Heath in the New Forest on the same day. Normally Silver Studded Blue is only on the wing for about a month in July and August, and eggs laid then remain dormant until the following spring - if however one had been triggered into growth there would have been time for the caterpillar to grow to full size (three weeks) and to metamorphose (another three weeks) to emerge about now, but if that was the case I hope it was very exceptional as this male is unlikely to meet and mate with a female at this time of year!

More normal observations are of species that we expect to be on the wing now, though I was interested to see that on Oct 6 when Rupert Broadway was at Durlston in Dorset, he not only saw two or three helice females among a dozen Clouded Yellows but also saw a late Meadow Brown and what may have been the last Small Heath. +++

Current news from Lawrence Holloway at Pagham Harbour today includes sightings of Red Admirals with single Comma and Peacock. Other insects were a Volucella zonaria hoverfly, Common Darters and Migrant Hawker dragonflies and a Vapourer moth.

Adrian Hoskins spent four hours in Stansted Forest on Oct 4, seeing little in the way of butterflies other than Speckled Wood and Large/Small Whites, but he did come across a woodland moth species which emerges at this time of year before hibernating as a moth to start the new generation next spring. This was the Grey Shoulder-knot, a newcomer to my year-list.

WED 09 OCT

At Langstone Pond today I watched a Southern Hawker dragonfly hunting over the water, and today's messages tell me that four dragonfly species were seen last Monday (Oct 7) in Sussex.

MON 07 OCT

The most interesting butterfly observation of the weekend has just come from Adrian Martin who saw two, maybe four, Wall Brown on the Lymington marshes at Keyhaven on Saturday (Oct 5). He also saw Clouded Yellow there, reminding him that at the beginning of September when he was on Kingley Vale near Chichester, he had been one of the few people to see a helice female of this species this year. +++

More Clouded Yellows and Red Admirals, with at least one each of Painted Lady, Comma, Speckled Wood and Small Copper were seen over the weekend by various people, along with the Small and Large Whites but the only unusual insect was an Oak Bush Cricket seen by Richard Carpenter in his Hill Head garden on Saturday.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

WED 09 OCT

Grey Squirrels do not often make news, except as villains, so it is interesting to hear of at least two that have attracted attention on the slopes of Portsdown recently. The first item concerns the re-appearance of one of the white (albino) Grey Squirrels that have been present on the hill for the best part of 20 years (probably longer). I imagine that over the years these sightings must represent several different animals of successive generations so I assume that there is a genetic streak in the local population giving rise to albinos more frequently than elsewhere (or maybe not - do you know of white squirrels in other parts of England?)

The other squirrel news comes from a garden on the southern slopes of the hill at Farlington. In response to my query as to whether antler chewing was a common habit among squirrels (see my notes for Oct 2) I now learn that another pair of antlers has almost vanished from this garden as a result of the squirrels. +++

One other item that has been in the news recently, but on which I have not commented, is the presence of many Black Rabbits among the wild population. Over recent years I have noticed pure Black Rabbits in several places close to towns and I am pretty sure that these originate from released domestic pets. The interesting thing is how they seem to survive successfully in the wild despite their origins (you would think that most released pets would succumb to foxes

before they are able to learn the ways of the wild), and despite the way they stand out as targets for predators, unlike the better camouflaged grey rabbits. Nevertheless the black population among the wild rabbits definitely seems to me to be increasing - maybe black bucks are more attractive to the does?

MON 07 OCT

A large and ancient willow which succumbed to gravity some years ago and is now lying near the north bridge over the River Ems at Brook Meadow in Emsworth, has once more produced a crop of uncommon but edible and nicely scented (if you like the smell of disused winecasks) fungi called Agrocybe cylindracea. When they were first noticed last year Brian Fellows was brave enough to eat some and as he found them there again yesterday I suspect they will once more be on his menu.

Near the river Meon canal beside Titchfield Haven, also yesterday, Richard Carpenter found a Slow-worm, maybe the last to be seen this year as they normally go underground to hibernate in October. I see that if a Slow-worm escapes all the Hedgehogs, Rats, Adders, Kestrels and especially Cats that are after its blood these lizards can live as long as fifty years. I was checking on their hibernation habits to see if the fallen Willow at Emsworth, split down its side and filled with loose, compost-like, detritus in its hollow centre, might attract Slow-worms in winter but it seems they like to be underground, favouring ants nests (the two species seem to tolerate each other's presence). One likely winter inhabitant of the hollow tree is a newt - I have myself found them hibernating in rotten logs.

WEEK 40 SEP 30 - OCT 6 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 06 OCT

Also on the Hampshire coast a number of birders visited the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth and saw the Red-necked Grebe. One of them was Will Walmsley who also came on a singing Stonechat (their Dunnock like song is infrequent in the spring and I would think most unusual at this time of year) and refers to a reported Ring Ouzel which he did not see - I assume both these birds were in the Milton Common area? +++

In Sussex Derek Mills took a walk round Thorney Island (not with the RSPB party being led round by Barry Collins) and saw not only three Rock Pipits at Pilsey (possibly the same three which Barry Collins first saw there on Sep 24) but also a Sandwich Tern in full winter plumage and a juvenile Whimbrel (both these birds could be staying on to winter in Chichester Harbour) plus a juvenile Wheatear that is unlikely to stay for long.

This morning I led a walk from Farlington Marshes to Langstone for the Hampshire Walking and Food Festival but the only slightly unusual bird observation was of well over 100 Ringed Plover on the north shore of the Chalkdock Lake near the stream outfall halfway along the stretch of path below the A27 embankment (where Lapwings will congregate later in the winter). With them were half a dozen Turnstone and a single Grey Wagtail (they seem to turn up everywhere at present). On the marshes birds were beginning to flock in to the lake, and no doubt anyone there for the birdwatching had a good show but the only birds I noted on the reserve were a single Stonechat near the building and one Cetti's Warbler singing by the track to the underpass. Meadow Pipit were still numerous as were the Brent, Wigeon, Black-tailed Godwit, and Teal, and there must have been more than 30 Great Crested Grebe at the west end of Chalkdock when the tide was up (I had anticipated difficulties with the high tide, but we barely got our feet wet when we came to the footbridge from the South Moors into Langstone Mill Lane where the water had just overtopped the footway) +++

In my garden I am still feeding up to a dozen House Sparrows and a pair of Collared Doves, and occasionally see a pair of Blackbirds - otherwise the Robins are the only regulars with an occasional glimpse of a Dunnock and one or two passing Blue and Great Tits. One new feature this autumn is the presence of a few Jackdaws on the chimney pots of houses in our road - they may be outcasts from the church in the centre of Havant which currently has builders working on the tower where they usually reside.

SAT 05 OCT

Will Walmsley was at Farlington Marshes today and includes 10 Black-necked Grebe in his list

(seen in Chalkdock lake) so presumably another two have just arrived. Also in Will's list were a single Sedge Warbler, two Sandwich Tern, three Bar-tailed Godwit and 5 Swallows plus a sighting of Peregrine over the stream. +++

Down at the Milton Lakes where the Red-necked Grebe was still showing Ian Thirlwell saw a Whinchat

Our Havant Wildlife Group this morning visited the Chichester gravel pit lakes, and among their bird sightings I was interested to see that there were 11 Pochard on Runcton Lake and at least six Gadwall with them. Both Swallows and House Martins were still present there. Another report of Pochard, seen on Oct 2, comes from Simon Ingram at the Eastleigh Lakeside site but I think this is a bird that has been there for some time (it arrived on Sep 21)

Very little to report from my WeBS count visit to the IBM Lake today other than that there are still 188 Canada Geese there (around 50 of these flew in from the west while I was there so the population is fluid). The only unexpected birds were a pair of Swans, accompanied by two well grown cygnets. The Coot population has grown to 47 but they have not yet formed into a grazing flock. I only found 41 Mallard, 17 Tufted Duck and 8 Teal. Moorhen numbered 24 but otherwise there were just singles of Heron, Cormorant, and Little Grebe (I probably missed several of these). A single Kestrel (I think female) was also present. +++

In the evening, too late to count the arriving birds, I visited the Wade Court Egret roost at Langstone and saw that the roost was still apparently doing normal business but have no idea of the total number there (I could see about 25 birds in the gloom).

Also yesterday Brian Fellows, newly back from a holiday in Canada, resumed his regular monitoring of Emsworth and tells me there are now 52 Coot on the Slipper Mill Pond, and overall totals of 64 Mute Swans and 102 Mallard. More interestingly he heard from a regular dog-walker that a Kingfisher had been seen by River Ems at Brook Meadow three times in the past week.

FRI 04 OCT

Both Richard Carpenter, in his Hill Head garden near Titchfield Haven, and John Collman on Hazeley Heath in the north of Hampshire, today noted their first Redpolls of the autumn (single birds in each case). John's bird was flying south and was presumably on the move to new winter quarters but quite a few Redpolls do breed in the north east Hampshire heathland, as they do in the New Forest, so the sight of one would be no surprise to many Hampshire birders, though for Richard in the south east it was a pleasant addition to the autumn bird population there. Other birds seen by John at Hazeley included two singing male Dartford Warblers with at least one female present, 2 Siskin, 2 Stonechat and a Tree Pipit. +++

Another welcome re-appearance in the south east of the county was the return today of the Red-necked Grebe on the Milton Lakes at Portsmouth - this bird put in a one day appearance there on Sept 21 but had not been seen again until yesterday. Ian Thirlwell found it yesterday, looking a bit less red on the neck than a couple of weeks ago, and both he and John Shillitoe saw it today on 'Swan Lake' (the southernmost of the three lakes near the Langstone Harbour shore on Milton Common - the other two are called Duck and Frog lake). John also had a Whinchat on the common there.

Richard Carpenter today gave us a status report from Titchfield Haven, where the Bittern was seen again, but there is nothing especially new there - Hobby, Peregrine and Marsh Harrier were all seen, 230 Wigeon dominate the duck scene (with 2 Gadwall and one juvenile Shelduck present but no mention of Mandarin). Both Common and Sandwich Tern can still be seen near the shore. Four Green Sandpiper, five Stonechat and at least nine Bearded Tits were also seen, but sadly only one Yellowhammer. +++

Bob Chapman also today put out his welcome weekly bulletin from Farlington Marshes where he says there are now nearly 2000 Brent in the harbour with no juveniles as yet seen by him (and just three in total reported from the whole Hampshire coast so far - although the families tend to arrive later than the non-breeding birds Bob thinks this augurs badly for their breeding success this year). Another 300 Wigeon arrived this week to give a total of 1600 in Langstone harbour but the Black-necked Grebe total remains at 8 (though they were joined by a single Merganser on Sep 29 only). A small westward movement of Skylarks is now detectable at the Marshes, and the first Chaffinches have arrived there. +++

Although it seems that the bulk of the recent influx of Song Thrushes, that has resulted in a flock of over 40 being present on Old Winchester Hill since Oct 1, have overflowed the coast to settle inland a few have appeared at the Marshes, and I think there has been more than one wave of continental Thrushes. Russell Wynn noted an influx in the Lymington area on Sep 28, and Paul Winter spoke of a possible influx at the Lower Test on Sep 10 while Lawrence Holloway at Pagham noted the appearance on Sept 8 of the first slim bodied, dusky billed, Blackbird (a description that could fit any young male Blackbird hatched this year, but Lawrence takes the annual appearance of these birds in his coastal garden to signify the arrival of immigrants) and this influx was noted by Trevor Carpenter in his Fareham garden on Sep 7 when ten Blackbirds suddenly appeared there following a long period with none in the garden. Coming back to the present Trevor saw his first Redwing at Cams Bay today.

For the past couple of years I have been without a decent telescope but this week I took the plunge and bought a new Kowa. Today I took it to the top of Budds Mound and for the first time this autumn had a close view of the 8 Black-necked Grebe in the Chalkdock channel, with half a dozen Little Grebe in the Hermitage stream channel. 16 Brent (unperturbed by a nearby bait-digger) and 7 Egrets were on the South Moors shore where 52 Curlew almost outnumbered the Oystercatchers (though overall there were well over 200 of these in sight from my viewpoint). Redshank were dominant on the Budds Farm shore - 150 of them as against just a dozen Black-tailed Godwit. The only Dunlin I saw were 30 over on the North Binness shore. The Budds Farm pools had nothing new but there must have been more than 50 Teal with perhaps 20 Tufted Duck and maybe a dozen Little Grebe with a few Shoveler, Mallard, Coot and Moorhen - no Swans or Canada Geese today, and no hirundines (just three or four Meadow Pipits)

[Before posting this update I have carried out the Saturday WeBS count on the IBM Lake and can tell those who are interested in such matters that there are still 188 Canada Geese there]

THU 03 OCT

In the Milton area of Portsmouth the Red-necked Grebe (which appeared for one day on Sept 21) was seen again this afternoon. Other than the single bird that has been seen regularly at Rye Harbour since Sept 15 this is the only other Red-necked Grebe I have heard of on the south coast this autumn and I guess this one at Milton will have been present all the time, proving once again how little we see of the wildlife around us - maybe it was just across the road at the Great Salterns lake, or maybe it was on the Milton Lakes all the time but no one happened to see it. +++

On the other side of Langstone Harbour Mark Tutton was at Sinah Lake on Hayling today, watching two Hobbies hawking for the dragonflies that are still enjoying the good weather (or were until the Hobbies turned up). For a change of diet one of the Hobbies snatched a Long-tailed Tit that was foolish enough to stray into its path. Mark suggests that the dragonflies were Emperors but it is a long time now since I heard of these being seen - more likely they were Southern Hawkers that are still on the wing. +++

To add to the colour and excitement Mark watched a Kingfisher fly out over Sinah Lake, hover above the water, and plunge at a fish. Mark asks if this hovering is unusual, but all I can say about that is that I don't recall seeing one do so myself but in my 'Popular Handbook of British Birds' I read that in addition to plunging from a fixed perch .. {{ It also hovers over water. }} .. so the practice is not unknown. Mark says the hovering was tern-like, but I suspect that there is one difference between the two birds in that a Tern searches for its prey on the wing, hovering and plunging when it spots a possible target, whereas I'm pretty sure the Kingfisher will not have set out from its perch until it spotted a potential prey item which was too far away from it for the normal plunge technique - when it gets to the target area it probably has to hover to achieve its standard more or less vertical dive. These are guesses on my part so informed comments are welcome!

WED 02 OCT

Trevor Carpenter was the first to report juvenile Brent when he saw one off Hill Head yesterday, and today he saw two more in a flock of 30 Brent at Cams Bay in Fareham Creek. With them were 33 Golden Plover and, best of all, two Curlew Sandpiper which Trevor has never seen at

this site before. Not quite so exciting, but of interest to me, was the presence of the first 100+ flock of Dunlin to be reported in Hampshire this winter (though there was one report of 100+ at Newtown on the Isle of Wight on Sep 12 - other than that the nearest other reports were of 70 at Titchfield Haven on Aug 23 and 65 at Pagham North Wall on Sep 3). +++

With Bob Chapman and Jason Crook complaining at the lack of birds in Langstone Harbour this autumn maybe a few birders will be changing their allegiance to Portsmouth Harbour and joining Trevor at Cams Bay where his list today also included a Spotted Redshank and a Greenshank, 14 Knot, 30 Curlew, 40+ Ringed Plover, 230 Redshank and 187 Wigeon. A Spotted Flycatcher and one Common Tern were there today and I am surprised he does not mention Godwits - there is usually a good count of Black-tailed and on Sep 24 I see he had 153 of them with a single Bar-tail. Most of the passerine migrants have been recorded here and there is a resident Lesser Spotted Woodpecker for those who have the patience to track it down. +++

Other bird news from Hampshire today starts with a sighting by John Goodspeed of a Common Sandpiper at the Hayling Oysterbeds (now that the main passage of these birds is over could this be one that will be staying the winter?). John also saw a Stonechat on the nearby 'brickfield'. At Titchfield Haven John Shillitoe heard a report that a late Black Tern was there today but all he could see himself on the water was 70 Brent, and the regular male Marsh Harrier and 200 Wigeon within the reserve (where others saw at least nine Bearded Tit and a Whinchat).

TUE 01 OCT

Here in Hampshire Jason Crook announced the return of one of our regular Black Brants which he saw just west of Farlington Marshes. Jason thinks it may be the adult female which wintered in Langstone Harbour two years ago but passed us by last winter (just dropping in for a few days in November) so the question is will it stay this winter? +++

You may not be lucky enough to pick out a Brant among the Brent on the shore but you could well find Song Thrushes back in your garden soon. Today at Old Winchester Hill John Shillitoe found a collection of birds which had probably just arrived from the continent, chief among them being more than 40 Song Thrushes, and the presence of more Robins and Goldcrest than usual probably meant that they too were newly arrived, while 50 Meadow Pipits, 10 Blackcaps and a smaller number of Chiffchaffs were likely to have been heading in the opposite direction along with the House Martins and Swallows that were passing over.

MON 30 SEP

Brent are already showing little fear of humans and human activity, feeding close to the shore in many places, and I think it will not be long before we hear of them feeding on fields ashore. Last autumn I found my first party of around 50 feeding on a field east of Prinsted Bay in Chichester Harbour on Nov 4, and see the Brian Fellows had some on the grass of Portsmouth college and on playing fields at Southsea on Nov 7, but I don't think we will have to wait until November to see them ashore this year. Speaking to Bob Chapman yesterday he said that the first usually appear on Farlington Marshes alongside Canada Geese, the latter acting as 'safe to land here' indicators. (Will the farmers take this as a reason to eliminate the Canada Geese?) +++

PLANTS:

SUN 06 OCT

Butchers Broom is now flowering in Mill Lane at Langstone, not the first flowering of the autumn for this plant, but nice to see among so many plants at the end of their flowering period. Another plant looking very healthy but with no flowers open as yet is Chinese Mugwort - it should have a good flowering season this year, unlike the average year when many plants never seem to flower at all. Among the 'end of the road' plants I enjoyed Common Centaury and Doves Foot Cranesbill, and by the Brockhampton stream I was once again impressed by the huge display of Guernsey Fleabane and the great amount of seed it is now shedding when there is any wind.

SAT 05 OCT

Visiting the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth today I found my list of flowering plants there

was only just 50, but among them were Blue Fleabane and Common Stork's Bill with a few examples of Yellow-wort. A surprise item was a yellow oxalis (pretty sure it was Procumbent Yellow Sorrel) which I do not recall seeing on the site before.

FRI 04 OCT

As I walked past the New Lane allotments in Havant today one of the allotment holders arrived at the gate, asked me why I was so interested in peering through the fence, and then invited me in to look all round at their prize collection of weeds. My main interest in this site has always been the Weasels Snout or Lesser Snapdragon (*Misopates orontium*) and I found it was widespread and relatively abundant throughout the allotments. Two other plants of interest were single plants of *Viola tricolor* and Henbit Deadnettle with more than forty other weeds in flower (including Small Nettle). At the end of my tour I came on the most impressive sight - one allotment covered in Apple of Peru (*Nicandra physalodes*) with its big blue flowers and chinese lantern seed (the calyx enlarges and wraps round the fruit berry to give this effect), but no one who was there knew if these had been planted as a row of flowers or had arrived as weeds. Checking this plant out in Stace I see I may have caused some confusion in the past by referring to the plant as the 'Lily of Peru' as Stace uses that English name for the popular 'cut flower' *Alstroemeria aurea* (though he names it Peruvian Lily). After leaving the allotments I found just one flower showing on the Intermediate Periwinkle (*Vinca difformis*) where a great mass of this plant fills the bottom of a hawthorn hedge which I believe goes back to the time fifty years ago when the hedge was perhaps part of Havant Farm which disappeared when Leigh Park was built (the hedge now surrounds the Havant Health Centre).

WED 02 OCT

Richard Carpenter tells me that Pale Toadflax can still be found in flower at Gilkicker Point at Gosport, and, following my remark (see notes for Sep 26) that up to that time I only knew of three locations for Bastard Toadflax on Portsdown Hill, John Goodspeed has now sent me a list of six places where it can be found. The map references for the sites, working from west to east, are SU628066, SU635066, SU645065, SU657064 (2 sites close together), and SU666062 but these are only approximate locations and if anyone wants to see these plants in flower they would probably save themselves time by contacting John or myself for guidance.

INSECTS:

SUN 06 OCT

Derek Mills took a walk round Thorney Island this morning and it was still living up to its good reputation for butterflies, giving him sightings of three Clouded Yellows, two Small Copper and two Red Admirals, plus single Comma and Small Tortoiseshell.

The highspot of my walk this morning along the north shore of Langstone harbour was the sight of two or three Clouded Yellows seen around the Budds Farm area, and equally colourful were two fresh Red Admirals on ivy flowers at Langstone. Otherwise the only butterflies seen were a couple of Speckled Wood and singles of what I think were both Small and Large White. A couple of Common Darters and one probable Migrant Hawker gave brief glimpses.

SAT 05 OCT

The Havant Wildlife Group were at the Chichester gravel pit lakes this morning, and Heather Mills tells me they saw Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Comma and Painted Lady (all I think on one Buddleia).

The last Meadow Browns are normally still on the wing in October (in 2001 the last recorded in the Hampshire Butterfly Report was on Oct 27) but it is interesting to me that this autumn several people have commented on the freshness of recent specimens. Today, at the IBM North Harbour site, I saw two very fresh looking examples (plus one very tatty Painted Lady), and I wonder if part of the success of the Meadow Brown is due to the way in which this species staggers its emergence over the summer season so that at least some of the insects come out in favourable conditions.

FRI 04 OCT

So far I have heard two reports of Red Admirals bravely flying out to sea on an attempted return migration (see yesterday's notes) but it seems that Clouded Yellows are showing their yellow streak and, having reached the coast, chosen to die here rather than risk a watery grave. That,

at any rate, is my interpretation of a count today of 85 Clouded Yellows at Beachy Head where there were 54 last Monday - it seems that once they see the sea ahead they choose to enjoy the nectar of a clover field and just fly around that field. These butterflies were again seen by Tony Wilson, who says that one of the 85 there today was a helice female. Ten other butterfly species were present (2 Painted Ladies, 10 Red Admirals, 3 Common Blues, 4 Meadow Browns, 2 Small Copper, 1 Small Heath, 3 Speckled Woods, 3 Small Tortoiseshells, and both Large and Small Whites) and Tony also watched a Hummingbird Hawkmoth there, both feeding and, unusually, taking a rest - perhaps it and the Clouded Yellows have actually come north over the channel and deserve their food and rest? +++

Just one other butterfly species was recorded today - a single Comma seen in north Hampshire by John Collman at Hazeley Heath..

THU 03 OCT

On Sept 28 I described how Colin Allen had been out on a boat ten miles south of the Nab Tower (south east of the Isle of Wight) and had seen a single Red Admiral flying strongly south towards France, and today several more Red Admirals were seen setting out on the same journey, by Adrian Thomas of the RSPB, from East Head at the mouth of Chichester Harbour. +++

Just one more Clouded Yellow was seen today, by Bob Marchant at Hook/Warash.

Barry Collins in Havant had his moth trap on last night and recorded 15 moth species of which I think the only really unusual one was another single Red Underwing. The only species present in any numbers was Lunar Underwing (20 of them) and 5 Large Yellow Underwing were in the trap - all the others were ones or twos. Among them was a very common species (Shuttle Shaped Dart) which is normally on the wing from May to early October but at this time of year it must I think have been a third brood moth of the year.

WED 02 OCT

Two Clouded Yellows and singles of Common Blue and Small Copper were seen today by Richard Carpenter at Gilkicker on the Gosport shore, and way inland at Pulborough Brooks Tony Wilson had 2 Commas, 1 Red Admiral and 2 Speckled Wood as well as another Small Copper

TUE 01 OCT

A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was seen today at Seaford, not far west of Beachy Head, by a friend of Tony Wilson's, and more moths were recorded here in Havant by Barry Collins at his moth trap, including the large and lovely Red Underwing which is the first I have heard of this year though they should be out in August (I read that is unusual for them to visit moth lights though they are night flying, but they are after ripe fruit and thus can be best attracted to sugar). Another first for my yearlist in Barry's trap was the tiny and unimpressive Pinion-streaked Snout, the first to be found in Barry's garden.. Barry's third personal first was Blair's Shoulder-knot which has already been seen by others (Alan Dawson had the first on Sep 25) +++

MON 30 SEP

About this time in the autumn it seems that the Hornets, which have been hard at work all summer on domestic duties in their nests, are 'let out of school' and become abundant throughout the countryside. Checking last years notes I see that sightings of them continued until at least Oct 31, and that it is about now that they start their holidays. On Sep 27 last year one actually 'stayed out all night' and was found the following morning in Barry Collins moth trap here in Havant (he doesn't say if he smelt its breath to see what it had been drinking!). +++

The first report indicating the start of this Hornet holiday season this year comes from Richard Carpenter, who found five of them yesterday near what had been an active nest in the Curbridge area by the River Hamble below Botley.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 05 OCT

The very dry ground has seriously delayed the appearance of most autumn fungi but I did today see a few examples of the common Brown Rollrim in a shady and damp part of the IBM North Harbour site. Also seen there were fresh examples of a big boletus species which I have never been able to name although it appears on grass near pine trees there each year at this time.

The closest I can get to naming it is to say that it is similar to *Boletus impolitus* in colour of cap and bright yellow pores, and has short stems, but there are no oak trees anywhere near.

Brian Fellows today resumed his monitoring of wildlife in the Emsworth area after returning from a holiday in Canada, finding at least one Water Vole still active in the river at Brook Meadow.

THU 03 OCT

An unusual animal seen in the 'Point Field' at the southern tip of Farlington Marshes today was a Hedgehog, so Bob Chapman tells us in his weekly round up of news from the reserve. I understand that it is not uncommon for these animals to walk a four mile long beat each night in search of food so perhaps this one was on a regular expedition (which would normally be unseen at night) but for some reason stayed out late until observers were present, or maybe it was already searching for a good place to hibernate and had strayed far from its normal route.

+++

Bob also tells us that there are currently more Weasels than usual to be seen on the Marshes.

Bob, no doubt thinking about the rabbit population on the reserve, says that the Weasels are a welcome sight after a scarcity of them over the past couple of years.

WED 02 OCT

Standing outside my backdoor first thing this morning, listening for bird song, all I could hear was an unidentified rasping noise coming from my neighbour's garden. Looking over the wall I soon saw the origin of the noise - a Grey Squirrel sitting on the roof of a garden shed and leaning over to chew at a pair of deer antlers fixed to the shed door. Looking at the antlers it was clear that this was not the first time the Squirrel had been there, and I assumed that it was doing it to get some minerals to supplement its diet. Later in the day I spoke about this to a chance acquaintance who told me that Squirrels teeth grow very rapidly and they have to be for ever grinding them down if they are to be able to close their mouths! So can any one tell me if this is an unusual observation, and if the Squirrel was after a diet supplement or just wanting to wear down its teeth?

TUE 01 OCT

Chicken of the Woods (or Sulphur Polypore) is a colourful bracket type fungus which oozes its bright yellow and red body from various trees, and it was seen today at the site of the old Dunsbury Hill Farm near the A3M between Leigh Park and Waterlooville by Alan Cokes. This fungus can appear at any time from spring to late autumn, but I have usually found it in May or June, several times on Yew wood though also on Poplar and other trees.

WEEK 39 SEP 23 - 29

BIRDS:

SUN 29 SEP

Alistair Martin was on the Warblington shore today and saw 8 Greenshank on the mud and another 8 or more flying by offshore, suggesting that there may be an unusually large number on the Thorney Deeps at the moment (I think autumn totals of up to 200 at the roost there are not uncommon but all I can see from the latest two Sussex bird reports indicate the main passage is earlier than this - in 2000 the peak WeBS count was 192 in July and in 1999 it was 196 in September). On the Warblington fields Alistair could only see 1 juvenile Yellow Wagtail today - yesterday he had 2 adults with 3 juveniles there. +++

Going out into my garden soon after 7am I heard the expected Chiffchaff and Robin song with the occasional burst from a Collared Dove and Wren, but I was quite unprepared for a series of sharp and disorganised notes (sounding like a child practising a new toy trumpet) which came from close at hand in the trees above the old rail track that runs behind my garden. The pitch and repetition told me the noise must come from a Song Thrush and my analogy with a child practising a new instrument may have been appropriate as I guess this was one of this year's young birds giving voice for the first time in its life (an adult, even though it has been silent for several months, would surely remember how it used to sing). Looking back at last year's notes I see that Song Thrush were silent from July 27 to Oct 16, not heard again until Nov 17 and then only very intermittently until after Christmas. Also from my garden this morning I heard Pied Wagtail and saw Blackbird, both of which have been absent for some time. +++

Later in the morning I walked from Broadmarsh to Farlington Marshes, then back again to Havant via Langstone, but with little to report in the way of birds. While in the Bushes at Farlington a dozen or so Swallows flew east, and from the reeds by the stream came loud screaming of Water Rails - one was I think objecting to a cow which had waded the stream and was going through the reedbed like a tank, another group (of which I glimpsed one making a brief flight) seemed to be arguing among themselves (maybe residents objecting to the presence of new arrivals seeking a home for the coming winter). Even more noisy were some half dozen Cetti's Warblers spread out from the 'slip field' (nearest the chalkdock entrance) to the main entrance, all of them in scrub well away from water. An oddity was probably a pheasant which took off from a post in the fence line separating the main marsh fields from the reeds and stream close to the reserve building, did a whirr and glide flight brushing the tops of the reeds, and seemed to land again in the reeds. Near the lake I heard but did not see a Yellow Wagtail, and on the harbour mud at low tide were many Brent. +++

Coming back I had a good view of a Kingfisher flying downstream from the second bridge of the Brockhamton stream, and at Budds Farm I noticed three Canada Geese with the many Little Grebe, Teal, Shoveler and Tufted Duck..

SAT 28 SEP

News from Barry Collins of his sightings today includes a Merlin (female/immature) over Pilsey with 300 Brent and 16 Egrets in Chichester Harbour. At the Little Deeps on Thorney Island he witnessed the departure of 17 Bearded Tits - as normal, they made several sallies high into the air above the reed beds to accustom themselves to the world outside their reed bed and to psyche themselves up to the long journey into the unknown before eventually flying off high to the East North East. Also in this area he noted 3 Kingfishers, a Common Sandpiper, single Whitethroat and Blackcap, three Wheatear, six Whinchat, and twelve Stonechats plus a female or immature Peregrine.

Closer to home Alistair Martin had what may have been a family group of Yellow Wagtails (2 adults with 3 juvs) with cattle on the Warblington fields, and up at Forestside David Parker had a Firecrest in his garden with a couple of Goldcrest and 50 Goldfinch. I also had a phone call today from a lady in Westbourne who was delighted to see a Goldcrest visiting a small fishpond just outside the windows of her house - possibly a wave of migrants has just arrived in the area. +++

In my own Havant garden Blackbirds have just re-appeared with two visiting a Rowan tree in search of fruit, and this evening I heard my first Pied Wagtail for some time on the shore at Prinsted.

Back on Wednesday (Sep 25) the first Merganser was seen in Chichester Harbour by Barry Collins - the same day that two appeared off Pennington but a day after the Hayling Ferryman is reported to have seen the first returnee in Langstone Harbour. On Sep 24 Barry had 3 Rock Pipits at Pilsey Island, and these are the first to return to the Chichester/Langstone harbours as far as I know.

FRI 27 SEP

The latest update from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes tells us that Brent have very nearly reached the 1000 mark in Langstone Harbour (when Bob gave us his status report a week ago gave there was just one flock of 157 Brent). Wigeon numbers have remained unchanged at around 1300 over the week, and the estimate of Pintail has gone up by just 10 from 50 to 60. The Ospreys that were a major feature of the harbour for several weeks have now flown south (and it would seem that the Short-eared Owl and Merlin have also moved on but at least one (probably two) Dartford Warbler seem to have moved into the Point field for the winter, and on the water there are now 8 Black-necked Grebe. +++

Swallows and House Martins have been passing over the reserve all week (numbers may be trailing off towards the weekend) and one day saw at least 1000 Meadow Pipits moving over (sounds a lot but last weekend a county record was set when 2060 went over the coast near the Dorset border in just two hours). On the reserve itself the number of small birds seen has been a little disappointing with lower than expected counts of both Whinchat and Stonechat (the number of Stonechat has just got up to 10 this week though not far away at the mouth of the Hamble river there were 15 at Hook as early as Sept 8 and reports of them have been

widespread - perhaps many of the birds that were concentrated at Farlington in previous years have been more spread out along the coast this year?)

A list of sightings at Titchfield Haven today comes from Richard Carpenter who he tells us one visitor saw 11 different Water Rails, and putting this together with yesterday's news from Hook of Water Rails there being unusually noisy I suspect that a number of these birds have just arrived from distant places to spend the winter at Hampshire coastal sites - that would explain the quarreling as they establish winter feeding territories and the increase in the number of sightings of birds that have not yet learnt the best routes to move around without showing themselves. +++

Both the Marsh Harrier and the Bittern were seen at the Haven today, and Richard saw one group of around 12 Bearded Tits and tells us that there are now around 220 Wigeon present. At least 12 Snipe are also present and Richard tells us that yesterday someone watched a Peregrine catch one in flight despite its speed and zig-zag flight. +++

Offshore 31 Brent were with 2 Eider and 2 Common Scoter

Newly ploughed and sown cereal fields at Idsworth Farm naturally attracted the attention of quite a few gulls, especially to a field where the sowing and rolling was still in progress today. A quick check gave me an estimate of 1200 Black-headed Gulls with no other species visible on the ground but I did see just one Common Gull in the air. Later in the winter there will probably be many more Common Gulls on our inland fields with a fair proportion of Herring Gulls (I would expect something like 60% Black-headed, 30% Common and 10% Herring) but I am intrigued by the apparent difference between what we see here and the preponderance of Lesser Blackbacks in the Avon Valley and north Hampshire. +++

Wood pigeons have clearly arrived back in the area with a couple of flocks of about 50 seen by me (there will be more later and I am already noticing their arrival in my own garden where I had six this morning!) and the same with Skylarks - only seven put up from a field which normally attracts up to 50 in the winter months. Both on the farm and in Havant Greefinches are once more the dominant finches, and today I did not see a single hirundine. +++

While at the farm I was told that a neighbouring farmer at Chalton had recently seen a Buzzard catching worms by walking newly ploughed fields, to which my response was that I thought this was common practice among Buzzards, but if anyone knows better do let me know (maybe it is only a last resort among hungry juveniles that have not yet learnt to catch more meaty prey).

THU 26 SEP

At Pulborough Brooks yesterday (Sep 25) Lawrence Holloway saw 6 Ruff and remarked on a large number of Canada and Greylag Geese - the latter catching my eye in view of my comments yesterday on what I read in the Wildfowl and Wetlands Trust Goose News publication. I fear that the news printed there of declining numbers of Greylag and increasing Snow Geese does not relate to the feral populations in Britain where I am not aware of a significant increase in the number of Snow Geese nor, sadly, of a decrease in the number of Greylags (though I think these are far less of a nuisance than the Canada Geese, keeping to wild places rather than obstructing the fairways on golf courses and ruining the waterside grassland of our public parks).

The final item for today comes from Bob Chapman, who gives us the result of his 'all day birdwatch' at Farlington Marshes on Sep 22. The total number of species seen by Bob from one spot (overlooking the lake at Farlington Marshes) on that day was 75 and he claims the prize (if there ever was one!) offered by Trevor Carpenter when he was promoting a competition for the highest number of species seen in one day from one spot. And if anyone challenges Bob's claim he swears he will outdo the challenger next year by doing a real full day (this time he was only there for his 9am to 5:30pm working day and was subject to various distractions from visitors)

WED 25 SEP

It seems that Fieldfare beat Redwing in the race back to Hampshire by a good twelve days this autumn. Following the first Fieldfare heard over Southampton on Sep 13 we have had to wait until today for a report of Redwing and this comes from Paul Winter at the Lower Test Marshes - Paul noted two Redwing flying north up the Test from Southampton Water this morning, so it might well be worth taking a walk after dark on fine nights from now on to listen for the thin

whistles these birds make as they fly low on a broad front when on the move. So far this is the only report of Redwing I have come across, whereas Fieldfare have been recorded at Fairlight (Hastings) on Sep 22, and Beachy Head on Sep 16 since the Southampton bird flew over. +++ Another bird now arriving in Hampshire waters is Merganser - following the report of one in Langstone Harbour yesterday (see notes for Sep 23) Peter Smith saw two more today off the Pennington Marshes at Lymington (along with 3 Sandwich Tern, 7 Eider and a Little Stint). +++ Around mid-Sept last year a group of 50 Grey Partridge were released on Old Idsworth Farm (near Rowlands Castle), where there is no game shooting, in the hope that they would settle there and breed. One reason given for the decline of this species has been the lack - in intensively cultivated cereal fields - of the soft bodied insect food that is essential for Partridge chicks in the first few weeks of their life when they cannot digest the grain on which the adults thrive, and on this farm the presence of conservation headlands and hedges should provide an ample supply of such food for a few birds. Another factor in successful breeding is, I think, the availability of hedges on raised banks, allowing the Partridges to build well-concealed nests in the hedge bottoms with the nest just above a fox's head level as the fox patrols the field edge in search of prey - if the nest is not raised it is much more likely to be found by fox, badger or hedgehog that love to eat any eggs they can find, and while there are no such banked hedges here there is plenty of thick, dense cover along some field edges (such as those which border the ancient Huckswold Lane) +++

Despite the availability of suitable breeding and round-the-year habitat for the birds they vanished as soon as they were released and all that I have seen of them since on my infrequent visits has been a covey of around a dozen birds on Oct 24 last year - six weeks after their release - and three lone birds this spring. So it is a very welcome surprise to hear from David Uren, the farmer responsible for the original release and the many wildlife conservation projects on the farm, that twenty Grey Partridge were back in the farmyard today feeding on spilt grain. I doubt they will be other than birds from the original release.

With the Goose News came a paper giving the results of last year's efforts to assess the breeding success of Dark-bellied Brent in the UK. This showed the total winter population of the birds in Britain was 123,672 and 6.2% of these were juveniles. Not all the adults bred, but of those that did each pair raised an average of 1.8 youngster. (If my arithmetic is correct this means that 107487 Brent were non-breeding birds after taking away the 7667 juveniles and their 8518 parents - these figures are unlikely to support the overall population for long!) While a lot of numbers were collected and statistically analysed for this report I cannot see any statement of how the findings relate to the likely population trend for this species in the future, but I can see from it some of the immense difficulties in making such predictions (among other things needed for such predictions to be accurate would be fore-knowledge of the weather, lemming and lemming-predator populations, and effective monitoring of goose populations wherever they may be found (not just in the UK or our local harbours). I am glad to see that the report recognizes that its results are perhaps influenced by what it call 'pseudo-replication' - a long word for telling us that some of the goose flocks are counted and age-assessed several times over and others are probably never counted at all.

TUE 24 SEP

Two Golden Plover in full summer glory were seen at Pagham Harbour as early as Aug 8, and a couple more were at Beachy Head on Aug 26, but we have had to wait until today for any to be reported on the Hampshire coast. Trevor Carpenter was the lucky finder of ten birds at Cams Bay in Portsmouth Harbour and he comments that they are two days late (last year he had 11 there on Sep 22!). Other birds at Cams Bay were 153 Black-tailed Godwit (with an odd stray Bartail that is not normal at this site), 120 Wigeon, 60 Canada Goose (with the individual white headed flock-marker bird) and over 50 Lapwing. Perhaps this is an indication that Lapwing will soon appear in force on the coast - another indication of this came from a sighting of some 70 Lapwing in the Walderton area by the headwaters of the River Ems, and perhaps heading down the valley to Emsworth Harbour (though I think they were 'grounded' when seen and so may stay on the fields there) +++

Later in the morning Trevor went to Fort Nelson at the west end of Portsdown and watched a Peregrine soaring over the area where they have in the past had regular perches on electricity

pylons. A flock of 60 Linnets (plus a dozen more), and a single Yellow Wagtail, were not enough to raise the Peregrines hunting instinct. +++

Happening to pass the Wade Court egret roost soon after 7pm I found the Egrets streaming in and this time arrived at a minimum count of 81 birds - the highest ever at this site as far as I know. To top that, after there had been no arrivals for some time and I had just moved on, I saw one lone bird heading for the roost - when I got my bins on it I saw that this was no Egret (their hunch-necked, round winged, trailing legs profile is very distinctive when flying) as its neck was stretched straight in front of the body, the bird look larger and 'different' - the wings less round and the legs not so obvious though I was concentrating more on its bill than its legs. The bill appeared to be long, thin and come to a sharp point with no sign of a spoon shaped lump at the tip but I was looking at the shape side on, and I am certain it was a Spoonbill (Great White Egret would be larger and hunch up its neck like Egret or Heron). Last autumn on the evening of Oct 31 one also came to roost here (I did see the spoon tip to the bill then) and again was last to arrive. That bird was not seen at Langstone again but on the following day, just after lunch, a group of 12 Spoonbills flew west very low over Park Shore, west of the Beaulieu River and they were seen a little later heading over Christchurch Harbour (that observer said there were 13). Finally for today there is news of a third sighting of the 'Stansted Forest Goshawk' - seen at Dean Lane End north of Rowlands Castle on Sep 20 soaring and interacting with 6 Buzzard before it flew off north east, gliding towards the downs rather than Stansted Forest.

MON 23 SEP

While writing this on Tuesday morning (Sep 24) I had to break off to go down to Hayling where I happened to meet Tim Timlick and heard from him that the Hayling Ferryman had this morning seen the first Merganser of the winter fly into Langstone Harbour. Tim also told me that over the past weekend he had had a late Wryneck on Sinah Common (I think on Sunday Sep 22) and on the Saturday he had seen the first Dartford Warbler for some time in that same area (both were seen this weekend but I may have transposed the days).

This evening Jim Berry was addressing the Havant Wildlife Group on the subject of 'counting' - a subject of interest at this moment when observers are trying to record the huge numbers of birds on passage and others are commenting on new records for flock sizes (according to Trevor Carpenter Steve Keen's count of 2060 Meadow Pipits easily broke the county record for a Hampshire daycount of Meadow Pipits which previously stood at just 1461 birds seen at Hayling Bay on 24 March 1985). Also in the current news is Will Walmsley's claim to have seen over 100 Chiffchaff yesterday when walking around Titchfield Haven with the HOS party led by Kevin Stouse and arguments over whether that number was an accurate count (how could it be in the circumstances) or an estimate. Also very relevant to the subject this month is the start of this winter's international wader and wildfowl monthly counts (which we now know as the WeBS counts). +++

It is easy to say, as I often do, that counting birds is an impossible task - partly because of the difficulty of counting the birds you can actually see (which never stand still in an orderly line) and partly because there is always a number of birds that you do not see (either hidden within the area you can see, or just round the corner out of sight). Even with species that are easiest to count (e.g. Swans) there is always a doubt that significant numbers have escaped the counters attention (this summer we were 75 short on the expected total of the summer flock at Broadmarsh and no one ever found that number elsewhere - had they died? migrated? or just chosen to settle on a private stretch of water where no counter saw them?). At the other end of the spectrum can we ever establish the actual number of House Sparrows in any given area - the best we can hope for is the very negative confidence that we now get with e.g. Tree Sparrows that the number in the county is zero because no one sees any at all. +++

Nevertheless it is important to anyone with a genuine interest in birds (or any wildlife) to know whether the population of any species is increasing or decreasing, and to have an estimate of the county, national and world population. This information is vital for wildlife conservation, focussing the attention of both conservationists and politicians on the priority to be given to projects to protect endangered species. It is also essential background to anyone's understanding of what is happening to the wildlife around us - even if we do not lift a finger to alter what is happening but just want to know what is normal and what is unusual. +++

I myself have a vested interest in counting as I try to record all the observations that come my way in a computer database, and wish to make that data as useful as possible to myself and to contribute to organisations which collect records. Most people will include the date and a place name with the species name but very often they are vague about the number, and while my database is more flexible than the HOS one (which requires a specific number with each observation - I allow the number to be preceded by a single character "e" for estimate, or the standard > and < symbols, and I include observations with no number indication as 'p' for present) I do wish that people would not use expressions such as 'few' 'many' or 'several' (recently I was puzzled by the phrase 'a lovely number') - all these words are relative to some unstated expectation of a normal number that is known only to the person reporting the observation! Life would be much easier if everyone who felt the presence of a species was important enough to tell others about it would state a ballpark figure for the number of individuals seen or heard - may I suggest prefixing such an estimate as I do with a letter "e" (and for heavens sake do not make this an excuse for not giving an accurate count wherever possible). If they could go further and compare the figure they give with other counts known to themselves (how many were there last week, last month or last year) the usefulness of the observation would be that much greater. +++

I think some people are put off giving any figure at all because of the inherent difficulty in being sure of the real number present, or for fear of contradiction, but I for one would be grateful to have some idea of numbers rather than none - to me they are the most significant part of the observation.

PLANTS:

SUN 29 SEP

Walking along the shore from Langstone to Farlington Marshes and back into Havant today gave me a list of 78 plants still in flower, including my *Lathyrus hirsutus* on the Broadmarsh 'mountain'. Many totally dead stalks of Yellow-wort were seen with none still alive but I passed several fresh looking plants of Centaury, one of Hemlock, and a couple of Corky-fruited Water Dropwort, but most species are now showing their age - like the Golden Samphire and Sea Lavender which have odd flowers among many dead ones. One place where fresh plants can be seen in some profusion is in the factory development area adjacent to the Langstone South Moors where deep trenches have been dug and masses of Fumitory and even Round-leaved Fluellen have taken advantage of the freshly upturned soil beside these trenches. (Incidentally one of the trench lines has been dug to carry electricity cables underground through the factory development area, so Bob Chapman tells me, and the existing overhead cables will soon disappear (but only from the development area))

SAT 28 SEP

The Havant Wildlife Group had a lovely day for a walk in the Huckswold Lane/Ladyholt area north of Idsworth this morning. Jim Berry, who chose this route and led the party, tells me they not only saw the Long Stalked Cranesbill which I had noticed when I was at the Idsworth Farm yesterday but also found Rockrose (possibly growing along the northern edge of other fields of the Idsworth Farm where I have seen it in the summer) and the first Treacle Mustard to be noted this year (again Jim does not give a location but it may well have been in the large field east of Ladyholt house where I have seen it in two previous years). These were just three of a good list of 81 flowering plants seen on this outing.

A short walk along the shore at Prinsted showed me that the rocks piled up as sea defence in front of the the houses immediately east of the scout hut parking area have acquired two clusters of Slender Hares Ear plants, now dead, growing in soil that has accumulated in the crevices of the rocks

FRI 27 SEP

Long-stalked Cranesbill and Vervain were probably the two best of some 60 flowering plants seen in the Idsworth Farm fields today, and flowering Cleavers (or Goosegrass) was the least expected species. A good many Corn Marigolds and Cornflower still colour the areas where they have been sown, and in one field corner where I do not think there was any sowing a mass of the Corn Chamomile look-alike (*Anthemis austriaca*) seemed to suggest that the sowing of

so much wildflower seed may be achieving its objective in creating self-supporting populations of these flowers that were once common in arable fields - though the one species that seems to have no difficulty in maintaining its foothold in these fields is the Perennial Sowthistle, closely followed by the Field Pansy. Both Round and Sharp-leaved Fluellen flourish on their own, as do Small Toadflax and Dwarf Spurge. +++

Earlier in the day I was in Chichester where Marsh Woundwort was flowering abundantly in the ditch that I think marks the line of old city walls, and Pellitory of the Wall was still flowering on old walls, and on my way to Idsworth I called in at the Prinsted market garden site to check on the supposed Green Nightshade - today I was able to find a sample with fruit and the large, bright green berries with no hint of colour change, and this makes it the more likely that this is the genuine *Solanum physalifolium*.

THU 26 SEP

John Goodspeed today found Bastard Toadflax still in flower on Portsdown Hill in a place where I have not come across it before, increasing my count of the number of different sites for it on the hill to four (and I suspect there are more than that!). John's find was in the section west of the big Paulsgrove chalkpit and south east of the Fort Southwick site.

WED 25 SEP

Anyone who read my entry for Sep 23 and thought they might like to see the mass of Coral Necklace which I said was within the HWT reserve known as Holmsley Gravel Pits should think again and rejoice. Martin Rand tell me the site with all these wonderful plants is not the HWT reserve but other gravel pits in the same area with unrestricted public access and easy nearby parking. I have corrected the previous entry to give the correct details, so read it again!

MON 23 SEP

I feel sure there are many readers of this page who will be as interested as I was in the following message I have just received from Martin Rand about a visit to the New Forest last Saturday (Sep 21) so here it is verbatim ... {{ At the Plantlife / Hampshire Flora Group meeting in the New Forest, the three search parties managed to locate 10 distinct populations of Marsh Clubmoss (*Lycopodiella inundata*) in the Vales Moor / Cranes Moor complex of bogs west of Burley. One of these appeared to number in the thousands, and several others were in the hundreds (assessed by cone-bearing stems.) This is the start of a year-long Plantlife investigation into the status of *Lycopodiella* in the New Forest - anyone interested in contributing information should contact Andy Byfield at Plantlife. +++

Other goodies seen in this area included Lesser Bladderwort (*Utricularia minor*) still flowering well, Pillwort (*Pilularia globulifera*), Great Sundew (*Drosera anglica*) - no longer in flower - and its hybrid x *obovata*, and plenty of Black Bog-rush (*Schoenus nigricans*). +++

The survey of Vales Moor gave some of us the chance to make the close acquaintance of several Adders, basking not on the dry heath but quite well out into the bog. Perhaps the food service is better there at present. +++

Most of the party went on a post-survey 'jolly' to some Gravel Pits at Holmsley (not the HWT reserve but an open access area managed by Forest Enterprise at SU 217011 just west of the public carpark on the northern edge of Holmsley Inclosure) where they were able to gasp at the enormous quantities of Coral Necklace (*Illecebrum verticillatum*) and admire more *Utricularia minor* as well as Chaffweed (*Anagallis minima*), All-seed (*Radiola linoides*), Lesser Marshwort (*Apium inundatum*) and still flowering Marsh Speedwell (*Veronica scutellata*). The subsequent extension to Holmsley Tea Rooms turned up little of botanical interest until an intrepid rump of botanists sallied into the quaking valley-line bog on the other side of the old railway line to admire Marsh Fern (*Thelypteris palustris*) and a clutch of sedges including Slender Sedge (*Carex lasiocarpa*), Bog Sedge (*Carex limosa*) and Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*). }} +++

You almost certainly will have heard of Plantlife but may not know of the various surveys they organize (including a Common Plant Survey) and if you want to join in you can find out more by visiting their website (www.plantlife.org.uk) or contacting Emma Pilgrim (emma.pilgrim@plantlife.org.uk or phone 0207 808 0120). If you are a member of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and want to find out about its Flora Group the secretary is Catherine Chatters whose home phone number is 023 8086 3920 (Her address is Ivy Cottage, Ashurst Bridge Road, Totton, Southampton SO40 7EA).

INSECTS:

SUN 29 SEP

I saw two Small Heath in the Bushes area of Farlington Marshes this morning and a fairly fresh looking male Common Blue on the Langstone South Moors. Also still on the wing are plenty of Speckled Wood with single Red Admiral, Large and Small Whites seen by myself. +++
Other butterflies also seen today, by Alan Thornbury at Noar Hill, where a couple of Meadow Browns and a Comma - Alan also had Red Admiral and Speckled Wood here

SAT 28 SEP

One Red Admiral was seen flying due south for France by Colin Allen today when he was in a boat ten miles south of the Nab - I hope it made it! +++

At Keyhaven Steve Keen had a couple of Clouded Yellows, and on Pilsey Island in Chichester Harbour Barry Collins had 5 more Clouded Yellows with a Comma, two Small Copper and 4 Small Whites +++

Yesterday (Sep 27) a Painted Lady was seen at the Lower Test Marshes by Les Stride (with it were Red Admiral and Speckled Wood), and back on Sep 22 Barry Collins on Thorney Island had 4 fresh Wall Browns of a third brood .

Barry Collins had his moth trap on in Havant this evening, taking the first of this year's Green-brindled Crescent and a Black Rustic. Over in Southampton, also this evening, Alan Dawson had the first Orange Sallow, while on Portsdown Jon Stokes had Feathered Ranunculus (and a fresh brood Cypress Carpet). Most successful with new autumn species this evening was Paul Boswell at Greywell in north Hampshire, adding to my list Large Ranunculus, Brown-spot Pinion, Pink-barred Sallow, Dusky Thorn, *Aceleris variegana* and *Archips podana*. On the previous night (Sep 26) Alan Dawson had the first Barred Sallow (beating Paul Boswell by one night) and a fresh brood specimen of Grey Pine Carpet.

FRI 27 SEP

In a summary of what's around at Farlington Marshes Bob Chapman today told us that there are still plenty of Small Heath to be seen there, and a few Clouded Yellow have passed through. Also at the Marshes Migrant Hawker dragonflies are abundant and among others Blue-tailed Damselflies can still be seen (Dan Powell gives their normal flight period as ending in early September). +++

Other reports of Clouded Yellow seen yesterday (Sep 26) come from John Goodspeed (three on Portsdown) and from Trevor Carpenter (three at Hoo/Warsash, possibly four as Bob Marchant also saw one there)

THU 26 SEP

Interesting news comes from Lawrence Holloway who was at the Pulbrough Brooks RSPB reserve yesterday (Sep 25) where he saw at least 2 Brown Hairstreak still flying around Blackthorn. With them he saw the expected Comma and Red Admiral with Migrant and Southern Hawker dragonflies. +++

Also seen yesterday on Portsdown by John Goodspeed was at least one Clouded Yellow seen five times (may have been five different insects).

WED 25 SEP

In the Bishop's Dyke area of the New Forest, near Beaulieu Road station, Richard Carpenter today not only saw Small Copper and Southern Hawker but also a Gold-ringed Dragonfly which Dan Powell tells us normally disappears by the end of August. Steve Brooks new book agrees with this but when I turn to the source of local knowledge (Noelle and Tony Welstead's 'Dragonflies of the New Forest') I see that they give early June to mid-September as the flight time and Cyril Hammond's 'Dragonflies of Great Britain and Ireland' extends the start to end of May but agrees with mid-September as the end of the flight period, so the date is really not so surprising given the weather we have been enjoying. Reading about this dragonfly and its unique extended ovipositor (which enables it, by stabbing its long body and extended tip vertically downwards into the water while the wings are still out of the water to support and guide the body, to secure its eggs in the stream bed so that they will not be washed away) I noticed for the first time Dan Powell's highly appropriate description of this egg-laying action as 'pogoing' (the dragonfly jerking up and down like a child on a pogo stick).

Today's only report of butterflies comes from Mark Litjens taking a lunch break from work at IBM Hursley to walk round the local lanes. Mark saw seven species including a Painted Lady and a male Brimstone which looked very fresh for the time of year (could it have been disturbed from the hibernation site which it chose for itself when it first emerged earlier in the year?) +++

TUE 24 SEP

Today Adrian Hoskins saw both Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady (along with 17 Commas) in Stansted Forest, and then saw another Painted Lady in Havant. While at Stansted he found an Orange Tip pupa attached to the dead stem of a Garlic Mustard plants (where it will have to remain until next April if it is to survive) +++

Also seen today, by Bob Marchant at Hook/Warsash, were four more Clouded Yellows.

MON 23 SEP

My latest batch of messages show that at least ten species of butterfly are still on the wing with Holly Blue the most surprising of them. Richard Carpenter had one at Stubbington south of Fareham today, making me wonder if this was a late summer brood insect or an early third brood that occasionally shows in October. A group of ten fresh Small Coppers seen by Rupert Broadway at Stockbridge Down on Saturday (Sep 21) were almost certainly a third brood of that species, especially as Dave Pearson saw six more at Pagham on Sunday and Richard Carpenter had singles today at two different places. Rupert Broadway also saw a single Common Blue with 20 Meadow Browns on Stockbridge Down, and Dave Pearson had a single Small Tortoiseshell at Pagham (with Clouded Yellow there as well as Large and Small Whites). On Sunday Richard Carpenter also had a single Meadow Brown at Hook/Warsash along with a Red Admiral and 7 Speckled Wood, and today in the Chilling area west of Titchfield Haven he had a Painted Lady as well as another Clouded Yellow +++

Migrant and Southern Hawkers were also seen over the weekend - at least by Lawrence Holloway at Pagham, and I can vouch for Common Darter as well as for the magnificent Volucella zonaria hoverfly which spent some time feeding on our garden Buddleia this morning.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 28 SEP

Lack of rain means that very few fungi are showing but the Havant Wildlife Group found the first Poison Pie and more Common Inkcaps during their morning walk in the Barnetts Copse area of woodland north of Idsworth.

Yesterday a Seal (presumably Common) was in the north east arm of Langstone Harbour in the channel leading to Langstone Bridge during the afternoon high tide - this news comes from John Goodspeed but I am not sure if he saw it himself

FRI 27 SEP

A herd of Fallow Deer that had been confined (for two hundred years or more?) to the grounds of Parham House (a couple of miles east of the Amberley Wild Brooks in the flood plain of the River Arun) had found ways of escaping at least ten years ago and could be seen occasionally in the upper Arun valley - easily distinguished from other wild Fallow by their very dark, almost black, coats. Last Wednesday, on his way to the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve, Lawrence Holloway saw two of these dark coated deer near the roadside in the Rackham area (adjacent to Parham). This colour form was thought to be the result of many generations of interbreeding among the confined herd, and now some deer with this characteristic are free to wander it will be interesting to see if the trait spreads.

MON 23 SEP

Martin Rand has joined the chorus of protest at my branding of Muntjac as evil creatures that will eliminate our British Bluebells before next spring if we do not sign up now to President Bush's scheme for dropping napalm on the woods (in the hope of eliminating the deer and the certainty of eliminating both the woods and their flowers). In fact it seems that the threat that I posited was as untrue as the above phantasy (even if that is the way the 'real world' works) and Martin refers me to a couple of scientific papers on the damage done by Muntjac - both of which conclude that there is no imminent danger to Bluebells. Nonetheless all deer have good appetites and I have no wish to see their numbers increase - I feel certain that Spurge Laurel has become quite a rarity in local woods where Fallow and Roe abound ...

Within the past week three people have told me of seeing Common Lizards - Lawrence Holloway at Pagham Harbour and both Sue Drewett and Andrew Howard in their gardens. In this dry, warm weather I am not surprised at these sightings - in fact what surprises me is how very few sightings there are as I am pretty sure that these creatures are quite abundant. The only evidence I have for this comes from Tony Wilson who sent me the following back in July .. {{ I thought after 6 years doing my 'patch' at Benfield Valley, Hove that I had a good understanding of the wildlife there. However I had a big surprise yesterday (July 6) - it was a warm and sunny afternoon after a dull and damp morning and I was walking along the south side of the well vegetated A27 Brighton Bypass south embankment when I came across a couple of Common Lizards (I occasionally see one or two) so I decided to look for more. To my complete surprise along 1/2 mile of the embankment I found a total of 89 basking on dry grass or on a wooden fence. They varied in size and colour with some large females and a colour range from green/grey, with most grey/brown through to sandy brown and one even seemed to have a tinge of red. Got plenty of photos including one of 5 together on top of each other. I assume that the weather played a part in them all appearing although no doubt I've just missed them before. Also basking with them were 3 Slow Worms and I found a further 18 Slow Worms under various bits of rubbish. In one area where there were some cats it seemed that many of the Lizards had lost their tails. }} I suspect that Tony's observation was not uncommon, which just goes to show how little we do know about the wildlife all around us. +++

Another reptile which I know to be relatively common but which I rarely see is the Adder, and Martin Rand's comments on plant hunting in the New Forest this weekend (see the Plant page for today) mention the finding of several Adders in an unexpected place - well out in a New Forest bog where they would have escaped the notice of all but the foolhardy bog-wallowing botanists.

WEEK 38 SEP 16 - 22

BIRDS:

SUN 22 SEP

Although Siskin breed commonly in the New Forest, and probably elsewhere in inland Hampshire, we in the south east only see them in the winter and spring so it is good to hear that Peter Morrison had up to three of them at Hook near the mouth of the Hamble today. Peter was less certain about a possible Raven which he saw there, but Richard Carpenter (who was also there) saw at least 10 Yellow Wagtail to prove they have not all left us. He also saw a dark phase Arctic Skua, probably the same bird that was seen earlier off Titchfield Haven +++

A lot of birders had a good day at Titchfield Haven today, and among them was a party led by Kevin Stouse making the external circuit of the area. Will Walmsley has given us a summary of most of their sightings which started with a Peregrine over the carpark as they started out and included an estimated 100 or more Chiffchaff and 100+ Common Tern being harrassed by the Arctic Skua which I have already mentioned. Kevin himself was lucky enough to see a Pied Flycatcher and Will was fairly certain about a Roseate Tern which others (including Ian Calderwood who was not with Kevin's party) were sure of. Also on Will's list are a Lesser Whitethroat, a Reed Warbler and a Treecreeper with 3 Kestrel, 2 Buzzard and 2 Sparrowhawk to add to the Peregrine. +++

Within the Haven John Shillitoe saw both Bittern and a female Merlin, and Ian Calderwood had a Hobby. Under gathering clouds late in the afternoon John estimated around 1000 hirundines all in the air at once. +++

Elsewhere in Hampshire Paul Winter saw 10 Avocet in Normandy Lake at Lymington (where 11 Eider were on the sea) and later he saw the Jack Snipe at Lower Test (after hearing that it had been seen last Thursday, Sep 19) +++

Over my own garden here in Havant I was lucky enough to see a Hobby flying due south this morning (last night a Sparrowhawk was 'turning lazy circles in the sky'). Later in the morning I walked around the south of Stansted Forest and found 2 Green Sandpiper on the pond in the nature reserve - permit required from Michael Prior, the head Forester - with several noisy Buzzard and my first Marsh Tit for some time.

Over in Sussex Lawrence Holloway led a party of walkers around Pagham Harbour where he

estimates the Pintail now number over 100. The two best birds there were a juvenile Hen Harrier over the harbour and a Little Owl at Church Norton. Much further east in Sussex a Corncrake was at Coombe Haven (between Bexhill and Hastings).

SAT 21 SEP

Today's best local bird was a Red-necked Grebe on the Milton Lakes at Portsmouth. The anonymous finder videod the bird and passed the news on to us via Ian Thirlwell who says it was an adult with a lot of red still on its throat. Not having seen it I can't argue with this but I do remember being fooled myself when one turned up around this time of year on the IBM Lake many years ago - I felt it had to be an adult because of the red on the neck, then discovered that in most cases the adults will have lost their colour by now whereas juveniles show a lot of it. That bird on the IBM Lake stayed for more than a week and I hope this one does too, though the Milton Lakes may get too much disturbance for its peace of mind. +++

Another bird that may soon be seen in the mouth of Langstone Harbour around the Hayling Ferry not far from the Milton shore is Shag, so it is encouraging to hear that an immature Shag was seen today close in off Selsey Bill - that was seen by Owen Mitchell who also flushed two Woodlark from vegetated shingle there. In the evening Richard Prior saw a single Swift over Selsey Bill among the thousands of hirundines that were on the move south eastward. Most people saw far more Swallows than Martins but an interesting report from the Beachy Head area speaks of an estimated 25,000 hirundines passing in four hours (10am to 2pm) with 65% of them being House Martins (around 16,000 birds) while the other 9,000 were Swallows.

Back in Hampshire Bob Marchant visited Curbridge on the River Hamble and saw an Osprey and four male Madarin. Earlier he had been at Hook/Warsash where a single late Yellow Wagtail was present with 122 Wigeon, 29 Gadwall and 6 Brent. Further west at Pennington John Wines saw 24 Whinchat and (confirming my thoughts about their current scarcity) just one Pied Wagtail. Up at Fleet Pond John Clark noted more than 500 Canada Geese with 15 Greylag (at the Vyne Floods north of Basingstoke on Sunday Sep 22 Martin Pitt had 224 Canadas with 3 Bar-heads and a leucistic Greylag). +++

Here in Langstone Harbour the Havant Wildlife Group were at the Hayling Oysterbeds and Heather Mills tells me they saw a lot of Ringed Plover with just one Turnstone. 15 Great Crested Grebe were on the water and both Kestrel and Sparrowhawk were seen with one or more Wheatear.

Recent news from Sussex for Sep 19 includes a report of four Corn Bunting at Ditchling Beacon on the downs just north of Brighton and this sent me to check when these rarities had last been mentioned by anyone. John Shillitoe has had none in their Hambledon/Chidden stronghold in the past couple of months, but there was a report of up to 15 on the Sussex downs behind Hove on Sep 1, none were mentioned in August and the only one in July was a singleton at Whale Chine on the Isle of Wight on July 12. +++

To raise the hopes of Purple Sandpiper enthusiasts one was at Rye Harbour on Sep 19 (and has been there I think since Sep 15) while a couple of Rock Pipits there also give hope of these along the Hampshire coast soon. Going back to Sunday Sep 15 there was a report of an American Golden Plover at Rye, and in the previous week a Puffin had been on the sea and a late Wryneck had been at Winchelsea.

FRI 20 SEP

Today, according to Bob Chapman, is the actual anniversary of something (unspecified) which happened in 1962 in connection with Farlington Marshes. I think this event was the establishment, by Portsmouth City Council, of Farlington Marshes as a Local Nature Reserve, when the Hampshire and Isle of Wight Naturalist's Trust (founded in the previous year) was given the job of managing it. I think those facts are correct, though I have in the back of my mind an idea that LNR status, and the appointment of an official warden (Dave Billett) came some time later. What seems sad about this anniversary, and last year's anniversary of the founding of the Trust, is that nowhere has the story of what actually happened 40 years ago been properly recorded - all that has been done is to use the fact that there was some sort of anniversary as a peg on which to hang a marketing campaign - the founding of the Trust was celebrated by a beer festival, that of Farlington Marshes by a Sponsored Walk for which the advertising bore no relation to any known wildlife. +++

The only book which I know which might have recorded the details of the founding of the Trust is "The nature of Hampshire and the Isle of Wight", published in 1986, but I cannot find the story there and "Birds of Hampshire" is the only publication to give us some of the background - how a group of local people got together to become the "Portsmouth Group" which greatly influenced Portsmouth City, through Freddie Emery-Wallis (then leader of the Council), to set-aside the Farlington Marshes area rather than building on it, and the group also played a major role in bringing into existence what is now the Hampshire Wildlife Trust. It seems a great pity to me that members of that original Portsmouth Group were not mentioned or involved in the anniversary celebrations - how many people now even know of their existence, or of how Dave Billett very nearly gave his life for the cause when one of the 'marsh cowboys' shot him in the chest and left him to bleed to death (only rescued in the nick of time by his wife Rosemary who went to search for him when he failed to meet her at the expected time). +++

Thank goodness for Bob Chapman who has celebrated today's event by walking around the marshes and sharing his thoughts on its present wildlife with us. I hope he will not mind if I quote him in full, as follows +++

{{ Today (20th) is Farlington Marshes 40th birthday! To celebrate I walked round the reserve this morning and saw 70 species. It is interesting to note what changes there have been since the reserve was set up in the species that would be seen on such a walk. +++

I saw at least 65 Little Egrets, surely no-one then could have predicted that. Also an Osprey (although 2 were present), another very rare bird then. I also heard at least 6 Cetti's Warblers and saw a group of Bearded Tits. Cetti's was only just recorded for Britain at that time and Bearded Tit was very rarely seen in Hampshire. Out in the Harbour over 1300 Wigeon and 157 Brent were floating near Little Binness. The Wigeon are both more numerous and closer now that shooting pressure is much reduced. Brent Geese were still quite scarce and certainly did not arrive so early. Out on the fields a male Merlin and a female Sparrowhawk would both have been much rarer sights then than now, the early sixties being the nadir of their DDT reduced populations. +++

All is not positive and many species have declined or disappeared. The prospect of seeing Gull Bunting now is zero but then they visited the marsh from their breeding sites on Portsdown Hill. Many seed-eaters such as Linnet, House Sparrow and Yellowhammer were much commoner then. Turtle Doves bred in the Bushes and would have been frequent on passage. +++

Some changes are a direct result of the creation of the reserve. All the wildfowl and waders are much more approachable now that casual disturbance and shooting is largely controlled. This results in many species regularly using the reserve that rarely if ever did so in the past. Habitat management has also helped with the reedbed having developed since cattle were excluded. +++

Who knows, or could guess what might be seen in another forty years ... +++

On a more general note there has been a big arrival of wildfowl over the past week with the first Brent on Saturday 14th and a big increase in Wigeon to about 1350 and Pintail have increased to 50. +++

Wader passage is not very evident with up to 5 Curlew Sandpipers and 8 Spotted Redshank. +++ Small bird passage has been rather slight apart from a brisk movement of Swallows and a few Martins this morning. Other small birds have included the usual Whinchats, Wheatears and the odd Redstart. +++

The Black-necked Grebes are now six in number, as usual in Chalkdock Lake at high tide.

Ospreys have been present all week with two and sometimes three seen every day. }}

Others who have been out today (and those like myself just looking up from my garden) have all remarked on the eastward passage of Swallows (with relatively few House Martins and virtually no Sand Martins) for an hour or so in the morning. Over on the Isle of Wight an estimated 3500 hirundines went over West High Down; at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter estimated 500 Swallows passing; at Stokes Bay Ian Calderwood estimated a count of 400 (with just 3 Sand Martins) and Trevor Carpenter had slightly fewer going over Hook/Warsash when he was there (he counted 284 Swallows between 08:30 and 09:05, when the stream ceased abruptly so that when Bob Marchant arrived at 09:15 to spend a full three hours there he recorded no hirundines at all). +++

The hirundines were by no means the only birds on the move. Meadow Pipits (1400 over West High Down and at least 100 at Hook) were relatively easy to recognise by their feeble flight and distinctive calls, but there were other passerines flying low (and no doubt many thousands of other birds flying too high to notice or completing their journeys in the darkness overnight). The one species that stood out for Richard Carpenter was Skylark - only a small number but distinctly on the move (and as their passage builds up it will probably provoke our resident Skylarks into song as they defend their home ground against these invading airborne 'travellers'.) Two species that have not yet had a mention this autumn as migrants are the Woodpigeons and Jays that will soon be pouring out of Europe when the weather changes - though maybe there will be fewer Jays this year as they should have plenty of food at home (here the beechmast crop and other fruits are in plentiful supply, and I have seen very few of the knopper galls which make the acorns unsuited to the taste of the Jays). +++

Another view of birds on the move comes from Will Walmsley at Shedfield in the Meon Valley (west of Wickham) who writes {{ I wouldn't really consider the airspace over my garden, in Shedfield, a regular flyway for birds, not like the Alver Valley anyway (what happened to Lee by the way?), but this evening there seemed to be something flying over everytime I looked up. +++

Best birds were 1 Greenshank (flew south, fantastic record!!), 5 Yellow Wagtail (flew south), 2 Grey Wagtail (flew east), 1 Mandarin (male north-east), and 103 Black-headed Gull (all south, including a flock of 87) }} +++

If anyone does have any news of Lee Marshall of Rowner, Gosport, please let us know - he communicated with many people including myself almost daily up to 7 June this year, then vanished without trace. I only hope this was not the result of some sudden illness or other catastrophe, and I think many people share my concern and wish him well.

Richard Carpenter personally saw a Bittern in flight at Titchfield Haven today, but there is still no confirmation of the continuing presence of the second of the two Bitterns which were said to have arrived on Sep 15. The presence of the male Marsh Harrier is much less disputable and it was seen again today, as were two Ruff and the first substantial flock of 37 Brent at this site. Richard's personal sightings included the single Little Stint, more than 10 Bearded Tits, a Greenshank and the regular Barn Owl which was flying both early and late in the day. Passerine migrants included a Lesser Whitethroat and four Blackcaps. When at the Haven yesterday Richard noted the presence of 11 Snipe and 122 Lapwing, so perhaps more are reaching the coast now (the last Lapwing count from the Haven was of 73 on Sep 13)

My own observations today were made while walking from Langstone to Broadmarsh, then back into Havant via Bedhampton Mill. On Budds Farm pools the Shoveler numbered at least 15, and the pools are clearly attractive to them and to the Little Grebes, but not much else other than the passing Swallows. At Bedhampton Mill I was surprised to see a pair of Swans with three cygnets on the pool - normally they breed there each year but this spring I never saw them, though this return seems to show that they did succeed in breeding there. The sight of them also made me wonder about the origin of three other cygnets in the Hermitage Stream above Harts Farm Way - could these be the missing cygnets from Langstone Pond (four have disappeared from there in the past fortnight) or are they a remnant of the seven cygnets which suddenly appeared at Broadmarsh slipway on June 24 and which later vanished (I never knew where their nest was - perhaps on North Binness island?). While at Bedhampton I several times heard, but never saw, Kingfisher on the stream where it runs parallel to the mill pool, and over the water works I met with a Sparrowhawk trying to hunt but being shadowed by some 50 Starlings who were giving the game away.

THU 19 SEP

Today's unusual birds were a couple of Ring Ouzels at Culver Down on the Isle of Wight - the male showing well on a hawthorn tree - and at the top of Southampton Water Paul Winter heard of both Jack Snipe and Caspian Gull being seen. The continuing build up of Wigeon numbers was reflected at both Cams Bay (where Trevor Carpenter saw 130) and at Hook/Warsash (where Bob Marchant counted 150), and I see that John Shillitoe was still able to find 5 Yellow Wagtail in pony fields at Hundred Acres, east of Wickham in the Meon Valley.

Although House Sparrow numbers have undoubtedly diminished here in Hampshire they are still

a daily sight and sound for most of us, so it is interesting to hear from Ed Griffiths of his recent holiday in Northumbria. He writes {{ On holiday in Northumbria I was struck with the huge numbers of House Sparrows and Swallows there in comparison to Southern England - every house, barn or farm over the whole county seemed to have a flock of 10-20 of each and swallow nests were evident in several villages and the odd church porch. Northumbria is quite rural, but I'm not sure I could detect a difference between these sparrow infested spots and parts of Bucks or Hants I know with similar 'farmscapes'... }} Like Ed, I realise that the factors involved in the decline of these species may be many, complex, and not obvious, but I would like to suggest that one small factor in their demise is that very few of us now keep chickens in our back gardens. Many tons of special bird food goes into special containers, but we no longer scatter corn over the ground for the chickens - what I am trying to say is that the modern way of living has become too sanitised for our own good (look at the statistics for asthma) or for the wildlife that used to benefit from an untidy (and sometime unhygienic) human life style. Just one example of what I mean concerns the scraps from our dinner plates - nowadays in most households any left overs go straight from the plate into a waste bin and thence to a landfill site where they will generate methane but provide food only for the most reckless of gulls, crows, and rats who manage to grab a bite before the food vanishes into the ground. In our household left-overs are a rarity, but what is rejected by us goes onto an open 'compost heap' where any creature who wants to share it can do so before it has become rotten and poisonous to them - and in the absence of chickens I still go out each morning and scatter wild bird seed on our driveway near the bushes which shelter a few remaining House Sparrows.

Recent news from John Goodspeed is of an Avocet which he saw feeding in the mouth of the Hermitage stream at Broadmarsh last Monday afternoon (Sep 16). On the same day he noted a Kingfisher near the mouth of the Langbrook stream (east side of Langstone South Moors) where I had seen one on Sep 10 +++

Also on Sep 16 a Fieldfare was seen at Beachy Head, three days later than Glyn Horacek-Davis heard one fly over his Southampton garden on Sep 13. Also from Sussex comes an indication of Hobbies on the move southwards - that is how I interpret the presence of 5 at Rye Harbour yesterday (Sep 18) +++

Going back to last Saturday (Sep 14) it seems that that is the definitive date for the arrival of the first Brent in Hampshire, with reports of them both in Langstone Harbour and at Titchfield Haven, showing that some managed to escape detection at Dungeness on that day - they only saw two there but four arrived at Titchfield Haven! +++

Finally for today some even earlier news from Titchfield Haven - on Sep 7 they not only had a Cuckoo there but recorded a count of 440 Yellow Wagtails coming to roost that evening.

WED 18 SEP

By now it is quite clear that the Brent have begun to arrive along the south coast. The earliest report of them I have seen so far is of two flying west past Dungeness last Saturday (Sep 14) with 19 passing that checkpoint on Sep 16 and 28 on Sep 17. In Sussex another 20 flew past Selsey Bill on Sep 15, and it now seems even more likely that the 5 Brent seen by Matt Lawes in Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 15 were the first in Hampshire. Sep 17 not only saw 12 in Langstone Harbour (see yesterday's notes) but 4 more were at Ryde on the Isle of Wight, and today there are reports of 7 at Hook/Warsash and 19 in Portsmouth Harbour (off Pewit Island close to Fareham Creek).

A much more unusual migrant was a single Quail found this morning by David Thelwell in the Abbotswood area immediately north of Romsey (abutting the Cupernham part of the town), and another elusive bird was glimpsed at Titchfield Haven - a Bittern making a brief flight, presumably one of the two reported to have arrived at the Haven on Sep 15. Easier to see than Quail or Bittern is Golden Plover, and while there have been occasional reports of them since 2 appeared at Beachy Head on Aug 26 (3 more at Pagham north walls on Aug 28) today's messages bring news of at least one in Hampshire at Lymington (Normandy), and another (possibly the same bird) across the water at Newtown in the Isle of Wight. These are presumably newcomers as the three in Pagham Harbour were still there (in White's Creek) on Sep 16 +++

Other items in today's news include a single Sanderling at the Lymington marshes (Normandy)

with 17 Knot, 4 Ruff, 4 Curlew Sandpiper and a Whimbrel (plus an increase in the number of Wheatear there - 10 today, well outnumbering 4 Whinchat). The other Golden Plover seen at Newtown was with more than 10 Sandwich and 1 Common Tern, 9 Pintail, 5 juvenile Shelduck and 4 Spotted Flycatchers. +++

At Titchfield Haven the highlights were more than 14 Snipe and 4 Green Sandpiper plus the single Ruff and Little Stint, with reports of the Marsh Harrier still present. The 7 Brent at Hook were accompanied by 115 Wigeon, and on Hazeley Heath in the north of Hampshire 2 newly arrived Dartford Warblers were seen.

Shooting is not something which I normally take an interest in but three items that recently came to my attention may be of interest to others. Closest to home is news from Mike Collins of youths with air-rifles taking pot shots at birds on the Budds Farm Pools - be warned if you visit there. Secondly I hear that the regular organised shoots at Woolmer Pond (which I think in themselves are not new but have just restarted when the shooting season began on Sep 1) have this month been eliminating a good number of Canada Geese - unusual in that while they are a lawful prey species most wildfowlers ignore them since shooting them takes no skill. The third item is an interesting anomaly in our regulation-riddled society - there is a list of official prey species which includes both 'sport' and 'pest' species, and it has been pointed out that the House Sparrow (now regarded by the conservation bodies as a severely declining species and - because it is one of the birds which everyone can recognise - almost as good a fund raiser as the Skylark or Nightingale) is on the 'pest' list. So while the conservationists are passing round the hat to collect funds to save the Sparrow the government still lists it as a pest which anyone can kill at will. (But at least both geese and sparrows will have a couple of days of extra life this weekend when all the gunmen are marching on London - now if they could shoot half the population of the world without taking out anyone we know or care about they really would be doing wildlife conservation a service - you see why I normally avoid discussing this subject)

TUE 17 SEP

A phone call from Alistair Martin in the early evening gave me more or less certain news that the first Brent had arrived back in Langstone Harbour. Alistair had been on the Hayling Coastal path near the area which I call, for want of any official name, the 'mid-way saltings' which lie close to the Hayling shore off the big West Lane fields, just north of the Saltmarsh Lane area and, at around 6pm when the tide was starting to rise, he had seen a group of 12 Brent avidly feeding in the water closest to him. The date is right, the easterly wind is right, and as there were only six summering Brent in Langstone harbour a count of 12 summering birds would need some to have flown round from Chichester Harbour (where there are in most recent years at least 14 summering birds in the Cobnor Point/Thorney channel but I have not heard of them this year - the only mention of summering Brent in that harbour which has come to my attention is a count of 5 seen in the Fishbourne Channel by Kevin Stouse on Apr 29). +++

Assuming these Brent were migrants they may not be the first to return as I think the 5 seen by Matt Lawes at Cams Bay in Portsmouth Harbour on Sep 15 were probably migrants, though in an unusual place. In connection with that sighting I said that there had been no reports of more than three summering Brent on the Gosport/Titchfield/Hook shore this year, but I see that there was a group of 5 at Hook on Apr 23 (which I assumed at the time were late departing birds but may have stayed as two groups of 2 and 3)

The average departure date for the last Little Ringed Plover to leave Hampshire is Sep 18, so one seen at the Lymington marshes today by Paul Winter was probably one of the last to be seen this year, but hopefully the 9 Yellow Wagtail which Doug Munts saw there today were not - their equivalent average departure date is not until Oct 20 (though I fear the big flocks which we have been enjoying recently have already gone). Other summer birds whose numbers are diminishing, but still to be seen today, included Sandwich Terns at Bembridge on the Isle of Wight and a Hobby at West Dean north of Chichester. 2 more Rock Pipits had arrived at Bembridge as they disperse locally to winter quarters, and a report of 27 Pied Wagtail at Ryde on the Isle of Wight reminds me how few of these 'very common' birds seem to be about at present. +++

Yesterday's sightings (Sep 16) came from Lawrence Holloway, who watched House Martins feeding young in the nest at North Bersted (a northern district of Bognor) and heard Dartford

Warbler song near Halsey's Farm in the lowlands north of Pagham Harbour +++

On Sunday (Sep 15) a probable Cory's Shearwater was recorded at Selsey Bill, and the White Stork seen at Cuckmere Haven (which got a mention in yesterday's notes) could have been the one from Goodwood as Mike Collins tells us that he believes that bird left the area on Sep 10, but it may have stayed in the vicinity as one was seen going east along the coast at Felpham (just east of Bognor) around 10am on Sep 15 and could have got to Cuckmere in about 3 hours (it was seen at Cuckmere at 13:30, eventually heading north west).

MON 16 SEP

John Shillitoe, back in Hampshire after a holiday in Spain and enjoying the new experience of retirement from work, was out on his bike today following a regular route around the east of the Meon valley between Wickham and Hambledon. At Hipley, west of Denmead, he watched some 300 House Martins fly up from behind a hedge, suggesting that a migrant flock had spent the night there and were just resuming their journey as the sun began to warm them, but I am puzzled as to where they might have been roosting - they would normally choose somewhere resembling a cliff-face where they can cling to a vertical surface high enough to be safe from ground predators, or they might re-use old nests as Mike Jones at Longstock by the River Test saw last night. Mike says ... {{ After a day with hardly any Martins around the house, at 7-05 Sunday evening aprox 40 -60 appeared looking to roost in empty nests. I counted 13 into a bank of three old nests and seven into a bank of two. }} +++

When John got to Hoe Cross, just west of Hambledon, he began to see parties of Whinchat, and by the time he had cycled north to the foot of the hill ridge running east from Old Winchester Hill, and then turned south to reach Soberton, he had seen a minimum of 28 Whinchat at four different sites spread over 7 or 8 kilometres of country roads. John Clark, our Hampshire Bird Recorder, comments that this is the highest count of Whinchats ever recorded in inland Hampshire, as distinct from the large numbers that sometimes build up at coastal sites - Birds of Hampshire tells us that both Farlington and Lymington marshes each reached a maximum count of 40 in the 1980s, and there were 38 at Farlington on 29 Aug 2000, but the average autumn day count at Farlington is likely to be below John's total. The question now is, where are these birds heading for on the coast, and will they set a new overall record when they get there and are added to those already present.

Last Saturday evening (Sep 14) I noted a 'lost looking' Kingfisher flying low over the sea off Langstone Mill Pond and flying ashore into farm fields at dusk. Today John Chapman found one back on a regular winter perch above the Lymbourne stream channel where it flows into the harbour between the Royal Oak pub and the Old Mill, and I guess this is the same bird that I saw and which has now had time to take its bearings and settle down to a winter routine which includes feeding from this exposed perch at certain states of the tide (apparently as oblivious of many people coming and going around the pub within 20 yards of where it is perched as they are of it) and at other times retreating to the privacy and cover of the Lymbourne stream within the ground owned by the Mill. +++

I was also around Langstone Mill at dusk this evening, seeing the two Swans on the pond without their cygnets and hearing the Cetti's Warbler shout just once. I happened to be there at the peak time for arrival of the Egrets coming into the Wade Court roost and obtained a much better idea of their numbers - the minimum this time was 56 and that is almost certainly an underestimate for a total of over 60. I also noticed that Teal numbers are now high again here as they are elsewhere - my estimate for them was of at least 60 birds feeding in the shallow water of the harbour and flighting into the Mill Pond where they probably spend the night. +++

Still in the Havant area it seems that the Red-backed Shrike which Tim Lawman found at Sandy Point on Hayling last Friday is still there today and showing well. Alistair Martin saw it yesterday and Graham Osborne saw it today, along with three Whinchat at the Hayling Oysterbeds. At Farlington Marshes Graham found 3 Curlew Sandpiper in the stream with 6 Greenshank, and heard 2 Cetti's Warblers in the reeds (no one has mentioned Bearded Tits recently but we must be coming up to the time at which these birds make their brave long distance flight as this year's young seek out new homes - it must for them be a bit like the young people of a dying and over-populated planet earth being put into space-craft and sent off to find new homes on distant planets 'somewhere out there') +++

Graham also called in at Old Winchester Hill where a flock of over 100 Goldfinch and some Linnets was a more pleasant sight than that of 14 newly released for shooting Red-legged Partridge. On Saturday (Sep 14) Adrian Martin at Farley Mount to the west of Winchester also noted more than 30 of these Partridge cowering behind a hedge and on Sep 8 someone else noted 9 of them on the Isle of Wight at Culver Down. This should be a good week ahead for seeing these partridge while those who shoot them are away in London preparing for their weekend march.

On the subject of death and the emotions which it inspires I must quote verbatim a note from Keith Vokes on the subject of House Sparrows. He writes {{ 'New Scientist' (31st Aug 02) had an article on a viral disease that is killing off sparrows & starlings in Scotland. Apparently the disease affects the brain resulting in inability to fly and disorientation. The scientist in the article found evidence of Salmonella bacteria in two thirds of the dead spawwows examined.}} I like the emoting expressed by the trembling lips pronouncing the word 'Spawwows' at the end of this sentence.

Wigeon continue to pour into and through Hampshire Yesterday John Clark had 308 on the Blashford Lakes while Trevor Carpenter found 238 at Cams Bay - both record site counts for the time of year. While a lot of these birds may settle in Hampshire for the winter I suspect many are just moving through - Trevor points out that since he found 84 at Cams Bay on Sept 7 he has not seen more than a couple of them until today, and this 'moving on' brought 42 onto Richard Carpenter's garden bird list as they flew over Hill Head going west today. Richard's garden list also benefitted today from both Buzzard and Hobby overhead. +++

When Trevor Carpenter was at Hook/Warsash today he not surprsingly found the Wigeon count there was up to 92 but he also recorded only 1 Yellow Wagtail - I hope that is not a sign that they have begun to leave us after their south coast autumn holiday. Other birds one the move were 15 Meadow Pipits, 60 Swallows and 740 House Martins (the proportions again may be a sign that Swallow passage is drying up and the House Martins - which often stay on well into October - are already leaving in a big way). Moving upstream to the Bunny Meadows Trevor found at least one of the Curlew Sandpiper still there with 8 Greenshank and 84 Black-tailed Godwit plus 7 Egrets - has anyone had a go yet at counting Egrets roosting at Badnam Creek?

Miscellaneous news for today includes 56 Sanderling on Ryde Sands, Isle of Wight; 2 Ravens and 10 Knot at Pennington; a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker with 15 Crossbills at Slufers in the New Forest; and the autumn farmland sight of over 400 Lesser Blackback Gulls at Wootton St Lawrence west of Basingstoke.

Yesterday (Sep 15) brought news of a White Stork seen by an SOS outing party at Cuckmere Haven (near Beachy Head) where the Wigeon count was over 100 but Yellow Wagtail were few. Here in Hampshire Robert Watson could only find 1 Yellow Wagtail on the Lymington Marshes (the majority do seem to have left) but, as everywhere, Whinchat numbers were good with over 7 seen by Robert, along with 17 Eider offshore, 9 Knot, 8 Wheatear, 4 Kingfisher and 1 Common Sandpiper.

Further news for yesterday (Sep 15) starts with the discovery, by Mike Jones on Stockbridge Down, of a Yellowhammer still feeding young in the nest - possibly a third brood for this year? If so I hope that goes some way towards making up the numbers of this species. +++

Another unusual observation for the time of year comes from Andrew Howard at Petworth where he saw and heard a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on the bird's favourite Cedar tree. The only worry here is that the tree is in a disused cemetery and too much noise just might wake the dead... On a more serious note Andrew has been experimenting with his bird feeding, and discovered that the tits which come to his bird table and take sunflower seeds need help when it comes to eating peanuts. When he puts peanuts on the flat table the tits ignore them, but when he hangs them from a tree in a peanut feeder they are taken avidly. I assume this to be because the nuts are too large for the birds to swallow whole and when they are on a flat surface they roll away when the birds peck at them, but not when they are held firm in the feeder. Are there other reasons?

While Will Walmsley was playing Sunday afternoon cricket for his home village side (Shedfield) on their opponents ground at East Meon he saw 1 Red Kite, 2 Crossbills, 1 Hobby, 2 Grey Wagtails and 30 Linnets. Adrian Martin also had some colourful birds, the more so for their

setting against a pure blue sky, when he walked by the River Itchen at Brambridge in the morning. There two Hobbies were seen, one having a go at a Buzzard in passing, and two Sparrowhawks went by, one of them taking a Goldfinch from a flock of 50. A Kestrel completed the list of raptors, and the main colour was provided by a Kingfisher and a Grey Wagtail. +++ Yesterday's list of raptors would not be complete without a Peregrine, and this was seen on the coast between Milford and Barton on Sea, where John Wines also noted 10 Stonechat, 2 Whinchat and a Wheatear. Back nearer the Itchen Simon Ingram had a rewarding addition to his daily lists for Lakeside at Eastleigh when a Turtle Dove appeared there, along with 2 Spotted Flycatcher, 2 Tree Pipit, 3 Whinchat, 3 Blackcap and 2 Stonechat. At least 14 Chiffchaff were present, as were 39 Pied Wagtail (I'm glad there are still some in the county!), and the passing hirundines again showed a preponderance of House Martins (100 of them against 30 Swallows and 1 Sand Martin). Lastly for the Sunday sightings Alistair Martin had a single Firecrest in worn plumage in the north east section of Stansted Forest (over the road from Forestside Church - maybe it had been visiting David Parker's garden which is close to this spot) +++

Further sightings for Saturday (Sep 14) included a flock of over 25 Mistle Thrush at Farley Mount near Winchester, with one more Whinchat seen there by Adrian Martin and another four seen by Richard Carpenter on the Meon Canal path at Titchfield Haven (where the number of Yellow Wagtail was also down to just two)

PLANTS:

SUN 22 SEP

A walk around the southern parts of Stansted Forest through some of the conservation areas for which a permit is required from Michael Prior, the head Forester, gave me a good list of flowering plants among which the most surprising to me was Butchers Broom (I don't expect this normally until December). Less encouraging was to find only one plant of Orpine in an area where it has in the past been abundant - at least this plant was in flower. In the Pond Cottage meadow I spent some time puzzling over what I think must have been an odd plant of Bugle. It had just two flowers which were right for Bugle but instead of being erect it was trailing like Ground Ivy (the leaves were wrong for that), and it was excessively hairy on two sides only of the square stem (white, patent, eglandular). Betony and Devils Bit Scabious were flourishing and on my way round I passed two plants of Red Campion.

SAT 21 SEP

The Havant Wildlife Group went to the Hayling Oysterbeds today and Heather Mills tells me they found Restharrow still in flower along with White and Yellow (presumably Ribbed) Melilot. They might have seen more had the earth mound not been so closely shaven again!

FRI 20 SEP

A morning walk around the south west quadrant of the Havant area this morning gave me a list of 114 plants still in flower, suprisingly including the Lathyrus hirsutus on the Broadmarsh mountain - although the plants have wilted and faded I counted at least 40 flowers still showing their bright colour. At the foot of the 'mountain' Chinese Mugwort was covered with buds (it is supposed to flower in October), and in the Bedhampton area I found a good show of Vervain and a great mass of yellow flowers on the streamside Buttonweed. More significantly I at last found banks of ivy in flower - sufficiently for me to pick them out by their rather unpleasant smell before I saw the yellow anthers. A more unexpected bank (or forest) of flowers was seen by the Brockhampton stream where, as the path passes the mountain of pallets in the industrial units, the ground is covered with Guernsey Fleabane. Two other items worth a mention were the sight of both Rustyback and Black Spleenwort ferns covered with spores, and the delicious taste of one ripe Mulberry fruit - the only one that remained within my reach as I passed the ancient tree which overhangs the Wayfarers Way path from within the Portsmouth Water Company land at Bedhampton. +++

Not seen by myself but reported by John Goodspeed (seen by him on Tuesday Sep 17) is the appearance of a good show of flowering Devils Bit Scabious on the south slope of Portsdown east of the big Paulsgrove chalkpit. John says he has not known of this site for the plant before, but I suspect the plant will have been lurking there for a good few years.

On Sept 11 I commented on the wonderful specimens of Field Maple trees at Idsworth, and suggested they might be the tallest in Britain. Alan Mitchell, in the 1979 edition of his Field Guide to the Trees of Britain, gives 26 metres as the height of the tallest of these in Britain, and in an email from David Uren at Old Idsworth Farm which reached me today David tells me that he had the trees measured in 1993 and the height of the two tallest was then 21.6 and 21.9 metres. David goes on to say {{ At the time they were the tallest equal in the Tree Register of the British Isles but I know that taller trees have been found. As field maple go, though they are very much champions. Also of interest is the fact that there are a number of other specimen field maple along the bank - I think that they were grown ornamentally as part of the Idsworth Park - the area all being within the original park. }} That park was associated with the Idsworth House which was taken down brick by brick when in the first half of the 19th century the new London-Portsmouth railway line was built, passing so close to the grounds of the house that the owner, in protest at the noise, took his house down and rebuilt it on the hill above Finchdean (where it still stands). +++

Still on the subject of trees I noticed today in a garden at North Close, off Wade Court Road in east Havant, a single cluster of white flowers on what I had previously thought to be an Indian Bean Tree (*Catalpa bignonioides*) on account of the long, persistent, pods which hang from it. According to Alan Mitchell this must be a Hybrid *Catalpa* which does flower at this time of year, and Mitchell remarks that its brown pods (which can be 40 cm long) are not fertile but are filled with cottonwool!

WED 18 SEP

On Monday (Sep 16) Richard Carpenter was in the Botley Woods, where he found plenty of Devil's Bit Scabious with both Common Centaury and Lesser Skullcap flowering. +++

Cath Cooper, who lives near me in Havant, dropped in today with a plant which had puzzled her as it was a female plant of Annual Mercury covered in prickly-looking fruit capsules and very unlike the abundant male plants which can be seen everywhere with their long feathery upright 'catkins'.

INSECTS:

SAT 21 SEP

Three reports reaching me today show that at least 13 species of butterfly were still on the wing. At Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley Dave Pearson found some 50 Meadow Brown still flying, along with Comma, Red Admiral, and - more suprisingly - not only Silver-spotted Skipper but also Brown Argus and even two Chalkhill Blue. Mike Duffy, at Stockbridge Down, added 1 Holly Blue, 2 Small Copper, 4 Small Heath, and 6 Common Blue and at the Hayling Oysterbeds the Havant Wildlife Group had a Clouded Yellow and Speckled Wood. Large White were seen at the Oysterbeds and Beacon Hill giving the 13 species but I would be very surprised if Small White were not flying as well. +++

In the evening Rob Edmunds had his moth trap on at Fleet, recording 10 different species as the high season for mothing draws to a close - none of these species was new to my yearlist and none were likely to excite the amateur naturalist.

THU 19 SEP

Trevor Carpenter stood motionless in his Fareham garden this afternoon for a full ten minutes, watching a Hummingbird Hawkmoth, just two feet from him, feeding from the tubular flowers of *Abelia grandiflora*, a shrub coming from the Himalayas and hiding highly scented tubular white flowers among its shiny leaves. Trevor says he has only seen this moth once or twice before and adds {{ they are brilliant to watch. }}

Last night (Sep 18) Rob Edmunds in Fleet found two Lunar Underwing in his moth trap and this evening the same species was in Barry Collins trap here in Havant, along with another newcomer to the year's mothlist - The Sallow. Both these species do not fly until August or September. As these moths are not able to mate and lay their eggs until the autumn I suspect they both adopt the strategy described in my caterpillar book for The Sallow - namely, they lay their eggs now but those eggs do not hatch until next spring (I wonder what triggers the hatching? If it is air temperature I would think that with global warming quite a few will hatch long before the spring, and before there are leaves on the Sallow trees for the caterpillars to

eat)

Finally for today some news from abroad - at least as far as the Scilly Isles!. According to Steve Nash's national migrant moth website last Saturday (Sep 14) saw the arrival of an estimated 2000 Diamond-back moths on the islands (there must be a good supply of these moths which have been flooding into Britain since April 22, if not earlier). Another good collection was of 100 Red Admirals feeding on ivy, and also recorded there that day was a single Convolvulus Hawkmoth.

WED 18 SEP

When checking the caterpillar which Nik Knight brought me yesterday (see yesterday's notes), and deciding it was a Poplar Hawkmoth, we also came to the conclusion that most of the Hawkmoths had already finished their eating season and had by now pupated, so it is interesting to hear from Andrew Brookes today of Pine Hawkmoth caterpillar rescued from crushing under the wheels of a car in his neighbour's driveway (I guess yesterday). Even more interesting is that the caterpillar seems to have become very fat on the needles of a Monterey Pine (not one of our native trees and not normally noted for harbouring wildlife - my book says the normal foodplant is Scots Pine or Norway Spruce). Having lived happily in an unusual tree the caterpillar is now safely ensconced among a bed of pine needles in safe captivity where it should remain until next May - though it could emerge earlier in the comfort of captivity. Though only just over half the length of the massive Death's Head Hawkmoth caterpillars (13 cm), the Pine Hawk caterpillar at 8 cm is considerably larger than the 6.5 cm Poplar Hawk, and it (Pine Hawk) seems to have good camouflage in a pine tree - in my illustration it's back is the brown of a pine twig and the varied markings on the sides have the general colour of green needles with a mixture of dead brown ones (the horn is black and roughened).

TUE 17 SEP

Nik Knight (who runs the award winning Biology department at Portsmouth Grammar School) called at my house this evening on his way home, bearing a small glass tank with soil in the bottom, from which he produced a Poplar Hawkmoth caterpillar that had been found by someone else in the grounds (if not in the building) of Portsmouth Anglican cathedral. Having agreed on its identity Nik took it away to allow it to pupate in peace, but not before he had told me of a reported sighting of what was almost certainly a Hummingbird Hawkmoth in that same area last Thursday, co-inciding with the arrival of a wave of these migrants on Sep 11 and Dave Unsworth's sighting of one at Bishopstoke, Eastleigh, on Sep 13 +++

Following hard on the heels of that news today's messages contain one from Andrew Howard at another school (St Bede's) in Redhill, Surrey where Andrew himself today watched yet another Hummingbird Hawkmoth just outside his school office window. While on the subject of moths Alan Dawson has sent me a new entry for my yearlist, a Cypress Pug which came to his Southampton trap this evening at the end of its flight time (June to September) having apparently escaped attention from other moth-trappers during the summer. Interestingly this species is listed as relying on Monterey cypress as its larval foodplant.

Coming back to butterflies there is now clearly a widespread emergence of both Commas, which delight in the abundance of ripe blackberries, and Red Admirals which go for fallen apples. The other two common autumn butterflies - Speckled Wood and Small Copper - are also being widely reported but I think I detect a falling off in the number of Clouded Yellows and Painted Ladies. Having said that I know that there is often a strong surge of Clouded Yellows apparently trying to make a southward migration on sunny days in October, and I hope they do not let us down this year. Last Sunday an estimated 15 Clouded Yellows were seen at Cuckmere Haven in East Sussex (with at least two more at nearby Birling Gap), but I have heard of none since then, though Heather Mills had one here in Havant (Brockhampton) in the previous week - no Painted Ladies at all are mentioned in this week's sightings since the single dwarf specimen at Stansted on Monday (Sep 16). Other species still on the wing, excluding the Whites, are represented by one Small Tortoiseshell (seen at West Dean north of Chichester today by Lawrence Holloway) and one Brimstone seen by Richard Carpenter in Botley Woods on Sep 16. +++

Several Hoverfly species are still on the wing though I am unable to name the moderate sized ones that I saw twice today, both apparently drinking water (one at the bird table when I was

putting food out before breakfast and another which was at the kitchen sink plug-hole at midday - both were probably the common *Syrphus ribesii* that may still be around in November).

Richard Carpenter is clearly a lot better at identifying them and he names four species seen recently - on Sep 14 he had *Volucella bombylans* (looking like a bumble bee) in his garden at Hill Head and then saw *Helophilus trivittatus* by the Meon Canal at Titchfield Haven, and in the Botley Woods yesterday (Sep 16) he encountered both *Sericomyia silentis* and *Helophilus pendulus* (from my limited information it seems you can pick out *Helophilus* species by the yellow thorax with black longitudinal stripes which the other genera do not have). +++

Coming to dragonflies there is as yet no shortage of Migrant Hawkers and Common Darters but not much else so Tony Wilson was lucky to get very close views of a Red-veined Darter when he was at Birling Gap (Beachy Head) on Sunday (Sep 15). Tony says he is 100% certain of this one and adds {{ I even got the pale stripes down the legs as well as the pale pterostigma, blue eyes and orange veins in the wings.}} This sighting (which has already been mentioned anonymously in my notes for last Sunday) makes Tony the more certain that the Darter which he saw on the Downs behind Hove on Sep 5 was also a genuine Red-veined.

Finally for today another mention of caterpillars - last Saturday (Sep 14) Pete Irvine found a couple of full grown Buff Tip caterpillars feeding on Birch Saplings at Witley Common in Surrey. It seems that these caterpillars are gregarious for most of their life and will often (like the dreaded Brown Tails) strip the foliage from a whole branch of a deciduous tree. They only split up when they are about to pupate, and this ties in with Pete's find of just two at this time of year when they would be quite large (6cm) and look somewhat like an overgrown Large White caterpillar (yellowish with black blotches). When much younger, with many of them feeding together on one leaf, I think they may have a co-ordinated display to ward off any predator - all waving their tails in the air at the same time to make it seem they are a single large creature too big to be eaten by a small bird (please put me right if this behaviour belongs to a different species!)

MON 16 SEP

From the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website I see we have a new enthusiast for Stansted Forest called Adrian Hoskins who spent three hours in the Forest today, seeing 8 different butterfly species still on the wing. He was particularly impressed by 28 newly emerged Commas nectaring on bramble and also found a very pretty fresh Small Copper and an unusual, small sized Painted Lady. 16 Speckled Wood were no surprise but a late Common Blue male was a good find, and there was a surprise in that no Meadow Browns were seen. Other butterflies still on the wing today include a Brimstone, seen by Richard Carpenter in Botley Woods, and a Clouded Yellow, seen at Sandy Point on Hayling Island by Graham Osborne. The only Meadow Browns of the weekend were one on the Isle of Wight seen by Ian Pratt at Newtown on Saturday (Sep 14), and one seen by me on Hayling yesterday (Sep 15).

Latest additions to the national Migrant Moth website are an Oleander Hawkmoth in the Shetlands and several sightings of the delightfully named Dewick's *Plusia* (*Macdunnoughia confusa*) but the prize item (if confirmed by inspection of its genitalia - a process also required in the appointment of each new Pope) would be a moth found at Spurn Head in Yorkshire on Sep 11 after easterly gales had brought in many migrant birds. This moth is thought to be an asiatic relative of the British species Oak Nycteoline (whose absence from Yorkshire helps to confirm the claim for this moth to be a vagrant) and its presumed name is *Nycteola asiatica*.

Coming back to local matters Richard Carpenter today recorded two interesting hoverflies in Botley Woods - *Sericomyia silentis* and *Helophilus pendulus* - and on Saturday (Sep 14) he had two more species in the Hill Head area - *Volucella bombylans* (two of them) and *Helophilus trivittatus*. While walking by the Meon Canal that day he came across a variation of the big orb web spiders that have recently been at their best - this was *Araneus marmoreus* var *pyramidatus* which looks like the commoner *Araneus quadratus* after some has pushed a custard pie is its face (or in this case on top of its abdomen).

Finally Dave Unsworth's luck was in on Friday the 13th when a Hummingbird Hawkmoth turned up in his Bishopstoke garden in the Itchen valley and fed on Jasmine. A couple of days before that (Sep 11) I had noted eight reports of these moths scattered over the British Isles as a wave of migrants arrived but the nearest of these to Hampshire was at Durlston in Dorset, so I am glad

we got at least one of this wave though I have heard of 8 others in Hampshire earlier this year, and (though not in Hampshire) there was a carefully observed record of one hibernating at Plymouth railway station last winter (seen there on Nov 9 and Feb 7). The first Hampshire one for the year was in Winchester on Mar 7 (when a mini-invasion of migrant moths of many species was noted all along the south coast). Still in Winchester Brian Fletcher saw one on Mar 24 and another on Apr 5, while Philip Hack had one at Nursling, Southampton, on Mar 27. The next wave came in June when one was at Whiteley Pastures (Botley Woods) on June 22 and Sarah Patton (the Pagham Harbour warden) saw one when visiting Hayling Island on June 24. In July I found myself cycling alongside one at the Hayling Oysterbeds on July 16 and another was at Warsash on Aug 6 (missing out one seen by Graham Roberts in Chichester on July 23). All in all a good year for them, and not one newspaper published a photo to 'prove' that someone had actually seen a Humming Bird (not a moth).

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 22 SEP

Coming out of the Stansted Forest carpark into the main avenue I immediately saw a big display of coprinus toadstools beside the path (seemingly on wood chippings) and I think these were *C. lagopus* though the largest were 10cm high with a 6cm cap. Later I saw my first Common Inkcaps and found a good cluster of Brickcaps (the caps were exactly the colour of old fashioned bricks) +++

Towards the end of my walk I crossed the road leading to the garden centre at the point where, as you drive in, a bridle way goes off to the left and opposite it is a notice requesting riders to keep close to the road. Should you stop here and look at the ground around the base of this notice you will find it riddled with many Badger latrine holes filled with blackberry rich faeces...

FRI 20 SEP

Walking across the Langstone South Moors today I found my first two small Field Mushrooms, and coming back into Havant I noticed a large *Ganoderma* type bracket at the foot of one of the massive Alder trees that overhang the Homewell spring stream as it follows the footpath connecting South Street to Park Road South near the Dolphin pub. The bright white of the underside, and the way it forms a white rim around the outside edge of the top surface, suggests *G. applanatum* (Artist's Fungus) but I would like an expert opinion before I name it!

THU 19 SEP

Somewhere in the past I was told that the main reason for not welcoming Muntjac into the British countryside was that these small deer had the capacity to destroy one of southern England's greatest glories - the bluebell, which is not only a delight to see in spring woodland but is a plant which we in Britain are the custodians of for the world's benefit (in no other country is it a common plant as it is in Britain). Today Ed Griffiths takes up this opinion of mine and casts doubt on it, saying {{ From my experience up here in the Chilterns, where Muntjac are very common, I can re-assure you they don't seem to have any effect on our equally widespread bluebell displays... I did have one which rested up for a week in the mature hedge not 10 ft from my front window, and could in fact be observed eating bluebells when looking from the bedroom window (apparently bluebells in a hedgerow bottom in the Chilterns is a sign that the original field was cleared from woodland....). }} +++

As I don't have any personal knowledge of the subject I can't express an opinion either way, except to add that I understood the threat to come, not from munching the flowers and leaves, but from the deer using their tusks to dig up the bulbs during the winter, when other food is scarce, and I can see that if the numbers of Muntjac continue to rise and a colony of them takes residence in a bluebell wood, they could in the long term have a severe impact on the stock of bluebells. Does anyone have an opinion on this matter based on fact rather than guesswork or casual observation?

MON 16 SEP

The Brook Meadow Conservation Group recently had a training day on what to look for in the way of evidence that Water Voles are present, with Clare Bishop of Hampshire Wildlife Trust passing on her knowledge of the subject (but despite all the Health and Safety and Risk Assessment palaver that nowadays accompanies any physical activity one lady did manage to

fall into the water - and was rescued with little harm beyond a soaking). After this training a small group of the local volunteer team searched the river above and below the actual Brook Meadow site (where there are several Water Voles already recorded) and found more active sites in two different places, one downstream of the meadow near the tidal limit (and probably inundated at very high tides) and the other in a much more secluded spot upstream near the A27.

On a very different subject more related to the autumn season I hear from Richard Carpenter that he has today found the first large edible fungi - Parasol Mushrooms - in Botley Woods. He did not claim them as the first, and if he had I might have disputed his claim as when I was cycling around Hayling yesterday I passed a group of what I think were the edible *Agaricus bitorquis* mushrooms which tend to grow, like these, in dusty wayside places that make the food taken from them seem very unhygienic! These were typically half concealed in matted grass through which they were pushing up and I did not stop to inspect them closely!

WEEK 37 SEP 9 - 15

BIRDS:

SUN 15 SEP

Looking down from the west end of Portsdown towards the M27 junction for central Fareham early this morning Trevor Carpenter counted 495 Canada Geese, including the distinctive albino bird, feeding in a field at approx SU 596067 (south side of the M27 and west of Down End Road which leads up to Fort Nelson). Before counting them Trevor had seen some 90 birds take off from the field and head east so the total number in the field at dawn must have been at least 585. +++

While Trevor was on the hill Matt Lawes was in the Cams Bay area and noted 15 Canada Geese flying north - I'm pretty sure he was not aware of Trevor's discovery at that time, but the extra 15 very neatly rounds the total up to 600! More interestingly Matt also saw 5 Brent Geese, and these could just possibly be newly arrived migrants as there has been no other recent sightings of such a group anywhere in the Portsmouth Harbour/Titchfield Haven/Hook area recently and it is unlikely that summering birds from Langstone Harbour would have flown over there. (With the current easterly winds I would not be surprised to hear of arriving migrants - that was why I cycled down the west Hayling shore this morning, but I saw none, and the northerly component of the wind may well send the geese along the north coast of France rather than our south coast). +++

Trevor Carpenter later came down to the Cams Bay area but instead of checking the water he concentrated on the tree belt which separates the bay from the golf course. Here he found 4 Spotted Flycatcher, 3 Blackcaps, 7 Chiffchaff and 1 Lesser Whitethroat. Slightly east of the trees, from bushes south of the new houses between the trees and Birdwood Grove, a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker called and then flew back to the trees. On Sept 5 in the same area Trevor had seen a Lesser Spotted fly east from these bushes toward the Wicor fields to the east of Cams Bay, so there is a good chance that at least one is in residence based on the tree belt. (I can add that in the 1980s I came across one here more than once).

Stephen Graham today drove down to Titchfield Haven from his home in Berkshire, seeing a good list of birds and also hearing reports from others that two Bitterns had been seen earlier in the morning. His own sightings included one of the Cetti's Warblers, the Marsh Harrier, 4 Green Sandpipers, 5 Snipe, a Little Sint and a Ruff. Swallows and both Martin species were present (and he heard that a Hobby had been after them before he arrived). On the sea there were 2 Common Scoter, 2 Sandwich Tern, 3 Dunlin and a flock of Ringed Plover. +++

At Farlington Marshes Simon Woolley saw one Osprey (the only one remaining in Langstone Harbour?) and other birds including 2 Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Greenshank, 1 Kingfisher, 1 Wheatear, 2 Blackcap, at least 3 Whinchat and several Yellow Wagtail. He also heard reports of a Cockatoo being seen in the bushes, with a story that it might have flown over from a feral colony near Warsaw in Poland - maybe as a replacement for the square Bearded Tits, paper-dart shaped Godwits, and cardboard cutout Barnacle Geese promised in the adverts aimed at attracting visitors to the reserve to celebrate its 40th anniversary today. It seems a pity that they could not have had on parade a few of the original Portsmouth Group of birders who

were instrumental in establishing both this reserve and the Hampshire Wildlife Trust - maybe they could have found some real birds for the visitors to see.

John Clark was at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood today to make a start on this winter's Avon valley WeBS counts which are one of his personal projects. At dawn he counted 3100 Lesser Blackback gulls leaving their night roost on the water, heading north to feed on unspecified fields - at least three Yellow-legged Gulls went with them but a single juvenile Common Tern stayed behind. 308 Wigeon was an exceptionally high count for this time of year but 260+ Greylag Geese fell far short of the 600 which Nigel Stubbs recently (Sep 10) suggested flew north past his home (south of Ringwood) to spend the night in an unspecified roost area which he thought was at Blashford. The birds which Nigel saw usually had a Snow Goose with them and John Clark did not see this bird so I guess the majority of the geese roost elsewhere. +++ Other wildfowl seen by John were 825 Coot, 126 Mallard, 113 Gadwall, 90+ Canada Geese, 84 Tufted Duck, 83 Teal, 61 Great Crested Grebe, 44 Mute Swans, 14 Shoveler, 4 Pochard and 1 male Ruddy Duck. 227 Lapwing, 6 Green and 3 Common Sandpiper were also seen. +++ A Grey Wagtail had arrived back in central Havant today, calling as it flew over the houses near Waitrose as I made a quick trip there for essential supplies. I haven't heard one here for several months but they have been a regular feature of shopping trips in recent winters and almost seem to be replacing Pied Wagtails in these urban situations. +++ Another thing which I noticed today is that the majority of the local House Martins seem to have left Havant - I heard just one over my garden today where there have been half a dozen, and I did not encounter a single Swallow during the day despite cycling around north Hayling in the morning.

SAT 14 SEP

When I reached the Wade Court Egret roost at Langstone this evening I found 37 Egrets in the trees and saw four more fly in to give a minimum of 41 birds, but there could have been up to 20 more unseen in the trees when I arrived and I may have missed some flying in as two of those that I did see had come from the west below tree top level, only showing when they suddenly flew across the roost area - as at least one that flew in high from the east landed without appearing in the visible roost area others coming from the west may have done so without my seeing them at all. +++

On Langstone Pond I was pleased to see both Swans of the territory owning pair on the pond, presumably having left their four cygnets to their own devices (earlier than usual, and before they have grown adult plumage?). With them on the pond were four Shoveler, an unusual species here, and also unusual was the sight of a Kingfisher flying over the sea about 100 yards out and coming ashore well to the east of the pond - possibly it had just arrived at the coast and had not yet discovered that there was a pond and stream here. With darkness coming on it's first priority would no doubt have been to find a safe perch for the night in trees, leaving the search for food and water until the morning.

FRI 13 SEP

The first Fieldfare to be detected back in Hampshire was apologetically announced today as 'nothing exceptional' by Glyn Horacek-Davis, who heard it 'chakking' over his home in Southampton this morning, but I am sure I am not the only Hampshire birder who finds this news of more interest than, say, the appearance of another Red-backed Shrike on Hayling today. I'm sure this statement of mine will rouse hackles on the necks of some birders, but when I sit down every other day to sift through the Hoslist messages and other news to pick out items that interest me enough to want to include them in my website, and then try to put related items together and give them an order of precedence (from most to least interesting) this news definitely comes out on top, being a genuine and unexpected 'first' (whereas today's Shrike is at least the fifth to have been in my news since one was seen on the Warblington shore on Aug 20, then at Farlington Marshes on Aug 22), and it brings hope of the personal excitement of also hearing that chakking sound which heralds winter to birders right across the county, not just those who make a special trip to Sandy Point to see the Shrike. +++

Last year the first Fieldfares which I heard of in Hampshire were 6 seen by Richard Carpenter in the north of the New Forest on Oct 16, though a flock had been seen in the midlands over the M42 as early as Sep 6. The average arrival date for Hampshire stands at Oct 2. +++

Before leaving the subject of Fieldfares this is an appropriate place to include a very interesting contribution from Ben Darvill on a subject that I have not been pursuing (people's experiences of being covered in bird droppings). According to Ben, Fieldfares nest in large colonies and have an unusual way of defending their nests against predators. Ben says .. {{ If a predator is seen approaching, alarm calls rally the troops, and then wave after wave of co-ordinated bombing raids cover the assailant in guano. See 'The Life of Birds' for amazing footage of a Raven being plastered by turdus.}} Fieldfares are appropriately named *Turdus pilaris*. though I am not sure if *pilaris* actually refers to 'piling it on' - more likely it is the latin for *polaris* missile. Now, with apologies to Tim Lawman, to the juvenile Red-backed Shrike which Tim saw at Sandy Point on Hayling this morning. It seems it could be seen from the beach in the southeast corner of the reserve without going into the reserve (for which permission from the HCC Rangers is required - ring Andy Parfitt on 023-9247-6411 or email andy.parfitt@hants.gov.uk) and the bird showed no signs of leaving. This bird may well have been on Hayling yesterday when Alistair Martin saw distantly a shrike-like bird perched on fence wire in the 'Aston Villa' shore field (between the west end of Daw Lane and the shore). Alistair was looking for the Little Owls that reside here but did not see one and the Shrike resolutely gave him a back view only. Last autumn another juvenile Red-backed Shrike came to North Hayling on Sep 25 and stayed near the Oysterbeds for about a week - we hope this one also settles in for a bit.

Black-tailed Godwit, Curlew, Redshank and Grey Plover are among the waders which already have a massive presence in our harbours, and others such as Dunlin have yet to arrive in any great numbers, but one shore-bird which has been back in Hampshire in large numbers for some time is still reluctant to take up residence on the shores, preferring the farmland which it has long spurned for breeding purposes. I am of course referring to Lapwing, of which very few have come back to the shores yet, although up to 300 have been regularly seen at the Vyne floods near Basingstoke recently (241 there today) and 200 are on Goodwood airfield near Chichester. The only place on the coast which seems to have any number is Titchfield Haven where Richard Carpenter reports a flock of 73 though Brian Fellows count of just one in Emsworth Harbour today (among a record number of Redshank and a big flock of Black-tailed Godwit) is more typical. +++

This discrepancy will not last for long, nor will we soon be short of Dunlin and Sanderling. The first report of more than 100 Dunlin in one group came yesterday from Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight, and today Ryde Sands had around 60 Sanderling.

It seems we have now resolved the mystery of the Lymington Parakeets. Colin Bates has managed to get a good picture of the 7 birds which are very noisy residents in the town, and having put it on his website John Clark and Steve Keen agree that they are Blue-crowned Parakeets (*Aratinga acuticaudata*) which are also known as Conures. John refers us to an article in the Jan 2002 issue of British Birds about a small feral population in Kent at Bromley, and Steve tells us from his Venezuelan Field Guide that their persistent calls are described as 'a loud scream rapidly repeated'. Let's hope, for the sake of peace in Lymington, they do not breed and establish a feral population to rival the 4000 Ring-necked Parakeets of Esher in Surrey. If you want to see the picture go to www.communicate.co.uk/hants/itchenbirds/page14.phtml +++

Brian Fellows today counted the birds in Emsworth Harbour where there were 170 Redshank, 72 Black-tailed Godwit, 5 Greenshank (including two with colour rings), and 7 Egrets but relatively few other waders (4 Oystercatcher, 3 Curlew, 2 Dunlin, 2 Grey Plover, 1 Lapwing and 1 Heron). The Redshank count is the highest he has ever had there. +++

THU 12 SEP

Alistair Martin went to Stansted Forest today in the hope of seeing Crossbill but did much better with a 7 or 8 minute prolonged view of a female Goshawk soaring overhead above the eastern side of the Forest at Rosamunds Hill - presumably the same bird which John Simons saw on the western edge of the Forest last Sunday (Sep 8) over the Dean Lane End/Finchdean area before heading for the Forest. In both cases the sightings were around midday and the hawk seems to have been enjoying the thermals to inspect its 'territory' from on high (if the same bird has been there for five days it could have thoughts of staying the winter?) +++

Another reason to hope that this is no casual autumn vagrant is that both reports indicate that it is

an adult female, not a juvenile with no established home yet. John just states that it was a female, and Alistair confirms this when he says that it's underparts (all he could see!) were a whitish grey whereas a juvenile would have brownish streaking and some orangey flush around the breast and flanks. Although no Buzzard was available for direct comparison Alistair is confident that this was an accipiter by shape, but as big as a Buzzard. He also commented on the rounded corners of the long tail and the clear white patches around the base of the tail (seen from below). To make it more exciting Alistair thought he glimpsed another bird of similar size but it was flying below tree-top height and vanished as soon as he was aware of its presence. One possible reason for the bird being airborne is that tree-felling is now taking place in the normally peaceful and secluded eastern side of the forest where the bird might well have been perched for weeks at a time without being seen.

Another migrant which I thought had now left us was still in Chichester Harbour when Barry Collins walked around Thorney Island today - this is the Little Tern, of which Barry saw 3 along with 2 Common and 2 Sandwich Tern. Also on Barry's list were 2 Turtle Dove, 2 Osprey, 34 Yellow Wagtail plus 21 Wheatear, 6 Whinchat and 3 Whimbrel (maybe these Whimbrel intend to stay the winter?)

WED 11 SEP

From Sussex Barry Collins sends me news of a Short-eared Owl quartering the south of Thorney Island in mid-morning and an Osprey using the southern landing lights as a base for a series of fishing trips during the day (this bird could not be found again on Wednesday). +++

An evening walk from my home in Havant to Budds Farm and back via Langstone Mill pond had as its high spot my first view of a Kingfisher back at the coast for the winter. Despite the tide being fully out and the Langbrook stream nothing more than a trickle of water the Kingfisher was perched on a stone hoping the trickle would bring it something for supper when I disturbed it, making it fly off downstream to the harbour. +++

Around 50 Swallows were busy over the South Moors where a Kestrel was also hovering over the rough grass, and 1000 Starlings were in pre-roost mode on power lines near Budds Farm. Nothing special on the pools, and on the harbour the tide was too low to see anything at the water's edge, but on the South Moors a dozen or so Meadow Pipits were presumably passage birds stopping off for the night. Reaching Langstone I found one Swan on the pond and I hope it was the male which had been engaged in a desperate fight on Sep 4 when I saw it completely covered in black harbour mud, trying to wash itself clean in the outflow of the Lymbourne stream - a couple of days later I saw the same swan with more or less white plumage, but looking lonely, dejected, and preparing to sleep alone on the mud just off the pond (as if it hadn't got the strength to fly up onto the wall to get to the pond). It was by now too dark to see how many Egrets were settled in the Wade Court roost, though four were only just flying in, seen against an almost dark sky, and there were at least a dozen vaguely visible in the trees.

MON 09 SEP

Coming back to reality and today's Sussex news I see that the Goodwood Stork is still present but has (of its own volition or under orders from the Golf committee?) flown south from the golf course to fields near the course of the River Lavant between the Summersdale housing estate in the north of Chichester and the Goodwood airfield/motor racing circuit. Perhaps the bird now intends to do a bit more flying to annoy the airmen trying to take off and land?

Will Walmsley yesterday gave us his highlights of the walk around Farlington Marshes led by Kevin Stouse on Sunday (Sep 8), and today Kevin has added a few more birds that may be of interest - in particular a good sighting of a Peregrine (to those like Will who are often at the Marshes these falcons may be run of the mill, but they excite and attract birding visitors). Other items to add to Will's list were the regular six summering Brent, seen near Baker's Island, more than 60 Great Crested Grebe now on the harbour, a Water Rail at the lake, and a high tide roost of 40 Ringed and the same number of Grey Plover in the corner of Chalk Dock lake where Broadmarsh ends at the A27.

In connection with the summering Brent I had reason today to check on last year's dates for returning migrant Brent and see that Barry Collins had two back at Pilsey in Chichester Harbour on Sep 17, followed by a lone bird in Langstone Harbour on Sep 19 (seen by Jason Crook looking lost) while the first wave of arrivals was obvious on Sep 20 (small groups seen off

Pagham Harbour, Titchfield Haven, Needs Ore Point, and one on Ryde Sands). On Sep 22 two flew past Hastings and 6 past Worthing. A flock of 40 were in the south east of Langstone Harbour on Sep 25 and 61 off Stokes Bay that day. I see that Jason Crook noted that they were late coming back in 2001 compared to first arrival dates around Sep 16 to 18 in recent previous years.

PLANTS:

SUN 15 SEP

A brief tour of north Hayling on my bike this morning gave me the first few flowers on Common Gorse after their summer break. In Daw Lane I was pleased to see Betony still in flower, and elsewhere to find Common Centaury and Yellow Wort still showing their colours. Golden Samphire is nearly all over, as is the Sea Lavender, but I still noted a list of 60 flowering species including Blue Fleabane and Broad Leaved Everlasting Pea.

THU 12 SEP

This evening I cycled through Emsworth to Prinsted with the intention of collecting specimen of Amphibious Bistort to show Brian Fellows the woody stems and rhizomes which distinguish this plant from Redshank or Persicaria, at least when the Bistort grows in a very dry situation as it does on the north side of the A259 just before the first turning down to Prinsted (the site is immediately west of a short unmade lane which is the start of a footpath leading into the open Southbourne fields that were once an aerodrome - pictures of it in the Emsworth museum!). Having collected my specimen I crossed the road and headed into Prinsted, but turned right on another unmade road where the tarmac road bears left towards Prinsted square. This short unmade road goes through a one-barred gate and becomes a footpath across the fields back to Emsworth, and as soon as you have passed old farm buildings on your right you will find a truly organic mini-market garden full of interesting weeds. +++

Here (approx SU 764055) was a mass of Shaggy Soldier, Stinking Mayweed, Small Nettle, and - amongst others - something I had never seen before but which is, I feel sure, Green Nightshade (*Solanum physalifolium*). The first impression was of a large sprawling plant spreading over the ground like a Marrow, but having flowers closely resembling Black Nightshade, the whole plant being distinctly hairy. It could I suppose have been the *schultesii* subspecies of Black Nightshade which also has lots of patent hairs but I went for Green Nightshade as it agreed with all the characteristics given by Stace which it was possible to assess (no fruits at all as yet, flowers only just opening). In particular the calyx teeth were sharply pointed where those of *S. nigrum schultesii* are said to be obtuse, and the general shape and habit of this plant were totally unlike normal Black Nightshade. +++

The *Galinsoga* was densely covered with gland tipped hairs and thus much more likely to be 'Shaggy' rather than 'Gallant Soldier', and it took me some time to be confident of the Stinking Mayweed (*Anthemis cotula*) as the plant did not stink (even when I crushed a whole plant there was only a slight unpleasant odour). My initial impression of the plants (erect with small conical flowers and strongly reflexed petals) was that they were not normal Scented or Scentsless Mayweed but I eventually felt confident only after slicing through the flower head and pulling off a number of the disk florets to find small brown scales at the base of the florets, but in the centre of the flower head (tip of the cone) only. Incidentally the receptacle was hollow, suggesting Scented Mayweed, but Rose says that neither Scented nor Scentsless Mayweed have any scales at the base of the disc florets, and Stace specifies that they occur only in the centre of *Anthemis cotula*

WED 11 SEP

I had a very pleasant walk around some of the fields at Old Idsworth Farm in this morning's sunshine where some 90 plant species were still in flower, including the best display of Harebells that I have seen for many years. The downland turf on the hillside behind Old Idsworth chapel, running along the foot of Markwells Wood, is flower rich but the plants tend to appear later than on open downland as the field bank faces north and gets shade from the woodland - this was illustrated today by the good show of Clustered Bellflower still showing (I did check the leaves and they were not Autumn Gentians!). I have never seen Autumn Ladies Tresses there and failed to find any today but I still have hopes of seeing them if there is more

sheep grazing. +++

At the foot of this downland slope there are three or four magnificent specimens of Field Maple which I think have a good chance of being among the tallest in Britain, and they are in very good health. My guess at their height was around 100 foot (30 metres) and I see from Alan Mitchell's book on trees that the tallest Field Maple in Britain is only 26 metres so it might be worth making a proper measurement of the height and girth of these specimens). +++

Out in the arable field between the grass slope and the road a great swathe of *Phacelia tanacetifolia* was planted this year under power lines running across the field, supported by telegraph posts which prevent sowing or harvesting a cereal crop along their line. Earlier in the summer this line looked like a strip of a lavender field in full flower - today it was, from a distance, a brown line of dead and sundried plants but close inspection showed that a great many flowers were still out and showing their lovely blue colour, albeit from a prone position!

MON 09 SEP

While checking last years observations for this time of year to see when we could expect to see returning migrant Brent Geese I also noticed that Common Gorse began to flower on Sep 23, so it may be worth keeping an eye open in the coming week for this year's first flowers - for me one of the milestones of autumn.

INSECTS:

SAT 14 SEP

Mike Duffy was birding at Farlington Marshes today, and while there he saw more than 5 Commas, 2 Red Admirals, 1 Small Tortoiseshell, 1 Holly Blue, and several Meadow Browns Both Southern Hawker and Common Darter were also on the wing.

Over in Sussex it seems that Ivy has started to flower in the Benfield Valley, just north of Hove, attracting some 20 Red Admirals. These were seen by Tony Wilson with 10 Small Tortoiseshell and singles of Common Blue, Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood. Visiting Upper Beeding on the downs east of the River Adur Tony found a big specimen of the lovely Golden Orb spider (which some people name Wasp Spider but I dislike this name as it gives the innocent spider a bad reputation as a dangerous insect - which it is not). I suspect that many of these big female spiders will already have built their pretty pink 'paper Chinese lanterns' to hold their eggs, and soon the adult spiders will have vanished for another year.

Last night Rob Edmunds had an unexpected moth in his trap at Fleet - a Heath Rustic, and on the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website, where I saw this news, there is a picture of a Green Carpet moth still showing some of the green colour which is stunning when they are fresh (I once saw one in Havant Thicket and was much impressed). On Lawrence Holloway's website there is another Carpet Moth picture - this time of the commoner Garden Carpet in fresh condition. Lawrence tells us that he has recently had several Vapourer moths in his garden at Bognor where there were two Holly Blues on Sep 12. +++

In his notes on a recent holiday in Dorset Lawrence tells us that when he was in the Lulworth area on Sep 4 he not only saw a very late Marbled White and very worn Adonis Blue males, plus both Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady, but he also had a Wall Brown (the dearth of which I was commenting on yesterday)

FRI 13 SEP

The only report of butterflies reaching me for today is of three Clouded Yellow seen by Richard Carpenter in the Titchfield Haven/Brownwich area but we have by no means yet run out of butterflies for the year. In my own garden here in Havant I found two fresh Green-veined White and saw Speckled Wood, Red Admiral and Comma with probable fly bys of Large and Small Whites, and in the Hayling Billy trail behind the garden three more Speckled Wood were having one of their territorial dogfights. +++

Yesterday Barry Collins walked around Thorney Island and made the same point by listing 9 butterfly species along with Migrant Hawker, Common and Ruddy Darter dragonflies. Barry's butterflies were 10 Speckled Wood, 16 Small Heath, 29 Small White, 16 Red Admiral, 2 Comma, 2 Meadow Brown, 5 Small Copper, 3 Common Blue and 5 Clouded Yellow +++

There is however one species which does not appear on Barry's list which I would have expected in a normal year - Wall Brown - but this species seems to have had some sort of catastrophe

this year (possibly because the first to emerge did so earlier than they should and got caught out by the weather? - that is just conjecture with no research to back it). The first I heard of were three seen at Exbury by Philip Hack on Apr 8, and an unspecified number appeared on Thorney Island (normally one of their strongholds) on Apr 22 but the only report of more than 1 for the spring brood was a count of 5 seen by Mark Litjens at Keyhaven on May 4. This did not stop the summer brood from emerging at the end of July with a count of 8 on Thorney on July 26 and several on Portsdown a few days later but thereafter I have heard of none other than a single seen by the Havant Wildlife Group on north Hayling on Aug 20 and a count of 2 from the Sussex Downs near Hove by Tony Wilson on Aug 25. In comparison we started last year's summer brood with 28 on Thorney on Aug 6 and had counts of 3 on Aug 19, 7 on Aug 25, 5 on Sep 29 and 1 still flying on Oct 10 (I think all these reports came from Thorney Island and there were others from Pagham and the Isle of Wight).

THU 12 SEP

A new addition to the national moth repertoire comes today in the shape of a very fresh Death's Head Hawkmoth found in County Down, close to Belfast. Possibly its freshness is in tribute to the arrival of another moth earlier in the year, and to a good potato crop to nurture caterpillars, but the only report of this species earlier in the year is one sighting of one resting on a pair of jeans on a washing line in Cornwall on July 13, so the origin of today's moth remains a mystery (one can never exclude the release of insects reared in captivity).

Three less controversial moths, all new to my yearlist, were taken at Barry Collins' trap here in Havant last night (Sep 11). They were Frosted Orange, Brindled Green and Feathered Gothic - a very pretty trio indeed.

In addition to today's butterfly sightings on Thorney Island, which I have listed above, I see on the SOS website a comment from Andrew Grace in Hastings that warm weather today had brought a noticeable further arrival of butterflies and Migrant and Southern hawkers +++

Locally another effect of the good weather was to prolong the life of some of our summer butterflies, and yesterday John Goodspeed was able to report that there were still plenty of Common Blues on Portsdown (near Fort Southwick) plus a couple of passing Clouded Yellow. John also had a Clouded Yellow in the Stansted Forest area when he went there yesterday.

WED 11 SEP

Arriving at the Old Idsworth farm office this morning I was shown a series of small holes in the soft mortar holding flints to ornament the wall of the building, and was asked what the insects were which made these holes. My first thought was of Mason Wasps but when we saw one of the insects enter one of the holes it was clearly a bee and had an orange tinge to the underside of its abdomen. Before long these bees named themselves as Leaf-cutter Bees by flying back carrying small segments of fresh leaves which they stuffed into the holes, and when I got back to my books I could name them further as *Megachile centuncularis*, which usually uses nest cavities in wood and which normally ends in its life cycle in August. My two books by Michael Chinery did not help to answer some other questions raised by this observation - firstly did these bees make the holes themselves or do they re-use existing cavities made by some other creature? secondly, will these bees now die and leave their grubs, safe in their rose-leaf lined stone cavities, to survive the winter - in other words what is their life cycle and how do they survive the winter? (I assume the parent bees will stock the cells with some pollen and or nectar as food for the grub, but can they leave enough to keep it supplied for six months or more? and if the egg does not hatch until next spring will the grub's food supply still be edible?). Answers to all these questions will be much appreciated.

The latest update to Steve Nash's national Migrant Moth website has eight reports of Hummingbird Hawkmoth seen widely scattered across the British Isles in the period Sep 7 to 11 - the nearest was at Durlston in Dorset but one or more could well turn up in Hampshire at any time now. There is also a new report of Camberwell Beauty - one seen on the Norfolk coast at Wells this morning and with it a less certain report of a Berger's Clouded Yellow in the Scillies - the finder is unknown and the report unconfirmed.

Here in Hampshire butterfly sightings are definitely on the wane, and this is illustrated by the result of a butterfly transect at Bentley Station Meadow, walked today by Derek Mills in hot sunshine and calm air. All he recorded was just six species - 4 Commas and singles of Brimstone,

Meadow Brown, Speckled Wood, Small and Green-veined White. Elsewhere Bill Marjeram added a single Clouded Yellow, seen at Hook/Warsash and at Old Idsworth Farm I had one female Common Blue, a couple each of Meadow Brown and Speckled Wood plus a number of passing Large and/or Small Whites. (Also, trapped inside a window of the farm office was a moth which I took to be a Common Marbled Carpet by the way it held its wings at rest - a Geometer species - and the see-through hind wings with delicate veining, though I did not check the pattern of the darker fore-wings well enough to be sure). +++

Philip Hack has sent me a further list of moths taken recently at his Nursling trap, just outside Southampton. This includes one new species for my yearlist - Centre-barred Sallow, which came to the trap on both Sep 6 and 7 - and Philip's first Rosy Rustic. Among others in his catch were Tawny-barred Angle and Square-spot Rustic. Not at the trap but found in his garden was a fresh Common Marbled Carpet, helping to support my claim to have seen one.

Finally, Brian Fellows tells me he has withdrawn his claim to have seen a Horntail in Emsworth's Brook Meadow (see Sep 6 notes) and after checking the photo he took at the time thinks he saw the commoner and smaller Ichneumon *Amblyteles armatorius* - perhaps a warning for anyone unfamiliar with insects to check the scale used in Chinery's drawings - the Horntail is shown lifesize whereas the Ichneumon is shown twice lifesize (and still looks smaller than the massive Horntail whose body is 3 cm long without the 1 cm ovipositor sticking out at the back) - a Horntail is as obviously larger than most other similar insects as a Hornet is larger than a Common Wasp. The only other frighteningly large insect of this type that I have ever come across is the huge brown Ichneumon *Megarhyssa superba* (I have not actually seen the commoner and smaller *Rhyssa persuasoria*).

MON 09 SEP

Richard Carpenter visited Pagham Harbour and Thorney Island yesterday (Sep 8) but saw relatively few butterflies - at Pagham he had 2 Clouded Yellows, 2 Small Tortoiseshell and more than three Small Copper, plus just 2 Small Heath on the north east of Thorney. The only other species reported on Sep 8 were 3 Grayling, 1 Painted Lady and some Whites, seen by Dave Pearson in the Bratley Plain area of the New Forest. Dave did better with dragonflies, seeing three Black Darters which, for some reason, have not yet got onto my yearlist although they are relatively common in the New Forest and parts of Sussex, and should have been on the wing from July. Also on Dave's list were Emerald Damselfly, Common Blue damsel and Common Darter.

In my Other Wildlife page I reported on Saturday (Sep 7) that Badgers had dug out a Wasp nest on Portsdown in search of honey, and thankfully John Goodspeed has reminded me that Wasps, unlike Bees, do not have the ability to make wax for comb cells or honey to feed their offspring. Wasps chew wood to make a paper which is the only building material for their nests and the cells within them in which the young are raised. These cells hang with their open end downwards and the queen sticks her egg to the ceiling of each cell as she lays it - the grub which hatches presumably has some means of attaching itself as it hangs in the cell where it is fed on pulped insects (I think the queen alone pre-masticates the insects brought in by the workers and feeds all the young but I am not sure). Adult wasps do not feed on insects but on sweet substances obtained from anywhere - flower nectar or bread and jam!

On Saturday (Sep 7) Rupert Broadway was on Stockbridge Down, seeing more than 50 Meadow Brown and several each of seven other butterfly species (Small Heath, Small Tortoiseshell, Small White, Common Blue, Chalkhill Blue - now very worn - Small Copper and Brown Argus) plus one Brimstone. +++

On that evening (Sep 7) Paul Boswell found a Lilac Beauty moth on a house window opening onto his carport and wonders if anyone else has observed the emergence of a second generation this summer. Normally these moths are only on the wing in June and July, their offspring overwintering as caterpillars after feeding on honeysuckle but my caterpillar book says that if the caterpillars are bred in captivity (kept in a warm place indoors) they often pupate and emerge as moths in the same year that the egg was laid. Paul suspects that Honeysuckle in his sheltered carport has had the same effect +++

One other unusual moth appeared in Suffolk on Sep 6 and was recorded on the national Migrant Moth website. It is called a Spotted Clover (*Protoschinia scutosa*) but although it has a number

in the Bradley and Fletcher list of British Moths (and is not I think a micro) it does not appear in Margaret Brooks Complete Guide to British Moths nor in any other of my books

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 12 SEP

On Tuesday (Sep 10) John Goodspeed was in Stansted Forest and happened to see the fairly uncommon sight of Fallow and Roe Deer together, though with no indication that this was other than a chance crossing of their tracks by the three species (man, roe and fallow).

MON 09 SEP

On Sep 3 I reported a sighting of a Roe Deer in Emsworth's Brook Meadow and asked myself why it was there and how it had reached the meadow. One hypothetical answer to these hypothetical questions was the suggestion that it might have been using the dense cover of the vegetation there to take up residence without being seen by any humans who visit the meadow daily, but was discovered after the vegetation had been cut down. This was not a very serious suggestion, more a reflection on how little we know about much of the wildlife living closely around us, but a further sighting of a Roe was made by Brian Fellows today, only a few hundred yards north of the meadow, makes my suggestion slightly more likely. Brian's sighting was in the private land on the west bank of the Ems immediately south of the A27 - public paths run along two side of this area and Brian's sighting was from one of these. As deer do not understand the concept of private property, can easily leap normal fences, and would if necessary follow the course of the shallow river, it seems all the more likely that a deer might regard this as a very suitable hideaway until it was old enough to want to breed, when it might prefer more open country and woodland (or as a winter feeding territory at any age)

WEEK 36 SEP 2 - 8

BIRDS:

SUN 08 SEP

A morning walk in the north of Stansted Forest quickly brought me a flock of 21 Crossbill flying over the 'north west avenue', soon followed by a smaller flock, but when I had completed a circuit of the north west section of the woods and crossed the road into the eastern half I found more of them. I was in the area marked Fir Tree Piece on my map (between the north end of the Ladies Walk and the road) when I heard and saw more Crossbill in larches. Estimating there were at least a dozen there something suddenly spooked them and a flock which I estimated at over 150 burst into the air.

Other birds of some interest were a family party (?) of 5 Mistle Thrush on a Rowan tree, and at least 12 Swallows still around the Warren Down stables. Coal Tits were singing everywhere, as were the occasional Great Tit and a couple of Chiffchaff

Kevin Stouse led a walk from Broad Marsh around Farlington Marshes this morning but the best bird was seen by just one of the party - a Grasshopper Warbler seen by Will Walmsley as they walked along the north shore of Chalk Dock before reaching the reserve. Two Osprey were still performing in the harbour, and at the lake there were an estimated 20 Knot with 4 Bar-tailed Godwit plus 8 Shelduck (presumed to be juveniles) among the horde of other waders

SAT 07 SEP

At the Portsmouth IBM Lake for today's WeBS count I found a total of 403 Canada Geese with little else of interest (though the first two Teal were back and a Cetti's Warbler was singing loudly). Canada Geese are very mobile at the moment as they puzzle their brains trying to remember where they are supposed to migrate to - Trevor Carpenter has seen some 250 in the air at once near Fareham. It seems likely that the flock on the lake included most of the birds that have been at Titchfield Haven recently, and I hope the whole lot will soon head back there.

Four different reports of Storks are in the news today. The White Stork is still at Goodwood Golf Course, another White Stork was seen from Christchurch in Dorset (probably the bird that has been by the Hampshire Avon and on the Isle of Wight in the past few days) and two more reports were of Black Storks - a definite one heading east over the South Downs south east of Pulborough and a possible one seen in the north west of the New Forest

Will Walmsley was at Farlington Marshes today, finding a Garganey on the stream and seeing an

estimated 1000 Curlew and 600 Grey Plover (presumably at high tide roost). The number of Wigeon was estimated as 60, and there were 3 Whimbrel and 5 Whinchat. Will also saw the 5 Black-necked Grebe in the Chalkdock area north of North Binness. +++

Walking around the Warblington area towards dusk I heard Yellow Wagtail with the cattle on the fields near Pook Lane, and as I neared the cemetery two big flocks totalling at least 70 birds flew over (maybe heading for the small reedbed just inside the seawall east of the cemetery). Earlier in the walk an escaped Cockatiel flew over the Hayling Billy trail carpark near the Havant Arts Centre. +++

A report on the SOS website for yesterday (Sep 6) says that the Red-necked Phalarope was still being seen at Sidlesham Ferry and the Wryneck was still around the nearby Long Pool on the edge of Pagham Harbour.

FRI 06 SEP

News for Titchfield Haven today comes from Richard Carpenter (not all items are his personal sightings) and includes reports of an immature Little Gull and of a Purple Sandpiper which I would have thought was exceptionally early but a check with Birds of Hampshire shows that they have been recorded in every month of the year other than June. Of the commoner birds there was a very high count of 126 Oystercatcher (I presume this was a count of birds actually in the reserve) and a flyby over the sea of 6 Black Terns heading west to which Paul Winter adds another two seen to fly out of the reserve. +++

News of the past week as seen by Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes tells us that the Short-eared Owl and Merlin that were seen by others last weekend have stayed there and are regularly seen, as are three Ospreys +++

Brian Fellows found the Emsworth Swan population considerably diminished today (down from a recent peak of 128 to just 88) as the Swans regain their flight after the summer moult and disperse to their chosen winter haunts. Coot numbers, on the other hand, were up to 42 (and maybe lots more have settled on the Thorney Little Deeps where they can provide a 'wall to wall' black carpet over the water surface in some autumn periods). 140 Mallard are still present (a good figure in view of John Clark's recent comments on declining numbers of this species (see Aug 28 when John spoke of a decline at the Stratfield Saye lake in the north of Hampshire from over 1000 not many years ago to just 403 now), and at Emsworth the Mallard are doing their best to keep numbers up - a brand new family of 7 downy ducklings seen there today must be approaching a record for latest hatching. +++

THU 05 SEP

With lower water levels in the Farlington Marshes lake (the water builds up during Neap tide periods when the tide does not fall far enough to open the exit sluice for long enough to drain the lake, and we are now approaching spring tides when it both rises and falls further) the number of waders using the muddy edges as a high tide roost area is increasing. Today Bob Chapman counted over 400 Black-tailed Godwit and over 250 Grey Plover plus 50 Greenshank (not sure if these were on the lake or hidden on the scrape). Also present were 29 Knot, 7 Curlew Sandpiper and 4 Spotted Redshank. One Farlington sighting that we have not been told of by others was a Pied Flycatcher which Bob says was there on Aug 31 +++

At Titchfield Haven the night roost of Yellow Wagtails is now said to be in the order of 150 birds though by day Richard Carpenter only saw 6 of them from the Meon Canal Path, along with a male Marsh Harrier and 3 Whinchat. Bob Marchant also visited Titchfield Haven today and tells us of 2 Ravens flying over and of an anonymous report of a Jack Snipe among the Common Snipe. +++

Bob also visited his usual patch at Hook/Warsash where he saw 56 Yellow Wagtail in two flocks and saw the Hook Park Lesser Spotted Woodpecker. The Whinchat count was only 6 but there were 7 Stonechat present. +++

A very unusual, but not unique, observation comes today from Keith Vokes (who lives, I think, in Marchwood on the west shore of Southampton Water). Keith writes {{ Whilst watching the House Martins above my back garden last night I noticed a Carrion Crow circling amongst the Martins. At first I thought there were flying ants about but after a while I realised the crow was trying to catch the Martins. It made about 2 dozen attempts but each time the martins just side slipped away. Needless to say it did not succeed. Was this a mis-informed juvenile or has

anyone else seen this behaviour ? }} This query produced a response from Keith Haggard, who says {{ Although I've never seen such behaviour myself this observation rang a bell with me. There's a note in the January 2002 Issue of British Birds (Page 26) referring to an instance in Cleveland of a carrion crow taking Sand Martins and House Martins, so it's not unheard of }}

Another very unusual observation comes from Barry Collins who went to Thorney Island this evening to check out the Egret roosts but could find not a single bird in either of the two normal roost sites. This decision by the birds to sleep elsewhere, for whatever reason, probably contributed to my finding at least 57 birds in the Langstone Wade Court roost this evening. While counting the Egrets I was pleased to hear the Cetti's Warbler singing once more from the reeds around Langstone Pond.

In Hampshire two Avocet flew over Farlington Marshes and yet another Black-necked Grebe arrived in Langstone Harbour to make a total of five now present. At Sowley Pond near Lymington Steve Keen saw 3 Pochard among 15 Tufted Duck, 33 Teal, 6 Gadwall and a Wigeon.

The Titchfield Haven website, which has not been updated since Aug 20, suddenly has a burst of news to bring it up to Sept 1. Items that I had not picked up earlier from other sources include the arrival of a bunch of 20 Wigeon on Aug 29, a flyover of 8 Avocet on Aug 25, a count of 100 Black-tailed Godwit on the reserve on Aug 23, and what seems to have been the final appearance of an elusive Spotted Crake on Aug 22.

WED 04 SEP

Last Saturday (Aug 31) brought several sightings of Crossbill in Hampshire (one flock of 60 birds and a probable county total of over 100 birds actually seen by birders), and today the SOS website reports that another 100 or more were seen in Sussex on Saturday (at least 50 at Coates Common near Midhurst and around the same number in the Hastings area of East Sussex). Further proof of a large scale irruption comes today from the New Forest where Bob Marchant saw more than 160 birds in the Slufers area. These large scale sightings are probably only a small part of the overall picture as it seems that the birds like to move in fairly small groups of 20 or less and are constantly on the move to evade the eyes and ears of most birders! (Bob's total was derived from summing a total of ten different groups - had he not waited around he would only have recorded one group of 6 birds which he found feeding when he first reached Slufers). +++

Hopefully before long these flocks will have found the best conifer woods and will settle down in relatively few places to give birders a chance to assess their full numbers and to try to pick out any Two-Barred Crossbills. Until then we will continue to get tantalising glimpses of them such as a group of 15 at Powdermill Reservoir near Hastings on Sunday (Sep 1), 7 more going west over Bishopstoke yesterday and 3 more over the Sidlesham Ferry area of Pagham Harbour, also yesterday.

A White Stork was seen today by the river Avon from a layby on the Ringwood road just north of Christchurch and no rings were seen on its legs. This could be the bird from Goodwood but I think that unlikely as it has been very settled there for a month or so and was seen only yesterday (when it allowed the observer to get within six feet of it before it strolled off). I get the impression that there have been up to half a dozen Storks wandering in south east England this year - perhaps if a few people were to put up Stork nest platforms on their house-rooves we might see more (but beware of planning regulations if you think of trying this form of nest box - the authorities might not be as lenient with you as they have been over the roof-top Kangaroo on the Isle of Wight). +++

Another Wryneck was found in Hampshire today - news comes via John Clark who received a report of one on Bramshott Common (close to the A3 south of Hindhead). Less authentic wild birds were flying over a development site in the Lymington area - thought at first to be a group of 7 feral Ring-necked Parakeets they are now thought to be a different species of Parakeet originating from the aviaries of a local breeder who is having difficulty persuading them to come back to his cages. From the comments on reports of these birds I learn that the total of Ring-necked Parakeets currently using the famous roost at Esher Rugby Club grounds in Surrey is now put at 4000 birds! (I note that the Hoslist reports and my own comments continue to refer to these birds as Ring-necked though their formal english name is now Rose-ringed

Parakeet - I wonder if this change of name has anything to do with the statement that the birds at Lymington are a different species to Ring-necked?) +++

Passing the Royal Oak pub at Langstone this evening, with the tide low, I noticed several people looking down the channel of the Lymbourne stream at an extremely muddy male Swan washing itself in the fresh water. This was the parent of the cygnets that were also in the stream channel but the nearest other Swans were some way off so I do not know for certain how he had become covered in harbour mud. Some people said that they had seen a fight between two Swans and that is the most likely explanation, but what were they fighting over at this time of year? Moving on I found Langstone Mill Pond had attracted a few Sand Martins, and earlier I had just been missed by a high speed hunting male Sparrowhawk dashing down the little used section of the old rail track leading to the old rail bridge.

TUE 03 SEP

At Farlington Marshes Will Walmsley spent the last few precious moments of the summer holiday before returning to school, and he found one juvenile Garganey and the young Ruff still on the stream and three Ospreys over the harbour. Wigeon numbers are now up to at least 60 but only 2 Yellow Wagtail and 2 Whinchat were seen. I have already mentioned the Kingfisher seen here by Martin Gillingham but not the 2 Redstarts which he also saw. +++

MON 02 SEP

Paul Winter had an interesting sighting of 25 Shelduck flying west off Hill Head this evening, causing me to reach for my Birds of Hampshire to see what it said about the time when the adult Shelduck return from their distant moulting grounds. As I thought, the book says that in August and September the only Shelduck likely to be seen here are this year's young, though I was not aware that in 1977 some 50 adults stayed through the summer at Dibden Bay (and while that was a 'one off' it could happen again). Normally the adults do not return until October at the earliest, with many not arriving until December. So were these birds youngsters indicating a good breeding season, were they summering adults, or were they a group returning much earlier than usual from the north German/Dutch coast? News of any sightings of adult Shelduck on the Hampshire coast in the near future will be interesting All I can contribute today is a sighting of one juvenile Shelduck on the water just outside the Hayling Oysterbeds, probably indicating that birds hatched at Budds Farm are spreading out over Langstone harbour. +++

A very welcome email from John Gowen, who regularly watches the Langstone village area, tells me that he is now 'online' and will be able to share his sightings with us on a more regular basis. Today he walked down the Brockhampton stream to the Budds Farm shore, and also had a look at the Budds Farm pools where the most interesting birds were the Swallows overhead, though the absence of all but a couple of Tufted Duck raises the question in my mind as to where the Tufties go to at this time of year. Birds of Hampshire also raises this question without answering it - it says that many Tufties breed in the county and there are often large post breeding gatherings of the birds at the Eversley and Blashford lakes, but these birds then 'vanish' before the large influx of birds arrive for the winter. The book suggests that the birds actually fly away to winter elsewhere, but I wonder how many remain, lurking with a low profile at this time of year (when was the last time you saw a Blackbird recently? although I am pretty sure they have not flown off they are at the moment quite rare sights in our gardens, and more likely to be heard than seen). +++

Much more impressive was John's list of shore birds seen at the mouth of the Hermitage stream (and an Osprey seen to land on North Binness) - he noted 145 Redshank, 85 Black-tailed Godwit, 70 Oystercatcher, 14 Dunlin and 12 Ringed Plover among others, with at least 20 Swans on the water, and this welcome return of bird activity to the harbour shores was very much reflected on the Langstone village shore which I passed as the tide was rising in the late afternoon. There again Redshank were in the majority (I reckoned over 250), with some 50 Black-tailed Godwit and at least that number of Oystercatcher, but still very few Dunlin and only a couple of Lapwing. Teal are back in Hampshire in large numbers but I only saw five on the shore here, though 9 Heron roosting in the saltings was average for winter and several Egrets were present. Best birds by far for me were a flock of at least a dozen Yellow Wagtail which dropped in to have a look at Langstone Pond but with no damp edges to the pond they quickly

moved onto the saltings where they were quite impossible to count. +++

Late news for yesterday has exciting birds for Farlington Marshes, Titchfield Haven and Church Norton where a Savi's Warbler was reported. At Farlington Jason Crook had the first Short-eared Owl of the autumn and the first newly arrived Black-necked Grebe (adding two new birds to the two that have been in the harbour through the summer), while on the reserve a juvenile Red-backed Shrike could be seen in 'The Bushes' area - this bird may have arrived on Saturday (Aug 31) when what looked very like a Shrike was glimpsed by Colin Allen (though it could not be refound after their attention was distracted by one of the Ospreys). At Titchfield Haven the excitement came in the form of a juvenile Bluethroat, netted by ringers along with a Firecrest, and up to 5 Black Terns were seen there by Peter Morrison. At Hook/Warsash Richard Carpenter watched more than 20 Sand Martins and saw 3 Stonechat, 3 Wheatear and 4 Whinchat. Further west at the mouth of the Beaulieu River Mark Litjens enjoyed yet another juvenile Osprey, and two Peregrines, while he was at Needs Ore Point.

PLANTS:

SUN 08 SEP

The first Ivy flowers were seen almost three weeks ago on Aug 20 but I only saw my first open flowers today. Luckily this habit of flowering sporadically over a long period through the autumn and winter makes it all the more useful as a continuing source of nectar and berries right through to next spring.

FRI 06 SEP

One plant that may be worth a mention today is Small Flowered Cranesbill which I found still managing to flower despite heavy roadside grass mowing by the pavement of the approach road from South Street into Juniper Square here in Havant.

WED 04 SEP

A short walk in the New Lane and Denvilles area of Havant today gave me several good plants in flower - Annual Wallrocket, Weasel's Snout and Rosebay Willowherb among them - plus one surprise find in the driveway of a New Lane house more or less opposite the allotments where the Weasel's Snout still flourishes. Passing this driveway I saw a very tall (at least 1 metre high) single stem of bright green grass topped by a long (at least 20cm) dense flower panicle of the sort sold as 'Millet spray' for cage birds. The grass was clearly not a Millet but a Bristle grass (*Setaria*) species and its height, the length and form of the flower panicle, and the way it drooped at the tip, seemed to say that it must be *Setaria italica* or Foxtail Bristle-grass. Surprisingly this species does not get a mention in the Hants Flora though I would be pretty certain that it occurs quite frequently to judge by the amount of cagebird seed consumed in the county!

TUE 03 SEP

Richard Carpenter was in the area of the River Itchen headwaters today and noted Monkey Flowers at Cheriton and Creeping Jenny in flower at Itchen Abbas. I'm not sure if the Monkey Flowers persist through the summer but the Creeping Jenny would I think be a new re-flowering as spring-like weather returns.

Brian Fellows weekly newsletter for the Brook Meadow conservation area at Emsworth has a summary of plants flowering there during the past week and the one which caught my attention was Amphibious Bistort. Clumps of this plant in a vegetative state are not uncommon, though often overlooked, but I rarely see any in flower and have not done so this year, so I welcome this chance to tick it off on my personal yearlist. The reverse is true of the Pepper Saxifrage which I have seen in flower since August 1 (and suspect it could be found flowering in July), whereas the plants at Brook Meadow are still not in flower (though they have been in bud for some time)

MON 02 SEP

On Sinah Common, south Hayling, the Pale Toadflax was still flowering near the Inn on the Beach, and at the Childing Pink site (where a little more gorse has been cut back in the hope of getting that rarity to flourish) Sheep's Bit was still colourful in a dry desert scene. Even the mass of Evening Primroses nearby were nearly at an end though I found that Hare's Foot Clover still had flowers. At the Oysterbeds, where there has been a great mass of White Melilot

in recent years, it has surprisingly vanished this year so I was pleased to see one plant in full flower on the southern bund wall of the lagoon. Goats Rue is still flowering in the overflow carpark behind the Esso garage and in the pony field inland of the coastal path where it passes Stoke Bay fresh flowers on Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea were a pleasant surprise. At the south end of Langstone Bridge the colony of white flowered Red Valerian is looking healthy and at the north end a little Blue Fleabane has escaped the close mowing. On south Hayling mowing has successfully removed Autumn Ladies tresses from more than one garden but these orchids were flourishing in Rosemary Webb's garden.

INSECTS:

FRI 06 SEP

Seven unusual species appear in the latest update to Steve Nash's Migrant Moth website, one of them being the well known Monarch butterfly seen on Fair Isle in the Shetlands (first record there since 1941). The other six species are moths and include a claimed Oak Yellow-underwing in a central London moth trap - if the record is accepted this will be only the third time this moth has been recorded in Britain. I have not seen a picture of it, but it is I gather an impressive moth related to the Red Underwing and Clifden Non-pareil. A first for this year is an Oleander Hawkmoth found in Wales, and the others are a Striped Hawkmoth and a Golden Twin-spot, both in Essex, plus a Jersey Tiger taken at Portland and a smaller *Conobathra tumidana* at Durlston in Dorset. These were all seen between Sep 1 and 3. +++

While still on the subject of moths I see that Mike Wall had the thought, but not the hard evidence, that the *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth which he found resting on washing hanging in a tiny Aldershot garden on Wednesday (see notes for Sep 4), might have been a moth freshly emerged from pupation in this country. The behaviour of this moth is typical of most hawkmoths on the first day after they emerge from pupation, when they climb the nearest object and then hang there for the whole day to allow their wings to expand and dry, but fly off as soon as it gets dark after that first day and are never seen again in such exposed situations. *Convolvulus* Hawkmoths do very rarely lay eggs in this country which succeed in completing the caterpillar and pupal stage, and this moth could have been the end product of a first generation moth which arrived in this country in the spring (those currently appearing are second generation and their offspring would not emerge until next spring). One question for Mike is whether the moth was found in a place where it could have crawled up from the ground (perhaps it was on an item hanging at the end of the line close to the post or wall supporting the end of the line).

Local insect sightings by Brian Fellows at Emsworth's Brook Meadow today include the impressive Horntail (*Urocerus gigas*) which would normally be found in a conifer plantation but which quite often appears in modern housing when a larva of the species, happily chewing away in a pine tree, survives the cutting down of the tree and the sawing of the timber into planks or joists, then emerges from the wood as an adult after its piece of timber has been built into a house! Much commoner and more expected in habitat such as Brook Meadow are the big orbweb spiders that come to maturity and prominence at this time of year. The commonest of these is the Garden Cross spider (*Araneus diadematus*) with its brown/grey body and prominent white cross mark in top of its abdomen, but a not uncommon and more colourful relative is *Araneus quadratus* which gets its name from the four spots that replace the cross on its back - this species can vary in colour from bright yellow to a rich claret red and is always worth a look if you come across its big web stretched at knee to waist high (or higher) between fairly tall vegetation. If you see a fresh looking web with no spider in visible occupation have a look at the 'guy ropes' which support the web at its top 'corners' - the spider will normally construct a little shelter of leaves for itself where one of these main supports meets the vegetation and will lurk there with one leg on the 'guy rope' to sense the vibration when an insect flies into the web - at which point the spider is out in a flash, injecting poison into the trapped insect before wrapping it up to still its efforts to escape. Your tickling of the web may not fool the spider into emerging but a little tickle to the spider itself will bring it out of hiding and show you its colours and markings.

THU 05 SEP

Richard Carpenter was on the canal path alongside Titchfield Haven today seeing 3 Small

Tortoiseshells, 1 Comma and 1 Small Copper plus four species of dragonfly of which 2 Banded Demoiselles were the prettiest (the others were Common Darters and Migrant Hawkets with just one Southern Hawker). Banded Demoiselle are usually on the wing into September but the Beautiful Demoiselle season normally ends in late August so it was doubly exciting when Barry Collins found one at the Thorney Deeps today - the main excitement being that this is a first sighting of a new species for the reserve

WED 04 SEP

There have been at least sixteen sightings of *Convolvulus* Hawkmoths in this country since the first arrived on Aug 1 but until today none have been in Hampshire. This latest sighting was in a garden at Aldershot where the moth was resting on a washing line, and luckily the owner of the washing phoned Mike Wall at Basingstoke for help in identifying it. At least one other of this year's sightings was of a moth on a washing line (but that was in the Scilly Isles) and so far as I know there is no research available to tell you what garments to hang out in the hope of attracting this prize moth. Another way of seeing one which (if my memory serves me right) has worked in the past for Mike Collins here in Havant is to send out your Jack Russell dog to hunt for them - hopefully the dog will attract your attention to the right spot by barking before it disturbs the resting moth.

TUE 03 SEP

Yesterday (Sep 2) Peter Eeles went to Noar Hill and found just one late Brown Hairstreak along with a good selection of other butterflies including numbers of Common Blue and Small Heath. Peter then went to Old Winchester Hill and saw more than 25 Silver Spotted Skippers in what used to be a good spot for them on a south facing slope in the valley between the carpark area and the hill fort (I thought they had all abandoned this site in favour of Beacon Hill across the Meon Valley and am glad to be proved wrong). +++

On Sunday (Sep 1) Francis Waddington went to the Shatterford area of the New Forest (near Beaulieu Road station) and found a very late Small Blue in this unusual situation far from the chalk downland and Kidney Vetch plants that support this species (could this have been just a "small blue" by size and not species?). +++

Other butterflies still in the news are Clouded Yellow and (now fewer) Painted Ladies. Most people still mention Small Tortoiseshell, and I note that Stephen Harwood was pleased to find six in his Catherington garden on Sunday Sep 1 (five were on a garden Buddleia but one was actually in the house).

Jon Stokes has had his moth light running on Portsdown above Portchester for several nights recently and has found migrants on each occasion - he mentions Dark Sword-grass and White-point, both of which I think keep on coming until late autumn - maybe even November. +++

From the north of the county come two reports of the elusive Old Lady moth which is usually not attracted moth lights but one came to Mike Wall's light at Basingstoke on Sunday night (Sep 1) and two came to Paul Boswell's trap at Greywell on the Basingstoke canal last night (Sep 2) +++

MON 02 SEP

Some of our best butterflies that adorned woodland rides in July have now vanished from the scene until next year, and this was brought home to Andrew Brookes when he visited Huntbourn woods near Denmead on Sunday. White Admirals, Marbled Whites and Ringlets are now things of the past, though Brimstones remained present here in good numbers, along with Speckled Wood and Green-veined White. The only pleasant surprise was a single Small Tortoiseshell. +++

Things are not so bad on grassland near the coast, and at Needs Ore Point (mouth of the Beaulieu River) yesterday Mark Litjens had plenty of Common Blue and Meadow Brown with 24 Small Copper and 8 Small Heath, plus 2 Clouded Yellows and the expected Large and Small Whites. Further east on the coast near the mouth of the Hamble River Richard Carpenter found three Clouded Yellow with at least ten Common Blue and just one Small Copper - I too had a single Small Copper on South Hayling.

Nearer home a day flying Hummingbird Hawkmoth was seen by Andrew Brookes in a Cosham garden yesterday, nectaring at Verbena, and last night Jon Stokes trap on Portsdown above

Portchester took several more migrant moths including a beautiful fresh Bordered Straw, a worn White Point, a Pearly Underwing, 3 Rusty Dot Pearls, a couple of Silver Y's (one of which was the dwarf aberration gammina form) plus two Rush Veneers. This lot was supplemented with a late newly emerged Poplar Hawkmoth and three Burnished Brasses (these last must be the first show of the second generation of this species). In Fleet Rob Edmunds trap, also last night, took a worn Old Lady and both Rosy and Six-striped Rustics. +++

Following yesterday's report of a late Emperor dragonfly from the Hook/Warsash area today's messages bring news of another, also a female, flying strongly yesterday near the mouth of the Beaulieu river. This was seen by Mark Litjens, who saw numerous Migrant Hawkmoths there plus 5 Ruddy Darters, Common Darters and a Black-tailed Skimmer. Back in the Hook area Richard Carpenter noted more than 50 Common Darter, and over in Sussex at Petworth Andrew Howard still had at least one Brown Hawker.

To end today's news I have a cutting from the front page of the Isle of Wight County Press for Friday (Aug 30) with the headline {{ Gurt mallyshag ate my hedge }} giving further proof that islanders are 'different', at least in their language, but also proving that Privet Hawkmoth caterpillars are as voracious over there as on the mainland - the paper has an excellent photo of the caterpillar in question and a picture of the adult moth. Perhaps the caterpillars over there are also 'different', as the photo shows the creature trying to read a text message from a mobile phone (perhaps it rang the paper to ask them to send a photographer out before it pupated?)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 07 SEP

Last Wednesday (Sep 4) John Goodspeed was walking on Portsdown with Richard Jones (the Portsmouth City warden for the wildlife of the hill) when they found a large hole in the ground with a wasp nest clearly visible in it. I'm pretty sure this will have been the work of a Badger, eager for the honey in the nest. The wasps were none too happy and when John and Richard tried to fill in the hole to prevent passers by from investigating and probably getting stung, the wasps put in a serious attack leaving both of them badly stung. I think this is not an uncommon thing for badgers to do, though how they avoid getting badly stung, at least on their noses, I do not know (perhaps the wasps have difficulty in finding their target in the dark as the badger will work in the night time). The Badger is probably driven off before it can do much damage to the nest, and I think the wasps will repair their nest in a short time, but they cannot fill in the hole in the ground. +++

John also tells me that on Tuesday (Sep 3) he was on Hazleton Common, by the A3M between Waterlooville and Horndean, where he saw a good number of young Common Lizards. (Board walks over potentially wet sections of this common are very attractive to the Lizards as basking places).

THU 05 SEP

Bob Chapman's overview of news from Langstone Harbour this week has a most unusual item - the sighting of Bottle-nosed Dolphin closely investigating pontoons near the Hayling Ferry just inside the harbour mouth. Reports of these Dolphins in the channel and along the Sussex coast are not uncommon but I have never heard of one inside Langstone Harbour before, while Bob Chapman comments that is many years since one was recorded there. +++

Another unusual sighting was of a Grey Seal, seen on Tuesday at Rye Harbour where it was close inshore, near the Old Lifeboat House. As this was a close sighting and appears in a list that probably comes from the warden at Rye I do not have my usual doubts with Grey Seal sightings - Common Seals are much the commoner species along the south coast but casual observers who do not know this may be sure they have seen a Seal and conclude that it was a Grey because they think that most seals are grey. +++

Another sighting from Sussex is less contentious - this was a sighting by Tony Wilson of two young Common Lizards in the Benfield area of Hove. No doubt these two were just the tip of an iceberg of unseen baby Lizards!

TUE 03 SEP

The rain forecast for the coming weekend should, if it materialises, bring out a good crop of

autumn toadstools but some just cannot wait for the rain as was proved by Richard Carpenter's find of an Earth-star (*Geastrum triplex*) when he was at Itchen Abbas (between Winchester and Alresford) today.

Another unexpected find last week in Brook Meadow at Emsworth was a Roe deer - the deer had probably wandered there from some fairly distant home area, but the sighting could have been the result of the recent mowing of the dense cover which has been present up to now this summer, and which could have hidden a whole troop of deer resting during the day and very unlikely to be disturbed by humans or their dogs.

MON 02 SEP

On Aug 19 I passed on Martin Gillingham's account of how, while fishing on the banks of the River Severn in July, he had been attacked by a group of 8 Mink that were after his fishing bait, and how another fisherman there was actually bitten by these animals. Today another similar story comes from Steve Mansfield who tells how he was cycling down a country lane near Cliddesden, just south of Basingstoke, in mid July when he met a pack of seven or eight Polecats/Ferrets. Expecting them to run for cover Steve cycled on and was very surprised when the animals made a concerted attack on his bicycle. I assume that he got away by racing them, but I hate to think what would have happened had they punctured a tyre and caused Steve to fall on the ground

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BIRDS:

SUN 01 SEP

Here in Hampshire only one report of Crossbills has yet reached me for today (after numerous reports yesterday), and this was a sighting by Sue Morrison of 4 going north over Warsash. Not far away on the Hook shore Trevor Carpenter saw 108 Swallows and 70 Common Tern on the move and again both flocks were going north. Among other birds at Hook were 2 Tree Pipits and 42 Yellow Wagtail, and when Trevor went to Cams Bay I see he had 69 Black-tailed Godwit showing that the flock which he first saw there on Aug 27 is still present and will perhaps stay in that area for the winter. +++

Havant Thicket was full of small birds when I was there this morning but Crossbills were not among them. Several Willow Warblers gave snatches of their song and one Chiffchaff belted out its song but I had to rely on harsh scolding to pick out Blackcaps and soft piping to detect families of Bullfinch (in at least three different places). Coal and Great Tit song was heard here, and one Blue Tit gave a burst of its 'silly laugh' song in my garden. The most common and widespread songsters at present are Robin, Wren and Woodpigeon.

SAT 31 AUG

Five people today reported Crossbill sightings from four different parts of Hampshire, giving evidence of a major irruption of birds into this country, though the number of birds involved is not yet large. The biggest number of birds were seen in the Acres Down/Bolderwood part of the New Forest where Martin Pitt saw several flocks giving him a minimum of 60 birds (but maybe twice that number). Will Walmsley was also in the Acres Down area and saw at least 20 birds, while to the north of Southampton Glyn Horacek-Davis watched 15 fly north. Not far away, at Eastleigh Lakeside, Simon Ingram saw another 13 going north east, and far away in the west of the county Mark Litjens saw some at Martin Down. +++

While at Martin Down Mark also saw a Peregrine and two Ravens plus one or more Tree Pipit, before he went to the New Forest and chanced to see a Wryneck flit between gorse bushes in the Ocknell Pond/Milkham area. Also in the New Forest were Will Walmsley and Martin Gillingham who were lucky enough to hear a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker and see a family (?) of four Treecreepers, plus at least 30 Willow Warblers, while in the Beaulieu Road/Denny Wood area. They also went to Eyeworth Pond where a dozen Mandarin were perhaps to be expected, but a count of 28 Mandarin on the big pond at Beaulieu, made by Paul Winter, was a surprise to me as I have not previously heard of Mandarin there.

66 Collared Dove seen in the Fareham Creek area today by Trevor Carpenter made the first autumn flock of these birds that usually take a break from gardens and nesting at this time of

year for their annual holiday in the country - mainly gleaning grain from harvest fields. Clearly not all Collared Doves have got the message yet as I still have one regularly taking bird seed from my garden and today I watched two having an animated dispute here in Havant. +++

Another and less welcome autumn flock was seen today by Richard Ford at Woolmer Pond - around 200 Canada Geese - but their presence was somewhat offset by the presence of four Woodlark, more than 50 Sand Martins, and song from both Chiffchaff and Willow Warbler. Two or more Mandarin were also on the pond. +++

Further north in Hampshire John Clark found two different Garganey on different ponds - a female or young bird at Tundry Pond (at Dogmersfield, just west of Fleet) and an eclipse drake on Fleet Pond itself.

A Great Tit sang strongly for the first time with the regular Chiffchaff in my garden this morning and this evening I could see that the Egrets were still using the Wade Court roost but I was too late to see them coming in and had to be content with a count of 20 that were still visible.

FRI 30 AUG

Best bird today was a Red-necked Phalarope newly arrived in Sussex at the Pagham Harbour Sidlesham Ferry pool where at least one Garganey is still present. Between the ferry and Church Norton 11 Curlew Sandpiper were seen, along with one Avocet and a Marsh Harrier plus the expected passerine migrants (on Aug 28 there were 8 Spotted Flycatchers at Church Norton).

Morning drizzle along the Hampshire coast may have persuaded a large flock of Yellow Wagtails to pause in their southward journey some ten miles before they reached the sea. Trevor Carpenter saw them in a field at Chidden, a little to the south east of Old Winchester Hill, and reckoned there were well over 50 there, more likely around 100, with four Wheatear, a Whinchat, Linnets and Greenfinch and more than 100 Swallows overhead (perhaps taking insects disturbed by the birds on the ground?). +++

Elsewhere in Hampshire an Osprey was perched in a tree at the Blashford Lakes, seen near Moyles Court, and one Swift passed over Romsey. A more unusual (if less interesting) bird seen today was an albino Canada Goose in the big flock at Titchfield Haven, seen by Sue Morrison (those who have got close enough say it has the requisite pink eyes!). One Roseate Tern is still at the Haven with a juvenile Black Tern and a juvenile Knot, and a Marsh Harrier is reported to be present.

Both Robert Watson and John Clark visited the Vyne floods near Basingstoke today. Robert comments on what looks like a blue phase Snow Goose and John agrees that it is a Snow Goose (though maybe a hybrid) and not an Emperor. It was with close on 200 Canada Geese and 3 Bar-heads plus 67 Teal, 17 Snipe, 13 Shoveler, 7 Greenshank and a Ruff (to which list Robert adds 152 Lapwing).

For those interested in the colonisation of the rooves of houses in our seaside towns by nesting gulls a late snippet of news from Nik Knight today confirms that Herring Gulls did breed on buildings at Portsmouth Grammar School this summer. This was probably not the first year that they did so as I heard of young Herring Gulls, just out of the nest, walking about on Portsmouth High Street close to the school on 27 July 2000 - the lady who told me of them lived nearby and was concerned for their safety as they clearly had no concept of danger from the cars using the road.

THU 29 AUG

An update on birds in Langstone Harbour comes from Bob Chapman today telling us that there are now three Ospreys in the harbour (did the two return from Chichester Harbour after appearing there on Tuesday, or are these new birds?). It seems that the Garganey all left after giving their last show on Bank Holiday (Aug 26) but wildfowl numbers continue to rise with 40 Shoveler, 10 Wigeon and 4 Pintail now present, plus some 60 Egrets in total in the harbour. A Merlin is present (presumably the one seen by Will Walmsley on Aug 26 has settled here) and Bob thinks the many Kestrels that he sees indicate a good year for voles and hence a good chance of the arrival of winter owls to hunt them (though if the vole population is high throughout Britain the owls may all find plenty of food and settle down long before they reach us on the coast!) +++

The Garganey may have left Farlington but there was still one in Hampshire today on the Vyne

flood at Basingstoke, seen by Martin Pitt (and another three probably still at Lymington). The reverse may be true of Black-tailed Godwit which can now be seen in hundreds on the Farlington Lake each high tide, whereas the birds which spent the spring and summer living off worms in the fields at Titchfield Haven seem to have decided that salt water mud is the place to feed now, leaving only 12 in the Haven today. A more unusual mud feeder seen there today was a male Bearded Tit, but I guess his interest was in food blown onto the mud from the reeds (though he may have been after mineral supplement for his diet or small stones to help grind the food in his gizzard). This news comes from Bob Marchant who reckoned that the Canada Goose flock was a little over 150 birds. He also noted just one juvenile Shelduck and heard 4 Cetti's singing (one more than the previous report). +++

West of the Haven Trevor Carpenter visited Hook and noted a small flock of 12 Mistle Thrush (what happened to that flock of 56 seen at Eastleigh Lakeside on Aug 5? Large roaming bands of Mistle Thrush were once an autumn commonplace but nowadays they are a rarity). The two Brent which re-appeared at Hook a couple of days ago are still there., unlike the Wood Sandpiper which David Thelwell saw floating down the Test near Timsbury (on floating vegetation) or the 700 Lesser Blackbacks which he also saw flying downstream at dusk - as he has not noticed them before he does not know if they are part of a recently started regular daily movement between inland fields and a roost at the head of Southampton Water or a one off arrival of birds from the north that will stay on the coast or go on across the channel.

A quick check on the Tournurbury Wood Egret roost on the southeast shore of Hayling Island this evening showed me that at least 34 Egrets were using it. I arrived at 7:30pm, a good 20 minutes before sunset and with the tide well out to allow the Egrets to continue feeding until it began to get dark, but there were already 5 Egrets perched on the trees when I arrived so there may have been more hidden from my view. I had to wait a few minutes until the Egrets began to fly in, all coming from the West Wittering direction across the harbour, and I waited until it was nearly dark and none showed for a good ten minutes but I have no idea if others came from the landward side of the wood, hidden from me by the trees. +++

To view this roost park at the north end of Selsmore Avenue and take the footpath leading northeast, between the entrance to the boatyard and Marine Walk road. This will bring you to the shore from which you can see the roost area to your left, on the north side of the west end of Mengham Rythe, known as My Lord's Pond. +++

Tournurbury Wood has a large rookery as well as the heronry, and there were probably 100 Rooks on the saltings with Crows and many Jackdaws. As the sun set these all flew up and headed for distant trees, making an impressive sight, but there were few other birds - one Sandwich Tern and one Great Blackback were the only ones that I noticed apart from a couple of Black-headed Gulls, and Oystercatchers were the only waders I could hear.

From West Sussex Andrew Howard tells me of a few late Swifts and many Swallows (plus good views of a soaring Hobby) over his garden near Petworth, and yesterday Lawrence Holloway had another single Swift over his garden at Bognor. Also in Sussex today at least 100 Swallows were seen over a small patch of semi-urban land at Sompting - with them were 5 Whinchat and singles of Yellow Wagtail, Garden Warbler and Sedge Warbler. Another small indication of a major movement of Swallows could be seen as a few flew south over my garden in Havant this morning.

WED 28 AUG

The first Ring Ouzels to appear among the autumn migrants were two (maybe three) seen on Ventnor Downs, Isle of Wight, with at least 15 Redstart and 8 Tree Pipit plus a late Swift. One Hobby and one Pied Flycatcher were in the same area.

No doubt Grasshopper and Aquatic Warblers are commonplace among the statistics collected by ringers from their mistnets but the sighting of one by a normal birder is a great rarity that brings much excitement, and today that excitement was experienced by Trevor Carpenter when he reached Fareham Creek at the end of a long walk along the north shore of Portsmouth Harbour from Portchester - to make the sighting even more impressive it was unaided by any sound from the bird. Among the other birds seen by Trevor were 19 Wigeon, showing that the Cams Bay flock is already building up, and a total of 25 Little Egret (maybe recently out of a night roost at Horsea Island or Elson Wood? - still no hint of whether those roosts are in use this

summer). Also in Fareham Creek were 64 Black-tailed Godwit, 2 Whimbrel, 6 Common Sandpiper, a Greenshank and a Kingfisher. Landbirds seen during his walk included 2 Spotted Flycatcher and 2 Wheatear, 5 Willow Warbler and 6 Chiffchaff.

This morning John Clark visited a couple of wildfowl sites on the northern fringe of Hampshire, at Wellington Country Park and Stratfield Saye. At the first site two pairs of Great Crested Grebe had young, bringing the total of successful breeding pairs there this year to four, while at Stratfield Saye he recorded the impressive numbers of 54 Gadwall and 403 Mallard, though he comments that in the 1970s over 1000 Mallard could be seen here each autumn. This comment sent me to make a quick check on past Hampshire Bird Reports and I see that in 1979 the Mallard count at Stratfield Saye reached 1400 in Oct of that year. Looking at later reports the maxima at this site were 850 in 1985, 480 in 1986, 750 in 1987, and 300 in 1988 with 308 in Oct 2000. Although trends are difficult to analyse in a species bred for shooting the WeBS summary for 1996-97 says that the population index for this species ... reveals a striking decline which appears to have commenced in 1988-89. Recently it looks as if the Mallard population may have 'bottomed out' (to apply a stock market term to a dabbling duck) and John's count today seems to reflect a general upward trend in Mallard numbers. +++

Another species which John does not even mention is Canada Goose, for which the 1983 Hampshire Bird Report gives an August count of 2500 birds at Stratfield Saye. I am sure there are lots of people all round the country who would love to know the secret of how to reduce their Canada Goose flocks to zero! +++

15 Snipe were among the birds seen John Shillitoe when he went to Titchfield Haven today - this is I think the first double figure count of Snipe back at the coast this autumn and made up for an otherwise unexciting visit. Earlier John had done better at Old Winchester Hill with 4 Blackcap, 3 Whitethroat, 3 Spotted Flycatcher, a Lesser Whitethroat and a Turtle Dove plus 11 Chiffchaff and 5 Willow Warbler.

TUE 27 AUG

At dusk this evening Barry Collins was on Thorney Island counting Egrets coming in to the roost trees in the churchyard but his total was only 147 compared to the 189 on Aug 13. This drop may have been just a 'blip' in the figures but may well reflect a movement of Egrets northward to inland sites as these invaders start to take over inland Britain as well as it's coasts - no proof of this yet but watch this space! +++

Well inland on the Hampshire/Berkshire border John Clark did not tell us of any Egrets in the Eversley/Moorgreen area but did count 597 Lesser Blackback gulls arriving for the night from surrounding farmland, with 7 Egyptian Geese present on the Eversley gravel pits.

Back on the coast Barry Collins had two juvenile Ospreys fishing in Chichester Harbour off Thorney Island today and assumes they were the two that have spent several days in Langstone Harbour. Normally in autumn and spring Ospreys seem to prefer Chichester to Langstone Harbour but this year these seem to be the first in Chichester Harbour (other than the one seen over the Bosham Channel on Aug 22). I wonder if these two will stay around Thorney or show a preference for Langstone harbour by returning there. Another Osprey was seen well into Hampshire today by Bob Marchant who watched it catch a fish in the river Hamble near Curbridge above the M27 - four Kingfishers and three Greenshank were in that same area. +++

Yet another Osprey was seen, with a Marsh Harrier, over Pagham Harbour in Sussex today but the Red-backed Shrike which was in the pony fields at the Church Norton Severals area yesterday had disappeared (my guess is that this is the same bird that was at Farlington Marshes in the middle of last week and was previously seen near Langstone).

Other birds of puzzling origin were two summering Brent Geese seen near the mouth of the Hamble river yesterday by Trevor Carpenter. Earlier in the summer two or three Brent showed occasionally in Portsmouth Harbour, at Titchfield Haven and Hook, and then disappeared. Two were last seen at Hook on July 28, and the only reported sighting of Brent west of Gosport since then was of one at Keyhaven on July 31. Also on July 31 6 Brent were reported in Langstone Harbour by Bob Chapman and at the time it was thought that the two from the eastern Solent had gone there, though a subsequent conversation with Jason Crook revealed that he thought the six had been in Langstone Harbour throughout. Presumably the geese

have been moulting in August and while they are doing this they always keep a low profile, emerging when they are restored to full flight about the beginning to September, when we see them scanning the skies for the first of their returning migrant fellows (could be as early as next week!). My guess is that the birds from Titchfield/Hook hid on the Lymington Marshes or at the mouth of the Beaulieu river during their moult, and if anyone has evidence of where they actually were I would like to hear it. +++

Other birds seen at Hook/Warsash today by Bob Marchant included 40 Yellow Wagtail and a Lesser Whitethroat. Bob also heard 3 different Cetti's Warblers singing in that area today - maybe marking the end of their summer moult silence. I wonder if we will hear the Langstone pond bird again or if it has moved off in disgust after failing to attract a mate? +++

An interesting report from the Meon Valley comes from Chris Jones, who saw a Raven fly off down the valley as he was driving up to Old Winchester Hill on Aug 25.

Among today's news from Sussex is a note from Mike Collins, who works on the Goodwood estate, to say that the White Stork which arrived on the golf course there on Aug 6 has remained there to date, implying that the Stork reported over Ringmer near Lewes on Aug 23 (flying east away from the distant Goodwood area) must have been a second bird in the county. +++

Other Sussex news includes the continuing presence of the Ortolan Bunting on the downs west of the River Adur near Sompting and the presence of a large flock of 100 Linnet in the Sheepcote valley on the eastern fringe of Brighton. With the Linnets were single Tree Pipit, Reed and Sedge Warbler, 4 Yellow Wagtail, 8 Whinchat and 18 Wheatear. Linnets sometimes get listed with Yellowhammer, Corn Bunting and other farmland birds in severe decline but luckily the shortage of Linnets has not yet become noticeable in areas where I spend my time (although as I write this I realise that the 100+ flock that was always to be seen on Old Idsworth Farm last autumn was not in evidence on my most recent visit to the farm despite harvesting and lots of wildflower seed). +++

John Simons, living in the Finchdean area north of Rowlands Castle, saw 24 Buzzards in the air together over Dean Lane End on Aug 15 and says this is the biggest collection of the birds he has ever seen in Britain. Certainly such a count would have been unimaginable anywhere east of the New Forest ten years ago but such is the rate of increase among these birds that I suspect this record will not stand for long. Recalling reports of 35-40 Buzzards in the Test Valley I have just had a look back at the reports for the spring of 2000 and see that Russell Wynn estimated that there were 40 Buzzard in the area from Nursling to Romsey but I see that the biggest group seen together then was 18. At that time Richard Jacobs, a raptor specialist, reported seeing one 'flock' of 20 birds and two of 18 in the Mottisfont-Romsey area of the Test valley, but nowhere can I see a Hampshire count to beat this current group of 24. As this group at Dean Lane End was probably a social gathering of up to six pairs breeding around the Finchdean area, with this year's young, we can safely predict that Buzzard numbers are not in decline locally! +++

John also reports that on Aug 17 he saw 12 Yellow Wagtail in this inland, waterless area, and that at least two pairs of Hobby have bred thereabouts this year. +++

One other item of Sussex news from another source is of an Avocet and a Little Stint seen at the Pagham Harbour north walls yesterday.

MON 26 AUG

Being Bank Holiday I took the morning off to join Geoff Ball, a visitor to Hayling Island from Edinburgh, on a walk round Farlington Marshes. Walking from Broadmarsh to meet him in the Eastern Road carpark I found Jason Crook 'digiscoping' a bird in The Bushes and had a good view of the Wryneck which he had just discovered. On the open land by the nearby stream were at least 12 Yellow Wagtail and I had had glimpses of four more among cattle in the Hay Field so I was hopeful of seeing more with Geoff, but - although we had much better views of the Wryneck feeding on an anthep - the only other really good bird seen was one of the two juvenile Ospreys eating a fish on the shore of Baker's Island opposite The Deeps. On The Deeps we saw three Pintail among the Shoveler and Teal, and watched a flight of seven Wigeon flying over. Other birds here were at least seven Egrets and three Herons, plus two Swan families, one with just one cygnet and the other with six, including the odd Polish bird that now looks to be an adult in its white plumage while its siblings are still 'ugly duckling' brown.

The most unusual sighting here was not of a bird but of a potential bird predator which initially made me think of the Polecats which have been the subject of recent discussion on Hoslist. It was working its way around the northern edge of The Deeps, taking advantage of all cover and holding its body low to the ground like a stalking cat, but was clearly an adult Grey Squirrel with long bushy tail and the prominent rusty red patches on its grey fur which cause occasional reports of Red Squirrels in unlikely places. What a Grey Squirrel was doing here and why it was behaving in this uncharacteristic way I do not know but we saw it clearly over a period of perhaps two minutes. +++

A good many other birders also went to Farlington today, and putting together their reported sightings gives a much more impressive list than my own sightings. Most unexpected was a Nightingale perched in open view seen by Mike Collins but perhaps the most comprehensive list came from Will Walmsley who saw a Merlin on the islands, both the two juvenile Ospreys that are currently resident in the harbour, the two Black-necked Grebe on the water in Chalkdock, and the two Garganey on the pool behind the reserve building (which I had looked at closely but thought were Teal). I did see a couple of Reed Bunting at the Deeps and a Lesser Whitethroat in the Bushes but did not see 2 Wheatear and 5 Whinchat on Will's list nor his 10 Whimbrel and 12+ Greenshank (Jason told me that the 54 Greenshank which he reported recently spend most of their time out of sight on The Scrape). Careful scrutiny of The Lake at high tide gave Peter Raby figures of 351 Black-tailed Godwit (plus 3 Bar-tails), 425+ Dunlin (the first 100+ flock of the autumn?), 147 Redshank, 62 Grey Plover and 28 Greenshank. At The Point Will saw one Black Tern perched on the remains of the Oyster House, and Robert Watson later saw two, maybe three, of them fishing with Common Terns. +++

While looking back through my notes to find Bob Chapman's announcement of the hatching of the Polish cygnet at the Deeps I noticed that on that day (June 5) he also mentioned the presence at the Marshes of one adult Shelduck with seventeen ducklings, and speaking to Jason Crook this morning I gather that these were all thought to have come from nests at Budds Farm where it is likely that three pairs nested this year.

Not too far from Farlington Matt Lawes was by the Wallington River which curves around the north west corner of Portsdown, seeing one Kinfisher and 3 Grey Partridge. Hopefully these Partridge are wild or at least feral birds, but this sighting (following hard on my own sighting of a pair near Westbourne yesterday) reminds me that this is the time of year when hand-reared game birds and their now fledged young are released into the fields in the hope they will stay and be shot. +++

Further inland Trevor Carpenter was on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley, seeing 6 Spotted Flycatcher and 5 Bullfinch before crossing the valley to check out Old Winchester Hill where he was greeted by a flock of 11 Tree Pipits and later found more to give a possible total of 23 (and a minimum of 13).

On Aug 16 Mike Jones was delighted to have a Bee-eater in his garden at Longstock on the River Test and today Pete Smith had the same pleasure in his garden in the New Milton area before the bird flew off towards Sway. Other unexpected birds were seen in Sussex today - on the downs just north of the Sompting area of Worthing an Ortolan Bunting was near a dew pond, and at the Church Norton Severals a juvenile Red-backed Shrike was seen in the pony field with 4 Spotted Flycatchers and 2 Garden Warbler in the same area. Up at the Sidlesham Ferry Pool there were 2 Wood Sandpiper, 1 Little Stint, 11 Curlew Sandpiper and a Merlin, and away to the east 2 Golden Plover were among the birds seen at Beachy Head. +++

Still with Sussex news I see that the White Stork was still at the Goodwood golf course yesterday, while last Friday (Aug 23) brought 2 Pied Flycatcher to Hove and a late Swift over Bognor.

In Hampshire yesterday the count of Yellow Wagtail seen by Trevor Carpenter at Hook/Warsash was 40, but Trevor thinks that while these birds find their food at Hook by day they commute to and from the reeds at Titchfield Haven for their night-time roost. +++

PLANTS:

SUN 01 SEP

By now the Goldenrod and Devil's Bit Scabious is abundant in Havant Thicket, and the Dwarf

Gorse can be detected in many places there by its flowers, but some of the brightest colour now comes from fruits such as bright red Rowan berries and even brighter Yew arils. The only surprise item when I was there this morning was freshly flowering Small Sweet-grass (*Glyceria declinata*). Lesser Skull-cap was still just flowering. Work to open up the edges of the main tracks, cutting back some of the trees and scraping the edges of the 'main roads' to bare earth, gives promise of more interesting plant growth and insect life for next year.

SAT 31 AUG

Although the majority of the Danewort plants by the old railtrack in Havant have long ceased to flower I saw quite a few new flowers there today.

MON 26 AUG

Walking around the Farlington Marshes seawall this morning Slender Hare's Ear was in full flower near The Deeps and elsewhere on the southern sea wall, but the only other plants worth a mention where the mass of Spear Mint (exact form not determined) in the Chalk Dock area just outside the reserve, and the Rock Samphire which is now common along much of the western and southern seawall - my only reason for mentioning this is the memory from the 1980s of just one plant growing on the seawall of the carpark area outside the reserve, when Dave Billett was jealous of its presence there but not in his reserve! Walking from Broadmarsh to the reserve along the Chalkdock shore I quite enjoyed the fresh bright orange/yellow berries on the Sea Buckthorn which make this otherwise drab and useless shrub quite attractive for a couple of week in the year. Noticing that the berries only occurred on a minority of the shrubs I have just checked that the species, like Holly, is dioecious so the berries only appear on the female plants.

INSECTS:

SUN 01 SEP

I think Emperor dragonflies usually vanish from the scene around the middle of August, so one seen today in the Hook/Warsash area by Dave Tolcher was not only the latest he has seen but may well turn out to be the last for the year. It was a female, but as with quite a few ageing dragonflies it was having hormone trouble and its normal female apple green colour was becoming suffused with male blue +++

Richard Carpenter was also in the Hook area today, seeing more than ten Common Blue butterflies, one Small Copper and three Clouded Yellows. I think the numbers of Clouded Yellows are now beginning to drop off but at least one more was seen today in the Fareham Creek area by Trevor Carpenter.

Many Speckled Wood were in the rides of Havant Thicket this morning with plenty of Common Darters but the two butterflies which caught my attention were a very freshly emerged Comma and a fresh Green-veined White. A few Gatekeepers and Meadow Browns were still on the wing and of course Large and Small Whites

FRI 31 AUG

Perhaps today's best butterfly sighting came by chance to John Clark when he was birding in the Dogmersfield area just west of Fleet - he had just found a Garganey on Tundry Pond when he came on a large patch of thistles to the south of the pond, with more than 110 Small Tortoiseshell on them. In the same area he had at least 5 Clouded Yellow. 4 Red Admiral and 2 Painted Lady. +++

Another excellent list of butterflies came from Mark Litjens at Martin Down - he recorded at least 100 Common Blue, 37 Small Tortoiseshell, 26 Small Heath, 25 Adonis Blue, 19 Speckled Wood, 12 Brimstone, 10 Peacock, 8 Brown Argus, 7 Clouded Yellow, 4 Painted Lady and 4 Small Copper plus 2 Red Admiral, 1 Holly Blue and 1 late Small Skipper. Also on his list were another 8 species making a total of 22 species seen. (Perhaps Hampshire can compete with Sussex after all!) +++

Not quite so dramatic was Mike Duffy's list of butterflies seen on Stockbridge Down but he too saw more than 15 Small Tortoiseshell and added a very fresh Comma and some Chalkhill Blues to Mark's list of 14 species which included just one Clouded Yellow. +++

Another butterfly species seen at neither of the downland sites was Grayling, of which Will

Walmsley saw at least 15 in the Black Gutter area of the north western New Forest. +++
One Small Tortoiseshell and one Common Blue were seen by me on the grassland at Broadmarsh by Langstone Harbour this afternoon, and by the Meon Canal path at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter had 5 Small Tortoiseshells and another Comma.

Dave Pearson had another 3 Grayling and a couple of Small Heath in the south east of the New Forest where he was mainly interested in dragonflies, finding at least nine species which included some 20 Beautiful Demoiselles, an Emerald Damselfly, two mating Keeled Skimmer and three Golden Ringed dragonflies plus Southern and Migrant Hawkers, Common Blue and Blue-tailed Damselflies

One moth that may be of some interest was seen by Rob Edmunds at Fleet on the night of Aug 29 - this was an uncommon heathland species called *Crambus hamella*, so it is not clear why it came into a suburban garden.

THU 29 AUG

At this time of year hawkmoth caterpillars are often in the news as they grow to large size and reveal their presence in unusual places when they set out from the camouflage of their food plant in search of a good pupation site. I think quite a few do not make it on this exposed journey, and we have sad proof of this today from Alan Barrett who found a dying Eyed-hawkmoth caterpillar in New Church Road at Hove (it's back end had been squashed) where he had found two other caterpillars of the same species on Aug 13 - one of those had also been trodden on, but the other, when offered the chance of pupating in some loose earth, eagerly took up the offer and will hopefully emerge next summer. The fact that this new find was a fortnight later than the first illustrates the variability in the time taken by different caterpillars to reach maturity, and hence the variability of the dates at which moths emerge during their season. +++

Three more mature hawkmoth caterpillars are in today's news, all Elephant Hawks. In Totton Les Stride found one that was probably on its journey to find a pupation site, and picked it up, but it's defensive strategy (drawing back its head and swelling out the first of its body segments to show its 'eyes' to best advantage) persuaded Les to put the caterpillar down again as quickly as he could! I hope that one found a safe destination. Here in Havant Nik Knight heard of one found in the grounds of Wade Court, close to which he lives, and in his own garden he watched one actually pupating - holding some leaves over its body as it spun a silk cocoon to hold the leaves around it for winter warmth and protection. (I understand this species sometimes buries a little way into loose soil but sometimes just lies among leaf litter on the surface).

In yesterday's notes I commented on the absence of Small Heath from Alan Thornbury's list of sightings at Noar Hill, where I believe the species normally does well, and Alan has sent me a further note confirming that he did not see any of these butterflies, while at the same time using that absence to further a theory he is developing about the reluctance of some butterflies to show themselves after midday. More than once this summer he has arrived at a butterfly site in hot sunshine just after lunch and failed to see species which other people have seen there before lunch. Referring to the Small Heath Alan says {{ Assuming that they are on the wing there at the moment, and I have no reason to doubt it, it may be another case of being in the right place at the wrong time of day (eg like the brown hairstreak, they had enjoyed several hours of good flying and feeding conditions and had bedded down earlier than normal). I had this phenomenon well illustrated in Whiteley pastures when I joined the BC walk on 14 July. In the late morning there were many more silver-washed fritillary on the wing than when I made a return visit in mid-afternoon in similar conditions (down to ~10% of their late morning level), yet other butterflies were on the wing in similar numbers, morning and afternoon. It would be interesting to know if other observers have come across this sort of behaviour. }}

Alan Barrett visited the Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ at Woods Mill on the River Adur near Henfield where he found 25 Small Tortoiseshell on the wing, and later at Mill Hill near Shoreham he found many Common Blues, at least 30 Chalkhill Blues with Meadow Browns, Small Heath and several Brown Argus plus 6 Clouded Yellows. This was a good list but several reports from West Sussex this summer have indicated that it has a much more numerous downland butterfly population than anywhere in Hampshire despite our Martin Down and Old Winchester Hill sites. One such report, of an outing on Aug 16, has been forwarded to me today by Andy Horton (not

sure if he saw the butterflies or if it was someone else). This walk was on the downs just north of Southwick (the part of the Brighton conurbation between Hove and Shoreham) and covered two square kilometres from Slonk Hill to Southwick Hill, and during it over 100 Small Tortoiseshell were seen with over 40 Wall Brown, 30+ Painted Ladies and at least 8 Clouded Yellow - no doubt with plenty of others in the supporting caste.

More insects seen recently in Sussex include three dragonfly species still out at Pulborough Brooks (15+ Migrant Hawkers, with 3 Brown and 1 Southern Hawker) and a couple of hoverflies seen by Lawrence Holloway in his Aldwick garden at Bognor - one of these was the reasonably common *Scaeva pyrastris* (a large insect with prominent white transverse markings, not meeting in the middle, on its black abdomen) and a less common, smaller hoverfly which has a similar black abdomen with transverse markings not meeting in the centre, but its markings are a bright lemon yellow - this is *Xanthogramma pedissequum* which apparently often escapes attention by its habit of flying very low over the ground. Lawrence also found a mature Oak Bush Cricket in his garden.

WED 28 AUG

Alan Thornbury went to Noar Hill this afternoon in the hope of seeing Brown Hairstreak, but while he found other people who had seen this butterfly before he arrived he failed to spot one himself (and now thinks maybe late morning is the best time to see them ...). Nevertheless Alan came away with a list of 14 species which included a late female Silver Washed Fritillary and a Painted Lady wearing an unusually dark shade of salmon pink on its wings. The dominant species was Meadow Brown (50+) with Common Blue (20+) next commonest. 12 Brimstone, 5 Speckled Wood, 4 Peacock, and two each of Brown Argus and Comma were supplemented by singles of Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady, Red Admiral and Holly Blue, plus Large and Small Whites, but Small Heath was not on the list though the first generation were numerous there and the second generation is well out elsewhere.

Alan Barrett tells me that his son, living in Weymouth, has recently collected five Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars from Fuchsias in local gardens. He is feeding the caterpillars in captivity, keeping them in a tank with loose soil at the bottom for the caterpillars to pupate in when their time comes, and I will be interested to hear how soon that is. The books say they pupate in September, but if they do so earlier that may explain why the caterpillar which I recently put on a large plant of Greater Willowherb was never seen again. I do know that most caterpillars only show themselves when they leave their normal feeding habitat and go in search of somewhere to pupate, so perhaps the one that I was given on Aug 21 was ready to bury itself. Elephant Hawkmoths are by no means uncommon, and I suspect that each female moth lays 100 or more eggs (pure guesswork - does anyone know the number) so I suspect that a dedicated search of fuschia plants and willowherbs would turn up plenty more of these fascinating caterpillars.

My ignorance of the Geranium Bronze butterfly has been further reduced by a note from Mark Tutton telling me that they were first seen on the wing in Britain in 1997 (in West Sussex), but their caterpillars had been found in imported Geraniums from South Africa perhaps 20 years ago. Though they are still uncommon in Britain they are now well established and expanding their range in southern Europe, and more can be expected here each year that global warming continues.

TUE 27 AUG

Local moths found in Hampshire recently included three fresh specimens of second generation Gold Spot, Small Dusty Wave and Treble Bar which came to Philip Hack's light at Nursling on the northern fringe of Southampton on the night of Aug 23, and one nice migrant, a Tree Lichen Beauty, was taken by John Langmaid in Southsea last night. +++

Other out of county migrant moths recorded on Steve Nash's national website that may be of general interest start with a Camberwell Beauty seen at a Butterfly Conservation reserve in East Sussex (at Park Corner Heath) on Aug 22 and a Golden Twin-spot moth found in Dorset last night. From further afield come records of both Rosy Underwing (Aug 21) and Gipsy Moth (Aug 18) found in Guernsey, and from the Sheltands comes a find of a Clifden Nonpareil on Aug 24 (with The Brick there on the same night and a Goldenrod Brindle on Aug 22)

When Mark Litjens saw a Grayling butterfly at Hook/Warsash on Aug 24 I remarked that I had not

heard of this species being found there before, but today Trevor Carpenter tells me that he used to see them there in past summers but has not spotted one there for several years. +++ More up to date news comes from Philip Hack who visited the Durlston country park in Dorset yesterday, finding 12 Lulworth Skipper which were the main objective of his trip but also seeing a few Adonis Blue plus some late Small Skippers and what may have been the last Marbled White of this summer.

MON 26 AUG

A brisk northerly breeze today kept the temperature down, but not enough to stop butterflies taking wing, and I was pleased to see perhaps a dozen recently emerged Small Heath scattered around Farlington Marshes. One Small Tortoiseshell was also seen but otherwise my list was limited to a few Common Blue, Meadow Browns and Whites (Small and Large definitely seen). +++

Although I only saw one Small Tortoiseshell bigger numbers of fresh specimens were seen on Old Winchester Hill by Trevor Carpenter and at Magdalen Hill Down by Lynn Fomison. While some of these freshly emerged butterflies must fall prey to birds or spiders I now think that the rapid drop off in numbers that usually occurs after an emergence is due to the butterflies, having had a chance to stretch their wings and fill up with nectar, going straight into hibernation.

Lawrence Holloway's garden near Pagham Harbour in the Aldwick area of Bognor Regis seems to be a mecca for hoverflies, and Lawrence's digital camera gives us all a chance to share in his sightings. On Saturday (Aug 24) he had yet another species of large black and yellow hoverfly to show us, and he names it as *Helophilus trivittatus*. Lawrence is less confident in identifying a black and yellow Ichneumon Fly of which he also has a good picture on his website - he names the genus as *Amblyteles*, of which Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects has only one example (*A. armatorius*) looking very like his insect but as Lawrence clearly has more comprehensive insect books than I do I hesitate to suggest that name. Holly Blues were also still present in his garden.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 29 AUG

Walking near the Sussex Wildlife Trust HQ at Woods Mill (on the R Adur near Henfield) today Alan Barrett is pretty sure that he glimpsed a Mink. He is not fully certain that's what it was but hopes to get confirmation that Mink do occur in this area to back his observation.

TUE 27 AUG

Richard Mould-Ryan, the Countryside Manager for Eastleigh Borough, seems to be doing a good job in protecting the natural wildlife of Lakeside Country Park from alien invaders. He tells us that the Terrapin that were once seen in the lakes are there no longer and that a large American Bullfrog which appeared recently (possibly a dumped 'pet') has been 're-homed'. I'm not sure if that is a euphemism for sending it to the great pond in the sky or whether it is being kept in 'protective custody' until it decides to go there of its own volition, but I hope it is somewhere where it cannot eat up the native wildlife or (even worse) breed.

MON 26 AUG

Last Thursday (Aug 22) I passed on Judith Chawner's news that wild Polecats do occur in Hampshire and I was reminded of this today when watching birds at the Farlington Marshes Deeps. On the hummocky, uneven ground close to the water I watched for perhaps two minutes as a Grey Squirrel worked its way southwards, using all available cover and behaving more like a Polecat than a Squirrel - body and tail pressed close to the ground and legs bent like a hunting cat as it crept onward maintaining the lowest possible profile. The long bushy tail and body, marked with the rusty colour that sometimes leads to their mis-identification as Red Squirrels, left no doubt that it was an adult Grey Squirrel, but I have no idea as to why it was there and why it was behaving in this way and not bounding over the grass openly, flicking its tail, as one generally sees them in open grassland.

Listening to a Radio 4 programme about Farming and Wildlife this evening I learnt that Dung Beetles are a favourite food of Greater Horseshoe bats, and that the bats require hedgerow trees to provide branches from which they can hang while eating their evening meals (leaving little piles of wing cases etc below a favoured perch). I had previously read that Horseshoe

bats hunt by slowly searching the leaves of trees for resting insects (rather than pursuing them in flight), but I have not heard of them hovering over cowpats to pick off dung beetles so I presume these are taken in flight. Nevertheless the bats are a new addition to my view of the food chain associated with organic milk production (non-organic dairy farming involves forcing large Bolus anti-biotic pills down the throats of the cattle so that their cowpats are sterile and attract no dung beetles).

WEEK 34 AUG 19 - 25

BIRDS:

SUN 25 AUG

Reports of a Spotted Crake at Farlington Marshes prompted Jason Crook to send out the result of his search for the reported bird - all he could see was a juvenile Water Rail - but at the same time he has given us a summary of what is currently to be seen in and around the reserve. Out in the harbour 2 juvenile Ospreys have been seen for the past couple of days along with 9 Black Terns and the regular two Black-necked Grebe. On the reserve the autumn flood of Greenshank has arrived with a count of 54 present today. 3 Pintail are I think new arrivals and the Whinchat count is up to 5. +++

Will Walmsley also went to Farlington today, and his more comprehensive list includes a juvenile Garganey near the reserve building, 8 Yellow Wagtails, 5 Curlew Sandpiper and a Redstart. Also on the list were a single Bar-tailed Godwit among the Black-tailed, 1 Knot, 4 Wigeon, 15 Shoveler, 2 Gadwall and an estimated 60 Teal with one juvenile Shelduck. +++

At Titchfield Haven John Shillitoe saw 2 Knot, 2 Black Tern, 1 Little Stint and the ongoing Roseate Tern.

At this time of year most Collared Doves desert their garden homes and head for the harvest fields, so I was a little surprised at a couple of reports of these birds building new nests, but a report from John Clark of 80+, with 50 Greenfinch and 50 House Sparrows, on a farm near Greywell in north east Hampshire sounds as if the majority are sticking to their traditional holiday season. This is the last area of Hampshire where Tree Sparrows were known to breed (and there has been a strong effort with nest boxes etc to keep them in the RAF Odiham airfield site) so John adds the comment that the Sparrows were all House, not Tree - it sounds as if the campaign to save them in the county has failed. John Clark also visited the wetland known as the Vyne floods north of Basingstoke today (it is currently a good site for inland waders and wildfowl) and had a Black Tern and four Yellow Wagtail there. Yesterday Robert Watson noted 170 Canada Geese with 1 Bar-head at this site, and also yesterday John Clark saw 7 Greenshank, 1 Ruff, 2 Dunlin and both Common and Green Sandpiper there before moving to Eversley gravel pits and counting 17 Gadwall.

In southeast Hants two Kingfishers were back on the River Ems at Brook Meadow today.

Two Grey Partridge were a pleasant surprise as I walked over pony fields north of Westbourne village this morning on my way to the south of Stansted Forest to check out the state of Aldsworth Pond. The Partridge were just south of the hedge separating the fields from the busy Emsworth Common Road and showed well on the short grass before flying off and identifying themselves as Grey with their 'rusty hinge' calls rather than the 'chuka' of Red Legs. Just before seeing them I had been watching around 75 Linnet feeding on weed seed in the heavily grazed pony fields but there was little other bird life until I got into the Stansted Forest Groves where a mixed tit flock included Marsh Tit and an 'l bj' with a unique di-syllabic call note 'Chew-ee' with the emphasis on the second syllable. I got good views of it and by its size, shape, generally brownish plumage and inconspicuous supercilium, plus its regular tail-dipping, was a Chiffchaff - presumably an aberrant individual bird. A few minutes later another bird call left me puzzled but on balance must I think have been a Kestrel (a pair usually nest on nearby Stansted House and this could have been one of their young) The call was a rapid 'kee kee kee kee kee' which did not sound like a normal Kestrel and at the time I wondered if it was a Hobby but looking at the books it seems there calls are not so high pitched and sharp - I did hear a Hobby, and saw it, close to this spot last year but cannot be sure of my memory of its call. Not long after this, walking along Park Lane near its junction with the Sindles Farm track, I had a third bird offering identification by call only despite

careful stalking - this was almost certainly a Redstart with a strong and persistent call like that of a Chiffchaff but much louder. +++

Reaching Aldsworth Pond I found the water level was only just below the top of the wooden boards of the exit sluice, but the only birds on the water were Coots, Moorhen and at least one Little Grebe..

SAT 24 AUG

A brief visit to the Wade Court Egret roost this evening gave me a count of just 36 Egrets. With the tide low and the weather fine I thought most birds would delay their arrival until approaching dark forced them from the shore but although I arrived about the time the sun set the majority of the birds were already in the roost, meaning that there were more there than I could see or count so I reckon an estimate of just over 40 birds spent the night here.

On Thursday (Aug 22) Tony Gutteridge walked around the Chidham peninsula in Chichester Harbour and had good views of an Osprey over the Bosham channel with both Whinchat and Turtle Dove near Nutbourne. Another Osprey was over Pagham Harbour that day and 13 Curlew Sandpiper were seen at Sidlesham Ferry with a Garganey, while the Selsey west fields had Marsh Harrier, Merlin, 4 Turtle Doves and 13 Med Gulls

Going back to Wednesday (Aug 21) an Icterine Warbler was at Beachy Head and on the previous day an Aquatic Warbler (first of the autumn?) was at Titchfield Haven

FRI 23 AUG

Following on a couple of recent reports of Crossbill flying over Sussex (10 near Hastings on Aug 11, and 40 over Brighton on Aug 19) David Thelwell today saw 3 of them flying north up the Test Valley at Timsbury. Still no hard evidence of an invasion - all these could be birds dispersing from local nest sites - but worth bearing in mind when in potential Crossbill woods such as Stansted Forest or Havant Thicket. +++

Last autumn Trevor Carpenter told us of an electricity pylon on the north west shoulder of Portsdown Hill which was regularly used as a daytime perch by Peregrines and today John Shillitoe saw two Peregrines on two adjacent pylons here for the first time this autumn. To look for them Trevor recommended using a rough pulloff on the roadside at around SU 6007-16 on what is I think called Swivleton Lane (though it is logically part of Nine Elms Lane coming up to meet Swivleton Lane). From here you can see the pylons to the north west of you as the power lines sweep down to cross the Wallington River at White Dell Farm.

Both Titchfield Haven and Hook have been well watched recently, and (although I have not checked it out myself) it seems that there is more news from the Haven to be found on the internet at <http://www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/titchfield/index.html> (rather than on the 'tisrecent' page which several of us have been visiting to get the official news and which seems to have ceased to be updated after July 18). +++

Today at the Haven Richard Carpenter tells me of at least 20 Yellow Wagtail, 2 Tree Pipits and 2 Whinchat in addition to a good variety of waders (Little Stint, Curlew Sandpiper and Ruff plus Greenshank, 2 Spotted Redshank and over 70 Dunlin). Best bird yesterday was a brief glimpse of a Spotted Crake, seen by John Shillitoe and presumably others at around 16:45 in the afternoon - possibly the same one which turned up on Aug 11 and showed well until it learnt its way about in the local cover. (It was also seen on Wed 21 Aug). There were Osprey sightings on both Aug 21 and 22, and a single Roseate Tern remains a regular daily feature. +++

At Hook Trevor had an Osprey fly over yesterday (Aug 22) when the first three Wigeon were back at the hide scrape (north of Hook Lake) and today Bob Marchant counted 17 Whitethroat in the Hook Links area where there were also 5 Stonechat, 2 Whinchat and 2 Redstart. There were 5 Gadwall here today with 10 Yellow Wagtail (yesterday Bob saw 27 of them with 15 Wheatear).

+++

A few days ago a Chiffchaff sang strongly from the Hayling Billy line behind my house and I expected to hear it each day thereafter as I do in most autumns but that one must have been a passage bird rather than a bird settling down to claim its winter territory. Today, while mowing the lawn at midday I enjoyed Willow Warbler song from the same trees lining the old rail line, and listening to this bird I could hear it moving quite rapidly towards the sea. Earlier in the morning I had been in Stansted Forest where a family party of Nuthatches were very noisy, as were all the common tit species that have now regained their voices. While in the Stansted Sling area I had a

brief view of what must have been a Sparrowhawk from its broad rounded wings but in the sunlight it had the reddish brown upper plumage of a Kestrel or a Woodcock - is this a feature of juveniles?

THU 22 AUG

A young male Red-backed Shrike was at Farlington Marshes this morning, probably the same bird seen on the Chichester Harbour shore between Warblington and Langstone on Tuesday evening by Gary Stevens. I hope it will stay for a bit at the Marshes and allow birders to see it as I think this is the first chance to see one in the Langstone Harbour area since the bird at the Kench in Oct 98 (which stayed four days). +++

Among those who saw it today were John Shillitoe and Will Walmsley, and Will's list for his visit to Farlington included two Redstart and a Wheatear, plus a Blackcap though surprisingly no Whinchat which I would have thought were now a regular feature. He also saw a Curlew Sandpiper, 1 Greenshank, 2 Spotted Redshank and 307 Black-tailed Godwit.

Mike Rafter was in his chosen patch of the north western New Forest today and enjoyed the unusual sight of a Honey Buzzard being straffed by a Hobby. His list of raptors did not stop there - he also had Osprey and Peregrine in addition to more expected sightings of Buzzard, Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. Passerines included 15 Redstart, 9 Wheatear and 8 Whinchat plus a couple of Woodlarks (which I imagine are difficult to find at this time of the year if, like Skylarks, they are keeping a low profile during their moult).

Another Hobby, plus a Swift, a Mandarin duck and nearly 200 Sand Martins, went on Dave Unsworth's list when he visited Sowley Pond near Lymington this evening to count the Egrets coming in to spend the night. His Egret count was 42, and in the absence of other information, I have put this figure into a guesstimate of the total number of Egrets currently in our area. Last year's total for the Aug 25 count was 584 and my guess at the current number is 650, arrived at by summing the following figures - those in brackets are pure guesses based on last years count, the others are based on figures recorded sometime this month. Pagham Hbr 60, Thorney Island 200, Tournerbury (50), Wade Court 50, Horsea Island (80), Frater Lake (40), Badnam Creek (40), Sowley Pond 40, Ashlett Creek (10), Arlesford Pond (10), Isle of Wight sites (70). My reason for putting out a set of figures that are not based on fact is to encourage a few more facts from birders in the areas for which we have no current information (and in those areas with roosts that we do not yet know of!)

Peter Raby was at Hill Head today and gives us news of birds on that section of the Solent shore. He only saw one female Scoter (Richard Carpenter reports four Scoter in the area) and just 17 Common Tern, but he did see 4 Black Tern and counted 77 Ringed Plover, 41 Dunlin, 30+ Redshank and one or more Sanderling as well as a Little Stint (in the Haven?)

In Emsworth the number of Swans today was up to a total of 128 (the highest count by Brian Fellows for this year though not quite up to the 135 he found there in mid July last year). Brian also counted a total of 40 Coot in the area compared to his previous overall count of just 19 on July 25. I have not had time to check through counts for previous years but it seems to me a little early for a mass movement of inland Coot to the coast which seems to be happening this year (but it would also perhaps account for the 7 Coot appearing on the salt water of Fareham Creek which I noted from Matt Lawes on Tuesday this week). +++

Yesterday Brian Fellows had a much more welcome bird arriving back at the coast from inland breeding - the first Kingfisher to be seen by the River Ems in Brook Meadow for several months. Also from Chichester Harbour comes a count of 7 Black Tern seen at the harbour mouth on Aug 19 by Tim Lawman.

WED 21 AUG

On Aug 16, when reporting a flock of 25 Yellow Wagtail seen at Beachy Head, I wondered if that would be the biggest single flock to be seen this autumn, and until today my pessimism over their declining numbers was born out by the small numbers reported along the south coast, but today's news is much more heartening. Here in Hampshire this morning Trevor Carpenter found a flock of 38 on the Hook shore fields and then saw a flock of 20 in the Bunny Meadows by the River Hamble just above Warsash, almost certainly making a total of 58 (Bob Marchant also saw the shore flock, which he counted as 35 birds, about an hour before Trevor saw them). These figures

were, however, totally eclipsed by a count of 330 Yellow Wagtail seen in the Rye Harbour area of East Sussex during a dawn count of roosting Little Egrets yesterday morning (Aug 20).

Colin Allen went out this evening to count the number of roosting Cormorant in the Hythe 'docks' area, finding a total of 46 perched on various cranes and wires, but he was much more excited, I think, to find that an old friend had returned to Hythe after an absence of around 9 months. This is a single Emperor Goose which (assuming that the sightings have all been of just one bird) has been circulating with Canada Geese in Hampshire for the best part of seven years. It first came to my attention in 1998 when it was seen at a number of sites in the Portsmouth area (Emsworth Mill Pond, Aldsworth Pond, Farlington Marshes, Baffins Pond and the Portsmouth Water Co HQ in Havant) but it had previously been seen on the Brick-kiln Pond at Stansted Forest in the winter of 95/96 (for which winter the WeBS report lists only one of its race seen by counters in the UK - compared to 17 Bar-heads and 95 Snow Geese). It stayed mainly in the Emsworth area until late in 2000, and was then seen in the Hythe area on Southampton Water from Jan to Nov 2001 when it turned up at Overton (head waters of the River Test near Basingstoke) and remained there until Jan 2002 when it put in a brief appearance at Andover before disappearing until today. The bird looks at first sight like a blue phase Snow Goose but the main differences are in the head and neck plumage and the bill and leg colour. The head and neck of a Snow Goose are white (with maybe some black on the back of the neck), but the Emperor has the black of its breast extending all the way up the front of the neck to its bill (rest of the head and neck are white). The bare parts of the Emperor are more yellow than red, Snow Goose is the reverse but this is not very obvious. Another wildfowl escape arrived at Titchfield Haven today - a Chiloe Wigeon. I don't know what its plumage is like at the moment, but a drake in the spring has a white face, dark head and neck, dark flecked breast, mantle and wings and light orange flanks - very showy and not to be confused with any normal wigeon or regular wildfowl. This was seen by John Shillitoe with the single Mandarin that is still there, but he did not see the Spotted Crake, Bearded Tits, Black Terns or Osprey reported by others. John also heard reports of Grasshopper Warbler but there is some doubt about the origin of these - Barry Duffin admits that tapes of this bird's reeling are played regularly to attract birds into the mist nets (and if I understand Peter Morrison aright the tapes can still be heard at midday)

Keith Vokes was in the Shatterford/Beauleiu Road area of the New Forest today and remarks that, for the last 18 months, Dartford Warblers seem to have become scarce here where previously they seemed common. Others visiting the northern New Forest have made similar remarks and among suggested reasons for this apparent decline have been low flying helicopters and even Mink predation. This is all very subjective and I have seen no real evidence for either a decline or for an observed cause but it does sound as if a thorough survey would be worth undertaking. My (totally unfounded) suggestion is that Dartford Warblers have not declined in number but have found the pressure of people on the New Forest growing to the point where it makes sense to emigrate to less pressured parts of the English countryside (this theory is of course blown out of the window by the lack of pressure during the F&M year). +++

Keith also comments on sighting a Reed Bunting in the Shatterford area for the first time about 10 days ago, and wonders if this species is unusual in heathland. Again I know nothing of the status of this species in the New Forest but I do know that those people who think of it as a wetland species only are wrong. It certainly prefers to breed in damp areas (I would have thought there is plenty of suitable habitat in the Forest) but in the winter it can be found almost anywhere. As long ago as 1952, when my still very useful Popular Handbook was printed it said that {{ recently Reed Buntings have been found breeding in dry habitats far from water. In winter they occur in cultivated fields and open ground including upland grass moors, often far from water }} Another reason for overlooking this species in habitats where you are not expecting it is its very unobtrusive nature.

Looking across Southampton Water from Redbridge Park to Eling Great Marsh this morning Paul Winter saw 66 Yellow Legged Gulls (including 7 juveniles), and yesterday (when the tide had pushed some of them off the roost area) there were at least 37 present with 10 juveniles further upstream.

Over on the Isle of Wight a second Marsh Harrier, a juvenile, arrived at the Bembridge marshes yesterday when the Icterine Warbler was still being seen at Whale Chine. Today the warbler was not reported but a Swift flew over and a possible Melodious Warbler was reported.

I spent my afternoon on the fields of Old Idsworth Farm where cereal harvesting is in full swing, but saw relatively few birds. Coal Tits were singing among a flock of other tits and noisy Nuthatch in the wood and a Great Spotted Woodpecker called from the trees lining Huckswood Lane, and in the 'setaside' Quarry Field two Skylark chirruped briefly when I disturbed them (they are now presumably quiet while moulting). The only real bird activity was near the farm where a mixed flock of Chaffinch, Greenfinch, House Sparrows and Yellowhammer were gleaning the harvest, and on the hedgrow trees to which these birds retreated as I approached there was one Spotted Flycatcher. Over the farm house and building a good two dozen Swallows were very active. Of the fifty Grey Partridge released on the farm late last autumn by David Uren, only two or three were seen by him during the disturbance of harvesting, but that is better than none!

TUE 20 AUG

A little while ago (Aug 2) a family of Hobbies were seen hunting airborne beetles (Summer Chafers) at dusk in the New Forest, and were still flying when the birders retreated through lack of light. Today a Hobby was once more seen at an unexpected time of day, hunting over reed beds at Rye Harbour (Castle Water) at the crack of dawn on a rainy morning - it would probably have gone un-noticed had it not been for a keen birder being there to count the Egrets leaving their over-night roost. The Egret count was 48. +++

A similar number of Egrets were probably in the Wade Court roost at Langstone this evening - I got there long after the majority flew in but I was able to count 37 in the trees and to see another four fly in. Had I been there earlier in the evening I might well have shared a more exciting bird seen by Gary Stevens and others who were watching the waders from the bench at the seaward end of Pook Lane (half way between Langstone Pond and Warblington Church). A passerine bird suddenly appeared on the posts which mark the remains of a small landing jetty once used by fishing boats here, and when Gary turned his scope on it he was initially baffled, but a quick check through a bird book told him this was a Red-backed Shrike (from what he told me it sounds to have been a juvenile). This is not the sort of place I would expect a Shrike to use for hunting (and most of these posts would be submerged by the incoming tide) but I guess there is a possibility that the bird noticed the much more suitable habitat across the water at North Common (around Northney marina) on Hayling Island and could be refound there. +++

On the same evening, a little to the west of Langstone, Mike Collins came to Budds Mound in the hope of seeing the Osprey that has been in Langstone harbour for several days. He did not see it, but did find two Black Terns, a Common Sandpiper and 3 Wheatear. On the Budds Farm pools he counted a dozen Little Grebe, one having a newly hatched chick with it. +++

Across in the south west corner of Langstone Harbour, on Duck Lake at Milton Common, Ian Thirlwell was puzzled today to see a troop of very dark coloured downy ducklings with a female Mallard apparently acting as their mother, though a male Tufted Duck was nearby. Both the dark plumage, and the fact that the ducklings were persistently diving, persuaded Ian that they were young Tufted Duck but I'm pretty sure they were genuine Mallard ducklings. In the first place young Tufties are, to my colour sense, black like baby Coots whereas Ian says these were {{ all over dark brown, paler on the flanks with no contrasting yellowish areas on the face }}, and secondly energetic diving is by no means uncommon among baby Mallard (they may be after food that their parents get by upending, but at that size upending does not get you down nearly far enough!) +++

Another item of Hampshire duck news comes from Chris Jones at Fleet Pond where he found yet another Garganey to add to the total of these rarities currently in Hampshire - this one being a drake.

Yesterday I reported that a single Arctic Skua was seen off the East Sussex coast last Saturday and that there were four there on Sunday. Today the SOS website reports that there were 5 present on Monday, and further evidence of the start of passage comes from Richard Ford who saw a Skua, but was not sure of the species, while he was on the Solent water crossing to the Isle of Wight on Monday. Commenting on Richard's news Trevor Carpenter gives a useful tip for picking out Skuas among a distant Tern flock - he says that the airborne Terns tend to stay at

roughly the same height when not diving down to fish, whereas the Skuas are for ever rising up above the flock before diving down on their next victim.

My final comment on today's news is in relation to a list of birds seen at Cams Bay, where Fareham Creek flows into Portsmouth Harbour, by Matt Lawes yesterday. The presence of 53 Canada Geese, 3 Common Sandpiper and 2 Little Grebe is not unexpected, but with them Matt saw 7 Coot, and I think it is rather unusual for Coot to be on salt water at this time of year - in fact I do not expect them there until inland waters freeze over. These were probably displaced from a nearby pond by some disturbance, but if they take up permanent winter residence on the salt water I will be very surprised.

MON 19 AUG

The first autumn Wryneck sighting this year went today to Ian Calderwood who saw the bird at around mid-day in private property somewhere in the Gosport area. Records of Corncrake on passage are usually less frequent than those of Wryneck but today brings a third observation for this summer of Corncrake in Sussex. Admittedly the first of these, heard on July 29 at the Hunston golf course just south of Chichester, was never claimed as a certainty, but one in oilseed rape on Chantry Hill (south of Storrington and north of Worthing) was definitely heard on Aug 4. Today's record is from Hollingbury Camp in Brighton where the bird vanished into a bank of Rosebay Willowherb (as this is also known as Fireweed I wonder if the bird will emerge as a Phoenix?). Among other migrants in that area were 8 Swifts, 12 Whitethroat, 10 Willow Warbler and a Whinchat. Also seen in Sussex today was a Melodious Warbler netted at Beachy Head and two Wood Warblers were seen in nearby Belle Tout wood. Another Melodious Warbler, plus a Booted Warbler, was trapped at Portland in mid week, and news of these comes from Simon Ingram who was staying there around Aug 16.

Both Jason Crook and Bob Chapman have independently put out updates from Farlington Marshes today, telling us that the first Whinchat and Redstart of the autumn arrived there yesterday (with a Spotted Flycatcher present in the bushes today). Also yesterday a juvenile Marsh Harrier was seen twice as it crossed and re-crossed the harbour (possibly the one that was at Dean Lane End, near Rowlands Castle, last Monday?) A juvenile Osprey has been around in Langstone Harbour since last Wednesday (Aug 15) and the count of Garganey is now up to five (two are often on the stream while the others are usually at the Deeps). Also at the Deeps two Wigeon arrived on Saturday (Aug 17) according to Bob and I assume these are the first of many returning for the winter (normally one or two stay on the reserve over the summer but I have not heard of any there regularly this year although on July 31 there was said to be one Wigeon at the Deeps -reported as a female by Bob and as an eclipse male by Jason, so the two birds now there may have been lurking for some time!). Among the more visible birds that are seen regularly are a Hobby, two Peregrines, four Sparrowhawks and maybe more than four Kestrels. No mention of any Yellow Wagtails or Shelduck, nor of the two Avocet that were in Chalkdock recently but the two summering Black-necked Grebe are still around.

Young Cuckoos now seem to be moving south (their parents have probably already left), and today brings new sightings of juveniles from Andrew Carter (I think in the Avon Valley above Fordingbridge) and from Newtown on the Isle of Wight. +++

Another sign of autumn was a sighting of more than 50 Swallows on wires in the Meon Valley by John Shillitoe who also noted a flock of 150 Lapwing in the Soberton area and the first Egret for a month or more by the river at Mislingford (have there been any regular inland Egrets this summer - perhaps in the Alresford area?) John found none of the Corn Buntings and chats he expects in the Hoe Cross/Soberton area today but he did, for the first time ever, see a Little Owl on one of the trees near Hoe Cross that have always looked as if they should have Little Owls. +++

At Hook on the Solent shore Trevor Carpenter was very pleased to see 2 Black Terns today, and very surprised to hear a Bullfinch singing - can anyone else match this? Trevor also had a Garganey and 17 Black-tailed Godwit here. +++

Richard Carpenter was also in the Chilling/Warsash area today seeing 3 Yellow Wagtails at Chilling, a Gadwall at Hook and 15 summer plumaged Grey Plover at the Bunny Meadows. Earlier he had heard a Dartford Warbler at Gilkicker and seen the single Roseate Tern at Titchfield Haven - the tern was also seen by Stephen Graham, visiting from Berkshire, who also

saw two Turtle Doves there in addition to 3 Egrets, a Snipe and 20 Dunlin that are less common in Berkshire. +++

Another Hampshire sighting today was of a single Tree Pipit seen by Simon Ingram at Eastleigh Lakeside where a visiting Common Gull was unusual after the summer break.

Yesterday's news from Sussex that has just appeared on the SOS website has three items that interest me, the most exciting being a report of 40 Crossbills flying over Brighton (hopefully heading west and the spearhead of a much larger movement that will bring the birds to us in Hampshire). Next came two sightings of Honey Buzard, one over Brighton and another over Pagham Harbour. There was also an Osprey seen over Ferring (at the west end of Worthing). The third exciting observation was of at least 50 Swifts over Church Norton, presumably a batch heading south from perhaps Scotland? Other birds seen in the Pagham Harbour area around Church Norton included 10 Curlew Sandpiper, 4 Knot, 3 Yellow Wagtail, 2 Spotted Flycatcher and 2 Wheatear, with singles of Whinchat and Greenshank. +++

Although seen at the far eastern end of Sussex it is worth noting that the single Arctic Skua that I reported on Saturday (Aug 17) had increased to 4 on Sunday, probably marking the start of their autumn passage through the English Channel.

An unusual news item from David Parker, who lives at Forestside on the northern edge of Stansted Forest, that reached me this morning relates to Saturday (Aug 17). David says it was {{ a truly remarkable day. I returned from a visit to Hayling Island at about noon and the garden was full of birds. From Hayling the loW was not visible so whether fog or mist in the channel caused migrants to sit it out I don't know. Our trees were full of House Martins and Swallows - 70 or so House Martins and 20 Swallows. This flock kept taking off, circling and landing for about 3 hours. During this time I also had a party of 7 Willow Warblers visit and our real rarity - 5 House Sparrows - both species looking equally lost. As the afternoon progressed the birds gradually left but not before I had had 3 Hobby fly over together and 5 Buzzards. Talking to friends it would appear that the local Buzzards raised 2 young this year; the fifth bird may have been one of last years? }}

On Saturday morning Simon Ingram logged species number 149 for his patch at Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park - this was Bar-tailed Godwit with three of them flying over among a flock of 11 Whimbrel. Hopefully this means that a few Bar-tails will soon be seen at the coast, not reserved for lucky inland birders! Also on Saturday there were still at least two juvenile Mandarin duck on the lakes at Eastleigh - three of them had appeared (as far as I can tell, out of the blue) last Monday, Aug 12. Looking back over Simon's records I see that on May 16 two drake Mandarin dropped in briefly (he says they were the first there since 1996) and on July 24 he saw a single Mandarin female, so my guess is that she nested there unknown to the vigilant bird watchers. I also checked for other Mandarin breeding in Hampshire and see that on May 27 David Thelwell found a female with 13 downy young on Broadlands Lake at Romsey, and on May 18 Giles Darvill watched a female with young in the Beaulieu Road area of the New Forest.

PLANTS:

SUN 25 AUG

A morning walk from Westbourne village (just north of Emsworth) into the southern fringe of Stansted Forest gave me an unexpected clump of flowering Orpine close to Aldsworth Pond and three good plant species in the fields just north of Westbourne. Starting from the Cricketer's pub and going north over the rough pony fields I found a mass of Sneezewort in flower with Lesser Hawkbit and lots of Sharp-flowered Rush, but I did even better on my return when I walked across the close mown grass of the village cricket pitch and found quite a lot of Devil's Bit Scabious flowering at ground level, and then found lots of Chamomile flowering in the football pitch (this was a lifetime first for me and was in perfect condition with wide areas of 'chamomile lawn' turf dotted with the plant's daisy like flowers). I see that sports pitches are a favourite habitat for this plant and that the Hants Flora marks it as occurring in the Rowlands Castle tetrad, not too far from Westbourne. +++

One other plant worth a mention was no longer in flower but had the remains to show its species and sex - this was a plant of male Hop in the Park Lake hedge just southwest of Stansted House (where I was expecting to see the first fruits on the many Spindle trees in the hedge, but found none).

FRI 23 AUG

This morning I took Rosemary Webb to Stansted Forest to get her confirmation of the identity of the Violet Helleborine which John Goodspeed showed me on Aug 9. That plant's flowers were by now all over but Rosemary had no doubt that it was a Violet Helleborine (incidentally she told me that the close packed clump of several plants which John had also shown me there was in itself confirmation of the species as this clumping is common with Violet but not with Broad-leaved Helleborine). +++

Walking back from this plant we spent a little time looking for fungi and, where a very large Beech has recently fallen on the slope down from the west end of the Main Avenue, we found a large patch of Common Dog Violets coming into flower as a result of the light now reaching the ground unshaded by the Beech. Coming back to the well trodden path leading down the slope from the south side of the Main Avenue to the dry bed of the Lavant stream (where the cattle are now grazing) we crossed from the north side of this path (where the fallen Beech is) to the south side where there were fungi on a much smaller stump of a tree felled long ago. As we stood up to leave this stump I happened to be facing up the slope and saw, within a yard of me, another perfect specimen of Violet Helleborine in full flower. If any one wants to see this plant for themselves they should go to the point, on the well used path leading up the slope, where there is a way through to the fallen Beech on the north side (this spot is marked by a big pine tree with the stump of a felled tree at its foot). Now look on the south side of the path and you will see the bare trunks of two mature (but not ancient) Beech trees forming the start of a line leading uphill and diverging from the path you are on. Project this line to an ivy covered tree stump and just beyond it to a small Hawthorn with two slender trunks - the Violet Helleborine is at the foot of the Hawthorn just uphill of the ivy covered stump.

Should there be any Tree Wardens (or people with an interest in Tree Wardening matters) among the readers of this page they can now make use of an email newsgroup on this subject that has been set up by a John Laws (himself a tree warden and parish councillor at a place called Welton - there are several such places in England, but I think his is the one just north of Daventry in Northamptonshire). The purpose of the group is to provide a source of mutual advice and support for Tree Wardens. To subscribe to the group send an email to tree-warden-links-subscribe@yahoogroups.co.uk and to post a message send it to tree-warden-links@yahoogroups.co.uk. To contact John Laws with any queries use the address treewarden@btinternet.com

WED 21 AUG

The first flowering Autumn Ladies Tresses orchid was seen on Portsdown on Aug 7, and although I have not seen any myself, I expect they are now widespread. This was confirmed today by Rosemary Webb who told me they are flowering in her garden on Hayling Island. I myself was walking the fields of Old Idsworth Farm today, enjoying a little downland flora on the banks of the large chalkpit on the north side of Huckswood Lane where there were many Harebells still flowering and a few plants of Autumn Gentian. Elsewhere around the arable fields both Round and Sharp-leaved Fluellen were covered with their lovely brown and yellow flowers, and I saw my first Small Toadflax and Dwarf Spurge. A few Long-stalked Cranesbill flowers could still be found and at one point I was very surprised to see a clump of Cowslips in flower. (I also broke my duck with Autumn Hawkbit!)

TUE 20 AUG

Richard Carpenter was on Stephen's Castle Down north of Bishops Waltham and found the first Ivy flowers of the year, a major milestone of autumn. As might be expected this had attracted some unusual insects which get a mention on my Insect page.

MON 19 AUG

The Havant Wildlife Group spent last Saturday morning on the North Common public open space behind the Northney marina on Hayling Island. Before the group set off and started their flower list Brian Fellows noted that Hedgerow Cranesbill was once more flowering around the entrance to the small carpark for this site, and on the flower list which I now have I see that both the unusual items at this site were seen - a lovely patch of Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos*) and a big colony of white flowered Goats Rue (unlike the blue flowered colony at the Oysterbeds carpark). Earlier this year Bee orchids appeared on this site for the first time ever (to my

knowledge) but their remains would now be difficult to spot. On the list I see that both Tall and Ribbed Melilot, and I have always had difficulty in separating them when they have fresh flowers (keel shorter than wings in Ribbed, and as long as the wings in Tall) but I see that the task is easier when they have fruits - the pods of Tall are hairy, black and longer than 5 mm, those of Ribbed are hairless, brown and less than 5 mm. Another plant that is on the list, and which must have been flowering for some time by now (but not yet spotted by myself) is Autumn Hawkbit - I have no difficulty in picking this out by the smooth enlargement of the stem into the involucre with no sudden widening. A couple of plants that are very common to abundant on dry seaside grassland in this area are Narrow-leaved Bird's Foot Trefoil and Strawberry Clover and these were both noted as was Betony which I have not seen for myself at this site.

INSECTS:

SUN 25 AUG

I think most Hampshire butterfly seekers must be envious of the total of 200 Common Blue butterflies seen today by Tony Wilson on the downs behind Hove in Sussex, but those familiar with Hampshire coastal sites would probably not be as surprised as Tony was when he came on the lovely Golden Orb spider (*Argiope bruennichi*) today for the first time. I first became familiar with it at least ten years ago as a regular late summer feature of the rough grassland of the IBM North Harbour site and was then told that the spider (which can be found all along the south coast from Kent to Dorset) was thought to have been introduced to this country in the Eastbourne area, but I have no evidence for this. Although large and colourful when seen I think many of these spiders escape attention for two reasons - firstly their webs are rarely vertical and they tend to hang on the web with the gaudy upper surface facing down, and secondly they often drop to the ground when they feel approaching footsteps. If, however, you learn to expect them in rough dry grass, with their webs spread across any hollows in the grass which a grasshopper (their main food) will have to jump, you may find they are quite numerous. So first look for hollows in the grass, then look in them for what looks like a wisp of smoke rising from a recently dropped match (this is the effect of the silk re-inforcement put, as a vertical zigzag line, in the lower half of the web to support the weight of the spider running up and down) and then look at the top of the wisp of smoke for the brown belly of the spider. Even if the spider is absent the webs are unique and prove her presence. I say her because the males are tiny little 'matchstick men' when compared to the females large girth, and I have never seen them make a web. Because they are so tiny they are one of the male spiders which are actually eaten by the females after mating (if they are slow off the mark!). In the next few weeks the female *Argiope* will be laying her eggs, and her egg sac is a work of art. She first binds the tips of several grass blades together and then hangs from this support what looks like a 'paper chinese lantern' (pale pink in colour) with the eggs in it - she may stay near it for several days until she dies leaving the young to their own devices. +++

Going back to the butterflies seen by Tony he lists 25 Painted Ladies, 15 Small Tortoiseshells, 2 Wall Brown, 2 Brown Argus and an Essex Skipper among others.

As I was approaching the sluice by which water flows out of Aldsworth Pond and under the Emsworth Common Road I noticed a movement in the thick waterside vegetation which was suggestive of a Common Lizard scuttling out of the way. Searching the area I found a large Hogweed leaf with three insects on its broad surface. One was a clearly identifiable male Dark Bush Cricket with its deformed wings and two rear end spikes but the other two were and remain a puzzle. Although I was within a foot or two of them my eyesight nowadays is such that I need my reading glasses to see detail at this distance but only had my hand lens with me and I would have almost certainly have sent the insects packing if I had used it on them. All I can say is that the two insects were similar and very large (I estimated the length as 4 cm and double checked this against the fact that they were about twice the length of the Dark Bush Cricket which is about 2cm long). They were a dusty brown colour overall (one had a line of darker colouring along its side, suggesting a Grasshopper species) and had huge rear legs. They were in a shaded place, making it even more difficult for me to see, and I could not see their antennae to distinguish Bush Cricket from Grasshopper. I could not see any wings. With only Chinery's Collins Guide to help me I wondered if they were Large Marsh Grasshopper, but that is based only on their size and location near the pond. Any suggestions? +++

Just one Clouded Yellow paused to feed on hawkbit flowers as I was walking across the open pony fields north of Westbourne, but the only other butterflies seen by me were Speckled Wood and all three common White species.

SAT 24 AUG

Although I have not checked out the full list of moths trapped at Titchfield Haven recently (only just put on their website) one of these taken on Aug 7 seems to be new to my list. This is The Crescent, a species of boggy places where its caterpillars feed on Yellow Iris.

FRI 23 AUG

In early August last year I had up to 12 Gatekeepers in my garden here in Havant but this year I do not think I have had more than half that number, and relatively little else other than the roving Whites, an occasional Holly Blue, Brimstone and Speckled Wood, and one or two Red Admirals. This morning I added Painted Lady to the list (and saw a Gatekeeper which I have not done for some time). +++

Going on to Stansted Forest I saw the expected Speckled Woods and Whites with a few male Common Blues on the grass of the main avenue. A darker butterfly was, I assumed, a female Common Blue but it was good enough to land and spread its wings, showing no hint of blue around the body so I assumed it was a Brown Argus, but looking in Jeremy Thomas's RSNC Guide it was much closer to the illustration of the brown form of the female Common Blue which is shown with bright orange crescents on every section of the wing edges and no white fringe (where the Brown Argus is shown with fewer and duller orange crescents and a prominent white fringe). I did not get a view of the underwing spots and I wonder what the experts look for when distinguishing Brown Argus from the brown female Common Blue?

TUE 22 AUG

Rob Edmunds in Fleet had a freshly emerged specimen of a Pine Hawkmoth at his moth trap this evening, sending me to my source of moth information (Margaret Brooks' Guide to British Moths) to check its flight period. and I was surprised to find that it normally starts to appear in mid June and vanishes from the scene by mid August. I know this sort of information is only a general guide but, in times when global warming is bringing most dates forwards, I wonder if this find is exceptional? +++

Both Rob in Fleet and Brian Fellows here in Emsworth found Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillars today, matching the one brought to my front-door yesterday. Brian's was feeding on Greater Willowherb, helping to justify my choice of this plant as the new home for the one brought to me and not wanted on the garden Fuchsia's were it was found - I am, however, a little worried that I have not done my caterpillar a favour as I have been back twice to look at the very healthy Greater Willowherb plant on which I put the caterpillar and can find no trace of it (and no nibbled leaves). I also think I made a bad choice in that the plants on which I put it are situated in ground that is likely to be flooded by winter rain, drowning the insect if it pupates in the ground at the foot of the plant. Maybe, by leaving the Fuchsia flowers to which the caterpillar was attached still in its grasp when I put it on the Willowherb I defeated the camouflage of the caterpillar and caused it to be seized by a passing Magpie?

Each week Brian Fellows issues a brief bulletin of news for the Brook Meadow Conservation Group, telling the less active members of what can be seen there as well as providing an ongoing record of the wildlife. This week he includes a list of the butterflies seen there in the past week, naming the following 12 species - Clouded Yellow, Brimstone, Small Copper, Common Blue, Small Tortoiseshell, Gatekeeper, Painted Lady, Speckled Wood, Peacock and all three common Whites (I would think it likely that there was also at least one Meadow Brown present, and probably a Holly Blue). Taking this list in conjunction with comments from the team that arrived this week to cut the great growth of vegetation in this damp meadow I think the conservation group are to be congratulated on their efforts - what the mowing team noticed was that the vegetation was that much easier to mow (previously much of it was an impenetrable matted mass of coarse plants) and that there was a noticeable increase in the variety of flowering plants. Yesterday (Aug 21) Sue Clark walked the butterfly transect at Bentley Station Meadow (on the edge of Alice Holt Forest south of Farnham) and, among other things, found three Silver Washed Fritillary still on the wing (just!). This matches a recent observation of a surprising number of them

still flying in the Head Down woodland, just south of Petersfield, seen by Rosemary Webb on a recent visit.

Latest news on the national Migrant Moth website includes four more *Convolvulus* Hawkmoths (one each in Dorset and Worcestershire on Aug 20 and two at Portland Bill on Aug 19), plus three species that are new to my yearlist. Two of these new species were recorded yesterday - a Hoary Footman taken well inland at East Grinstead in Sussex and a Ni Moth in Dorset - plus a Lesser-spotted Pinion seen in Dorset on Aug 19

WED 21 AUG

It seems I was less attentive to the truth than usual when writing my Monday update this week and I have to start with two corrections to what I said then. Firstly, after Barry Collins had told me of finding his first Rosy Rustic for the year in his moth trap I transposed Rustic to Footman in my mind and reported his find as Rosy Footman. Having now corrected it and run Rosy Rustic through my check of first sightings I find that his is only the second Rosy Rustic I have heard of, though Barry's on Aug 18 was a little later than the one taken by Mike Wall at his Basingstoke trap on Aug 8. +++

Not quite such a deliberate mistake was my assumption that the Geranium Bronze listed on the national Migrant Moth website was a moth species where, as Andrew Brookes has pointed out, it is a South African butterfly species which has somehow colonised the south of France and occasionally reaches Britain. I know I have read about this species within the past year but unfortunately I did not remember where to find the information again when I needed it. I think it's journeyings about the world are all man-assisted (eggs or larvae coming with pot plants) rather than true voyages of discovery by the butterfly.

Coming to today's news I returned home this afternoon to find a plastic tub waiting for me to open it, and when I did and saw Fuchsia flowers I knew immediately what else was hiding in the foliage - a fair size Elephant Hawkmoth caterpillar which is now hopefully acquiring a taste for Greater Willowherb to which I transferred it. +++

Another large caterpillar found in the Romsey area recently by Gill Coombs puzzled the finder and initially puzzled Derek Mills when she reported the find to the BC website. It was clearly a hawkmoth caterpillar with a prominent curved horn on its back end, and the distinctive blue colour of the upper side of this horn indicated Lime Hawk (Derek says that Eyed Hawk can also have a Blue horn). The puzzling thing was that, instead of being the light green colour overall of a normal Lime or Eyed Hawk caterpillar this one was pink. Derek referred the question to Tim Norriss, the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation branch's moth officer, and Tim came up with the extra piece of information which is that Lime Hawk caterpillars sometimes turn pink when they are ready to pupate (as lobsters do when they are ready to eat).

TUE 20 AUG

The national Migrant Moth website has yet more exciting reports today, though none from Hampshire. Starting with butterflies I see that Clouded Yellows near Dublin in Ireland have been seen egg-laying, and no doubt that is true in many other parts of the country. Eggs laid now should produce butterflies before the end of October, so if the weather remains reasonable we should see a few then (October often sees a wave of migrants heading south again - maybe many of these are newly emerged?). The only other butterfly reports are of two more Camberwell Beauties, one in the Lake District and one in Cornwall. +++

Going on to moths there seem to have been three *Convolvulus* Hawkmoths at Portland Bill recently (no doubt including the one already remarked on by Simon Ingram in my notes for Monday) and another of these reached the Scilly Isles. Two more Bedstraw Hawkmoths have been seen in Essex and Norfolk. A much smaller moth, Tawny Wave, turned up at Portland Bill and was clearly a migrant though this species is resident in parts of East Anglia. A Scarce Bordered Straw was also at Portland Bill and a Great Brocade in the north of Scotland (Sutherland), but migrants, by definition, can turn up almost anywhere, and this is proved by the find of a tiny *Diasemiopsis ramburialis* which was found in the bathroom of a house in Muswell Hill, London after the light had been left on (and the window open) all night.

Good news for many insects is that the first Ivy flowers opened today, seen by Richard Carpenter on Stephen's Castle Down north of Bishops Waltham. Two of the flies which Richard saw on the flowers were previously unknown to me. One is called *Mesembrina meridiana*, a big black

House Fly (of a type which breeds in dung) with a hairy fringe to its back end, the other is *Myathropa florea*, a yellow and black hoverfly which specializes in using stagnant water in tree cavities as a home for its larvae. Other bigger hoverflies of similar colouration are also mentioned in today's reports. Richard had *Volucella inanis* near the ivy site, and in Bognor Lawrence Holloway had both the huge *Volucella zonaria* and the differently coloured *V. pelluscens* both in his Aldwick garden.

The single Wall Brown seen last Saturday on North Hayling would, I thought, be soon followed by reports of a large scale emergence of the summer brood of these butterflies on Thorney Island (where Barry Collins reported that the first 8 had emerged on July 26). Maybe these have passed without notice as being nothing special, but a check on the reports which I have seen of this species this year does not sound encouraging. We started well with Philip Hack finding three at Exbury (on the Beaulieu River shore) as early as Apr 7, then Barry Collins had his first on Thorney on Apr 20 (with only one other report of spring butterflies on Thorney - a single on June 1). A count of five seen at Keyhaven by Mark Litjens on May 4 was the highest number reported for the spring brood this year. As I said above the summer brood emerged on July 26, and John Goodspeed and Richard Jones both reported them from Portsdown around July 30, but since then I have heard of none until now, when Alan Thornbury tells me of another single on Portsdown, seen in the area above Paulsgrove, on Aug 17, the same day that the Havant Wildlife Group saw their single on north Hayling. +++

To balance this bad news I hear at second hand (from Andy Barker via Andrew Brookes) that a population of Silver-studded Blues has established itself on Hamble Common.

MON 19 AUG

An unusual item of local interest which has just appeared on the national Migrant Moth website is a sighting, by one M.Perry on the streets of Chichester on Aug 13, of a moth called *Paysandisia archon*. If the name does not excite you read on about its habits. The entry on Steve Nash's website tells us that this is {{ a South American species which has become established along the coasts of France and Spain. The larvae are a serious pest on Palm trees. It is most likely to have been imported on the host plant, although unassisted migration cannot be ruled out. }} So if you have just bought a new Palm tree for your garden check now that your insurance covers you against total loss caused by caterpillars. +++

If you do not have a Palm tree to worry about maybe you have some prize Geraniums? If so, worry on, because a moth called the Geranium Bronze is also in this country - one was reported from Cornwall and is thought to have arrived there with pot plants imported from Spain. Yet another unusual migrant which arrived recently in Dorset (found at the Butterfly Conservation HQ site), is the small moth called *Evergestis limbata* which is a close relative of our very common Garden Pebble moth whose caterpillars are also a bit of a pest to cabbage growers. +++ Other items picked from the Migrant Moths website tell of another Camberwell Beauty (in Cornwall) and of three *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth sightings (The Scillies, Norfolk and South Devon) with a fourth seen by Simon Ingram when he was at the Portland Bird Observatory in the middle of last week. +++

This same website also reports a 'furthest north' sighting of Clouded Yellow in Northern Ireland (Co Londonderry)

Coming back to more usual butterfly sightings Dave Pearson reports yet another high count of Small Tortoiseshells seen yesterday - he had more than 40 at Magdalen Hill Down, at least another ten in a garden centre at Stockbridge and 3 more in his own garden. I will be watching with interest to see if these high numbers are maintained, as I now believe that the majority of the Brimstones, Commas, Peacocks and Tortoiseshells that are now on the wing will almost immediately go into hibernation (despite the summer weather) and will not be seen on the wing again until next spring. As they will not breed until the spring it makes sense for them to conserve their energy and keep safe from predators until then. +++

Clouded Yellows continue to dominate the news from many sites and yesterday Barry Collins counted 26 of them on Thorney Island before the sky clouded over. At the same time his count of Painted Ladies got up to 41 showing that there is a real invasion of both these migrant species as well as Large and Small Whites and the less conspicuous Silve Y moths.

Both Barry Collins and Philip Hack have sent me moth trap results from the past weekend. Barry had personal firsts for the year at his Havant trap of Rosy Rustic on Aug 18, plus Pine Hawk and Lesser Swallow Prominent on Aug 17. Also on Aug 17 Philip had four personal firsts at his Southampton Nursling trap (Six-striped Rustic, Lime-speck Pug, Straw Dot, Canary-shouldered Thorn). None of these were overall firsts for the year but the Lime-speck Pug seems to be the first of a new generation. +++

On Saturday Aug 17 Philip visited both Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley and Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester, seeing at least 10 Silver Spotted Skipper at the first and 3 Clouded Yellow at the second with a few Brown Argus, Painted Lady and Silver Y moths at both sites. +++

Going back to moths I see that a Bedstraw Hawkmoth came to M. Perry's light at Donnington, just south of Chichester, on Aug 13 and another was taken at Icklesham in East Sussex (near the Kent border) on Aug 16.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 25 AUG

Andy Horton, who runs the website for the British Marine Life Study Society, has forwarded to me a copy of a message on the marine life email newsgroup from someone called Stephen who runs a Southern Marine Life Rescue organisation. Stephen's message reads {{ I received a telephone call late last night (Friday 23rd Aug) of what was almost certainly a seal off Lancing Beach (West Sussex) at about 1.30pm. The animal was originally thought to be a dog that was drowning. It was swimming just off the beach heading east west between the breakwaters and kept disappearing beneath the water. A women (heavily pregnant) rushed into the water to try to rescue what she though was a drowning dog but it disappeared. Distraught, the women told a friend of mine who lives near the beach (who reports dolphin sightings). She then reported it to me, but unfortunately could not get hold of me until late. The animal did not give off any sound or produce any splashes, which you would expect with a drowning dog. The behaviour pattern of the suspected seal matches previous observations of seals locally. When the lady rushed into the water, this was the last time the animals was seen which if it had been a seal would likely have shot out to sea. No one reported a missing dog and nothing was washed ashore over the next few hours. While we have always recorded seal sightings (usually common but occasional juvenile grey) along with cetacean observations (as Sussex County Recorder for Marine Mammals), this has become even more important in recent months because of the possibility of an infected seal reaching Sussex. There is also a fear that infection may spread to the small colony of seals at Chichester. }}

THU 22 AUG

More news on the status or Polecats in Hampshire comes today from Judith Chawner, who writes {{ I found a dead lactating female polecat on the roadside on the A354 near the Martin Down car park in 1997. I took it home and contacted the Mammal Society and the corpse was sent off for DNA - which proved it to be a pure Polecat rather than a Hybrid. Polecats were first recorded in Hampshire in 1994 .By 1997 the annual record was 5 for that year. For records since then I expect the Mammal Society can provide further information. }}

WED 21 AUG

The discussion of waterfowl predation continues on Hoslist, and today two interesting contributions come in a single message from David Thelwell, who says that, some years ago, he watched a Stoat enter the riverbank tunnels of Water Voles and emerge several times carrying dead Water Voles. If this has caught on among other Stoats (and perhaps Weasels) it could account for much of the decline in the Water Vole population. David adds that he has heard, but has no confirmation, that Polecats are also on the loose in Hampshire, so maybe Dave Pearson's sighting (see my notes for July 12) of what looked like a dead Polecat by a roadside in the north of the county was more worrying than I assumed at the time - my guess then was that this was an escaped pet (or domesticated 'Ferret racer') unused to being in the wild and unlikely to be a successful predator. +++

As part of the same discussion Colin Bates tells us that an Itchen river keeper responsible for a mile or two of the river where it passes Bishopstoke has said that he has trapped around 20 Mink in the past year or so, and presumably he has not yet got them all.

Another animal that is not welcome in the English countryside is the Muntjac deer. Like all deer they have big appetites, and I believe that one of the favourite food items of this species is the bulbs of the bluebells which give so much pleasure in the spring woods. I am not sure if the deer have had any measureable effect on Bluebells or other plants in those parts of the country where they are well established but I would prefer not to see them hereabouts, so it is with some dismay that I hear from Alan Thornbury that they are now in the Botley Woods where he has recently seen at least two of them. Earlier this year I was told that Michael Prior, head forester at Stantsted, now admits to their presence (a few years ago he denied that there were any in his woods), so I fear the advancing tide is still rising hereabouts.

Finally for today two items of somewhat better news. The first came from David Uren who was today busy harvesting wheat on Idsworth Farm but found a couple of minutes to emerge from the cab of his combine and tell me that he had seen hares fleeing from the diminishing stands of wheat in most of the eight or nine fields he had harvested. The second item came from Rosemary Webb who had seen a very impressive show of Dryad's Saddle bracket fungi in Northney churchyard on Hayling Island this week - no doubt they will be there for some time.

MON 19 AUG

There has been some recent correspondence about the reasons for declining numbers of waterfowl along the Basingstoke canal, with Herons, Pike and Terrapins on the list of suspect predators. Another prime suspect is Mink and the following story, from Martin Gillingham, is very relevant to this discussion. +++

Martin writes {{ I would say that mink are the main culprits. While fishing on the Severn a couple of months ago I was attacked by a family group of around 8 mink, which were after my bait. I managed to avoid injury but the person down river was not so lucky and ended up with a nasty bite to his hand. There were no waterfowl to be seen on the stretch I was fishing and according to other anglers the mink had taken them. The point I'm trying to make is if mink have no qualms about attacking humans then any waterfowl would be easy prey. Coming back to Hampshire, Funtley Pond had a good number of mallard and moorhen chicks this year, as ever. The pond contains a large number of pike and has a resident terrapin the size of a dinner plate but, as far as I'm aware, no mink. }}

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BIRDS:

SUN 18 AUG

The Lower Test reserve has leapt ahead of Titchfield Haven and all other Hampshire sites in this autumn's Green Sandpiper race (at present that 'race' is just a phantasy of my own but now that a Hampshire birder, Bob Marchant from Locks Heath, has won the Sussex Pom King trophy what about Hampshire taking on the other south coast counties in an annual Green Sandpiper event?). Last summer Paul Winter set a new site record for the Lower Test when he counted 25 Green Sandpiper there on Aug 18 (2001) and you could sense the disappointment when on his next visit there (26 Aug 2001) he had to report that Simon King had edged him off the throne by seeing 26 of them during the intervening week. I see today that last year's experience has made Paul even more determined to up the score, but when he was there today he could once more only count 25 (at which point he admits to thoughts of banging the windows of the hide from which he was watching in the hope of scaring a few more of the birds into the air from places out of his normal view)

Peter Raby was at Titchfield Haven today, seeing two Tree Pipits that are, I think, the first autumn passage birds to pass through here. He also saw a female Garganey in eclipse but showing well in front of one of the hides. Teal are now there in strength (more than 82 seen) and there were 10 Shoveler and a female Mandarin as well as the regular single Wigeon with at least one juvenile Shelduck. Black-tailed Godwit numbers were moderate at 49 but there were 21 Dunlin and a juvenile Arctic Tern to be seen.

Local news is from Brian Fellows in Emsworth, to whom I must apologise for misreading his message about the number of Godwit he saw on Thursday morning (Aug 15) - I have now corrected the text to what Brian actually wrote! Today's news from Brian is not so good - for the

past few days he has noticed Wrens very active around some ivy in his garden and yesterday he saw the parents carrying food to chicks whose squeaks could be heard from their hidden nest. By those squeaks the chicks sealed their fate, and this morning the ground below the ivy was strewn with dead chicks and remnants of the nest after local cats had visited it.

SAT 17 AUG

Sue Morrison watched a juvenile Montagu's Harrier perched on a post at Hook Links (the old shoreline reserve) for 25 minutes early this morning, and watched Kestrels and Magpies mob it as it flew off. Sue also saw at least 3 Yellow Wagtails here. It would be nice to think that we have had three young Montys in our general area during the past week but there is still no proof that this is not the same bird that has been seen in the Selsey area and on the Isle of Wight (though that latter bird at Ventnor on Aug 15 was never positively identified and could have been a young or female Hen Harrier). The other good Hampshire tick today was a Raven seen by Trevor Carpenter flying south east over Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley. +++

Back in Hampshire Will Walmsley went to Farlington Marshes where the number of Garganey has risen from four to five and the huge number (!) of 6+ Yellow Wagtails was seen (it will take a good deal to beat the existing record count of 25 Yellow Wagtail seen at Beachy Head yesterday!). Around 300 Grey Plover, mostly in summer plumage, were an impressive sight at Farlington where Will also saw 1 Little Sint, 1 Greenshank, 2 Knot, 2 Wheatear and a Lesser Whitethroat (but no mention as yet, in response to my query, of any Shelduck there!).

Overhead were at least three Kestrels (presumably a family hunting together), a Hobby and two Peregrines. One of these Peregrines was probably the bird seen over North Hayling this morning by our Havant Wildlife Group walking near the Northney marina.

Bill Marjeram was at Titchfield Haven where the Barn Owl is still a regular daytime sight. Another 3 Kestrels were here, also two Hobbies and a Spotted Flycatcher. Among the shore birds Bill remarks on a growing number of Turnstone with several flocks seen, some of up to 30 birds. I notice no mention of the two young Avocet nor of a Spoonbill - have these all now departed?

+++

FRI 16 AUG

At last a Bee-eater has been seen in Hampshire (thought to be only the eighth record for the county - the checklist issued by John Eyre in Dec 2001 only listed 6 records so maybe there has been one this year that I have not heard of?), the lucky finder being Mike Jones at Longstock in the Test Valley north of Stockbridge. Mike heard it overhead last night and thought it had flown south down the river but he saw it again this morning (as did a parade of twitchers who had latched onto Mike's news). I doubt the Bee-eater will stay but on the North Solent shore there are better chances of a juvenile Osprey, seen today at the mouth of the Beaulieu river by Mark Litjens, hanging around for some time till it plucks up courage to cross the channel.

I had to drive to the Huntingdon area in Cambridgeshire yesterday and returned to Havant this morning, my reward being the sound of Willow Warbler song in trees by the Bedfordshire Ouse river this morning and the sight of a young male Blackbird already wearing adult black feathers on all but his neck and breast. Less pleasant news was the sight of two roadside corpses - one a Swan and the other a Kestrel (presumably a young bird more intent on roadside prey than the traffic)

THU 15 AUG

Renewed song from Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff is part of the pleasure of autumn and while neither is a 'first' on its own today is the first time that both have been reported on the same day. Trevor Carpenter heard Willow Warbler song from one of six birds at Hook/Warsash, where he also saw singles of Yellow Wagtail, Redstart and Wheatear. The Chiffchaff was heard by Will Walmsley in his Shedfield garden in the mid Meon valley where a passing Garden Warbler was a pleasant surprise. At Warsash Peter Morrison had one (possibly two) Pied Flycatcher(s) in his garden - the surprise in this garden was a flyover by two Snipe, perhaps (another of my flights of fancy) coming in to land at the flooded Bunny Meadows by the Hamble after a long distance flight from northern Europe.

In West Sussex the Montagu's Harrier was today in the Church Norton area with an Osprey over Pagham harbour and a Honey Buzzard over Sidlesham Ferry. Another Osprey was in East

Sussex seen over Ore village near Hastings and the SOS website also brings news from Rye Harbour of 6 Garganey on Castle Water today (9 there yesterday) and an adult Little Gull. Other observations there included a Marsh Harrier and Peregrine interaction, 7 Greenshank and a Wood Sandpiper, plus a Pied Flycatcher. Probably a fairly unusual sighting there was of two Med Gulls, one a juvenile - I like to think the young gull came from a Hampshire nest and is now on one of the exploratory flights which must be part of the process by which a species extends its range.

Back in Hampshire John Shillitoe was on Old Winchester Hill, a favourite place for watching autumn raptor movements, and saw five proper Buzzards and two Hobbies. Also present were many Willow Warblers, a family of Bullfinch, a Turtle Dove, a Spotted Flycatcher and a Black Redstart. Further west in Hampshire David Holland went to the Lower Test reserve, notching up that reserve's score in the 'Green Sandpiper race' to 22 birds (20 seen together and 2 quietly resting in another place and unlikely to have been part of the 20). David also comments on the absence of Little Egrets and on two male Kestrels seen 'flying in formation'. I know that at this time of year family groups of Kestrels do hunt together - I have myself seen five of them hovering more or less in a line, with perhaps 100 yards between the birds, on Hayling's Sinah Common, and I think I have read of 11 being seen hunting together, so perhaps these were two 'family dads' being sent out by their female partners to find a good spot to take the children hunting with orders to report back straight away when they had found such a place.

Brian Fellows saw 182 Black-tailed Godwit in Emsworth Harbour this morning and says this count is his highest since a record count of 218 seen on 16 Aug 1998 - at least five of them were colour ringed. Brian also comments that quite a few of the 50 Redshank were juveniles which could be picked out by their paler orangey legs (and I guess their age could be confirmed by flecking on their closed wings where the adults are a uniform greyish brown). While numbers of waders are building up here at Emsworth I do not think any Dunlin or Turnstone, Knot or Bar-tailed Godwit, or even Grey Plover, have returned as yet so there is more to come ...

An interesting bit of news for our local (Havant) area is on the SOS website today. At 8am on Aug 13 John Simonds watched a Marsh Harrier quartering fields near Dean Lane End (at Finchdean, just north of Rowlands Castle) for 20 minutes before it flew north towards South Harting (probably passing over one of my favourite wildlife spots at Old Idsworth Farm).

My comments on the apparent low numbers of Shelduck this summer prompted Ed Griffiths to tell me that when he was at Farlington Marshes last Sunday (Aug 11) he saw a group of about 12 Shelduck, three of them juveniles, fly out from the reserve main lake west into the Shutt Lake area of the harbour. I wonder if any of the more regular visitors to Farlington Marshes can tell us more about Shelduck numbers and breeding success there this year? I would have thought that all the adults bar one or two child-minders would have left for their summer moult before the beginning of August, so I wonder if more of these birds were in fact juveniles in a more advanced stage of development.

WED 14 AUG

At this time of year, after the Canada Geese regain their flight feathers and disperse noisily over the countryside, I expect to get several calls from non-birders telling me that the Brent Geese are back early. So far I have not had any this month but Hoslist today carries the obverse side of this coin - what I presume to be a genuine report of 20+ Brent Geese seen today in a little visited part of the north Solent shore between the Lymington and Beaulieu rivers - a place called Park Shore. As the mouth of the Beaulieu River is where the last big flocks of migrant Brent are seen each spring I have often wondered why we do not get more reports of summering Brent there, and maybe in future we will do so (though perhaps it is one of the conditions of getting a permit to visit Needs Ore that you are not allowed to mention Brent Geese in case the news attracts an invasion of twitchers and egg collectors?) +++

Hoslist today also carries the first three reports of Arctic Terns on autumn passage. The first was a juvenile seen at midday yesterday (Aug 13) near the Itchen Bridge (close to Southampton docks) by Ian Watts. The second was also a juvenile seen in Langstone Harbour yesterday evening by Jason Crook, and early this afternoon Ian Watts saw two adults and a juvenile from Mayflower Park on the Southampton waterfront. +++

Still with Hampshire news I see that Titchfield Haven is making a bid to outdo the Lower Test as a

Green Sandpiper hotspot. As we have already had a count of 20 at the Lower Test in the first week of August and Titchfield Haven could only muster 11 today (reported by John Shillitoe) it is unlikely that the Lower Test will be beaten but I for one will be watching the scoreboard in this fast moving game(!) John also comments on a new arrival with the Canada Goose flock at Titchfield - he says it is a white goose with no black in its wings (i.e. not a Snow Goose) and I wonder if this could be the hybrid Bar-Head from Baffins Pond? Combining notes from John and from Richard Carpenter I see that the Haven currently has 11 Gadwall, 1 Shoveler and 1 Wigeon among its wildfowl, plus 1 juvenile Shelduck and this last bird makes me think that Shelduck seem to have had a poor breeding season in Hampshire. Last year at least one family group of three youngsters survived from the Budds Farm pools and a total of 12 juveniles were seen at Farlington Marshes in early July (though I think they were reduced to 7 by early August). This year none seem to have survived at Budds Farm (though at least three grew to full size and may still be in hiding) and I have heard of none at Farlington so for all I know this one juvenile at Titchfield is the only one in Hampshire. +++

Last summer I heard of at least 40 juvenile Shelduck at Pagham Harbour in the Sidlesham Ferry Pool and so far this summer the highest count I have heard from there is 24

TUE 13 AUG

The Isle of Wight has at least 10 juvenile Shelduck in Newtown Harbour (and probably the two escaped Cape Shelduck at Bembridge) but the thing that caught my eye and stirred my sense of humour in Derek Hale's Isle of Wight news today was the report of an estimated flock of 300 Jackdaws and Crows settling for the night in Parkhurst Forest - with their reputation for thieving jewellery the Jackdaws do seem to be tempting fate by choosing a night roost so close to Parkhurst Prison!

Jason Crook had a good evening of birding around the north shore of Langstone Harbour this evening. New to the scene in the Chalkdock area (east of the Marshes and north of North Binness) were two Avocets and with them where the two summering Black-necked Grebe, while the eastern seawall of the Marshes gave Jason very close views of a crowd of 180 Common Terns which contained 2 juvenile Black Terns and 1 juvenile Arctic Tern. At least three juvenile Garganey were on the stream in the reserve (one very close to the reserve building) and more obvious birds were 25 Greenshank and 4 Spotted Redshank plus one Wood Sandpiper at the Deeps.

Barry Collins counted 189 Egret going to roost on Thorney Island this evening, and while this may include 30 disturbed from the Langstone Wade Court roost (see my note below) the total is in line with the growth in the Egret population as birds return from local and overseas breeding with perhaps some young. This years roost counts for Thorney are as follows (but beware that there are two roost sites on the island and it is impossible for Barry to count both at once) - 15 on Jan 2, 43 on Feb 6, 35 on Feb 21, 47 on Mar 7, 37 on Apr 4, 58 on June 25, 93 on July 15, 118 on July 29, and now 189 on Aug 13. In 1998 and 99, when the Thorney Roost was the only roost in our area, the totals were 222 and 281, but now there are quite a few other roosts and we need regular co-ordinated counts of all roosts to get a proper picture of the number of birds in the area.

Passing the Langstone Wade Court Egret roost just after sunset I noticed that there were no birds on the usual trees but there were at least 20 on other, taller, trees nearby with all the birds on the topmost branches. More came in to reach a total of at least 42, joining the others on their high perches as if worried by some danger in or below the normal roost area. As it became darker the birds began to make their usual move to lower perches in the normal area but as they approached it they sheered off and we soon had all 42 birds circling high in the air. At least 30 of them eventually headed off towards Thorney Island but around 10 returned to their high perches. I did not wait to see whether they stayed the night. I remember that in August last summer when we started the co-ordinated roost counts we saw similar behaviour on one or two early nights - at that time Mike Collins was recording the detail as I was recovering from my eye operation.

Last Sunday (Aug 11) Steve Keen enjoyed a visit to the Lymington Marshes which gave him (among other birds) 5 Kingfishers, 12 Greenshank and 15 Egrets. Steve was somewhat surprised to find that an estimated 40% of the Black-headed Gulls which he saw were ginger

juveniles, the more so as earlier this summer we were told that all nests had the county's biggest gull breeding colony (Needs Ore at the mouth of the Beaulieu River) had failed. Here in Langstone Harbour the percentage of young is not nearly so high (though there are plenty around) and I guess that while we have a great crowd of post breeding adult birds remaining around their nest sites on the islands the youngsters may have a built in tendency to disperse as soon as they can fly, taking many of the young from Langstone Harbour, and from breeding colonies on the Isle of Wight, to the Lymington Marshes. This would tie in with observations of young in Langstone harbour last summer well before Chirs Cockburn (the RSPB Warden) saw young leaving nests in his reserve - the young that we saw had come from distant, not the local, nests.

MON 12 AUG

A cycle ride down the Hayling coastal path to Sinah Common this afternoon gave me two close views of a Ring-necked Parakeet. The first sighting was of the bird flying south over the West Lane fields and the second was of it (or another) over the houses of Richmond Close just south of West Town station. I have no idea whether this was a local escape from an aviary or a feral bird from the London area looking for pastures new. My only other bird sighting worth a mention was of at least 60 House Martins resting on and flying round the south face of the Royal Shades hotel overlooking Sinah Common near the Beachlands centre, with at least 10 Sand Martins on the sandy beach nearby.

An interesting and maybe unique tick list for south east England was achieved yesterday by Adam Bowley, a Sussex birder who made a trip to Kent to tick the Pallid Harrier, found both Marsh and Hen Harrier at the same site, and then came back to the Selsey west fields to add the juvenile Montagu's Harrier, thus scoring 4 Harrier species in 8 hours.

Here in Hampshire Trevor Carpenter was at Farlington Marshes yesterday and enjoyed both the smart plumage of the Wood Sandpiper which is still there and also a flock of 160 Goldfinch, presumably attracted by the thistle seeds that are now ready to eat. Going back to my question (see Saturday's notes) as to where you can now find the 400 or so Canada Geese which have recently dispersed from their Portsmouth area moult sites (the IBM lake and Baffins Pond), Trevor does not mention the number on Farlington Marshes but Richard Carpenter does say that there are currently over 200 based at Titchfield Haven. Richard says they fly out from the reserve to feed on left-over grain from the cereal crops that have just been harvested in the Chilling area west of the reserve, and I guess food in harvest fields may be a main factor determining where the rest of the geese are. +++

Ed Griffiths yesterday made a trip down from Berkshire to Titchfield Haven, and once again the Barn Owl performed well in the day. His best bird of the trip was the adult Roseate Tern which is still in breeding plumage and is maybe a parent of the juvenile Roseate that also remains on show there. Both Peter Raby and Ed's young son asked the same question about this young bird, namely where was it hatched? I have no idea but, unlike the juvenile Black Tern about which we were asking the same question recently, the answer could be that it was hatched in a British nest as Roseate Terns breed (as far as I know) at two or more locations on the East coast (Northumberland and Norfolk coasts). I think it far more likely, though, that this bird came from the Cherbourg peninsula or from the north German/Low Countries coast. As the bird is not ringed any answer must be pure guesswork.

PLANTS:

SAT 17 AUG

John Goodspeed was walking by the canal path just south of Titchfield Village when he came on a plant of the pea family which he did not recognise - he gives the location as on the left of the path walking south from the car-park in Bridge St at about SU 542051 - and he sent photos of its flowers to myself and to Debbie Allan at Gosport to see if we could identify it. After a false start on my part both I and Debbie (with prompting from John Norton) came up independently with the same suggestion that it was Goat's Rue and I am pretty confident that is what it is though no one other than John Goodspeed has yet seen it in situ. As this plant flourishes at two places on Hayling Island, and on Warsash Common, and has been found at a couple of places in Gosport, it would seem to be a successful colonizer of our waste land, probably

originating from garden plants as it is a large and decorative plant somewhat like a lupin. +++ Also seen by John near the Meon Canal were Gipsywort and Nodding Bur-Marigold, and on North Hayling (in the North Common open space public carpark) the Hedgerow Cranesbill which flourishes there had started a second flowering. When this carpark was created a few years back the bare ground around it was scattered with wildflower seed and a nice patch of Yellow Chamomile (*Anthemis tinctoria*) grew and flowered, but true to the traditions of local government the same authority which had paid for the scattering of seed sent mowers in to cut down the plants - the hedgerow cranesbill survived by chance. A second clump of Yellow Chamomile then flowered in the grass at the south east corner of Langstone Bridge (where the bridge repair workers now have their base camp) and that too was strimmed to death.

MON 12 AUG

A small patch of Slender Hare's-ear was starting to flower at an established location near the west coast of Hayling Island today. For those who do not know the plant this is a good place to become familiar with it as the instructions for finding it are simple. To find it here go down West Lane on Hayling and turn right into Saltmarsh Lane fairly soon after entering the built up area, then take the first right into Denhill Close, a cul de sac where you must leave your car. Walk on into the open space at the end of the close and bear left on a well worn track rather than following the gravel path. After perhaps 30 yards this track forks into two sections and the Slender Hare's-ear plants are at the very point where the paths divide (i.e. the point lying between the two paths). The plants may be difficult to separate from the grass stems, but the wiry stems are more zig-zag in outline, and some at least currently have tiny yellow flowers at their tips. +++

On the east side of the Hayling Coastal Path (aka Hayling Billy line) roughly level with the northern edge of the large open fields between the Coastal Path and West Lane, one plant of Saw-wort is just coming into bud. The way to locate it is to come from the north and start looking as the path makes a left bend at roughly SU 7101-46, with a small piece of woodland on the seaward side and a tall hedge on the landward side. Immediately after coming round the bend and before seeing the long straight stretch of track ahead, look for a tall gorse bush which forms part of the hedge on your left going south, and the Saw-wort is roughly at the foot of this bush (which has been hedge trimmed so that it is just part of the hedge, not a separate bush). +++

Another plant that is still in full flower is the Pale Toadflax on Sinah Common at roughly SZ 7098-69 (at the south east corner of the mini-golf course). As you enter that track that follows the south side of the mini golf course at this point look around the gorse bushes on the south of the track.

Richard Carpenter gives us the news that Water Chickweed is now to be seen in flower in the Meon canal west of Titchfield Haven. This plant is not uncommon in Hampshire by the muddy edges of streams and in wet woods but it is not found in the extreme southeast of the county, and I have never knowingly seen it but it sounds as if it should be easy to recognize as a close but bigger relative of Common Chickweed, and you should be able to confirm your find by seeing that the petals are noticeably longer than the sepals and each flower should have five rather than three styles. Also flowering by the Meon canal was Trifid Bur-marigold.

INSECTS:

SUN 18 AUG

Mark Litjens went to Martin Down this morning and came away with an excellent list of butterflies including the first summer brood Adonis Blues that I have heard of in Hampshire (some were out at Swanage in Dorset on Friday Aug 16) and a superb count of 63 Small Tortoiseshell boding well for next year's 'crop' of these once very common butterflies. Meadow Browns by the hundred were the commonest butterfly here but there were also good numbers of Chalkhill and Common Blue, Small Heath, Brown Argus, and both Small and Large Whites. Only four Clouded Yellows were present and both Small Skipper and Dark Green Fritillary (both at the end of their season) were few in number.

SAT 17 AUG

Mike Duffy joined forces with Mark Litjens today for a visit to both Noar Hill and Old Winchester Hill. Noar Hill failed to produce a single Brown Hairstreak for them though there were small

numbers of Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell, Red Admiral, Small Heath, Holly Blue, Painted Lady and even one Large Skipper. Things were better at Old Winchester Hill where they found their first Silver Spotted Skippers (I thought they had ceased to breed here but these could have come from Beacon Hill to the west or the site mysteriously known as The Mountain to the north) and counted a record (held for one day only) 53 Small Tortoiseshell. Chalkhill Blues and Meadow Browns were abundant and by Hampshire standards 10 Clouded Yellow, 14 Painted Lady, 20 Common Blue and 24 Brimstone were good figures - three Dark Green Fritillaries were also still on the wing. +++

In Sussex Tony Wilson went to Beachy Head today and came away with a list that should remind some of us what butterflying used to be like in a good summer. Admittedly he only listed 20 Small Tortoiseshell and 100 Chalkhill Blue, but his count of 500 Common Blue would once have been easily matched in Hampshire, though the position of Beachy Head might still have given it an advantage with cross Channel migrants such as the 50 Painted Ladies and 45 (possibly over 100) Clouded Yellows - not to mention 1000 Silver Y moths - which Tony saw today. Another contrast with Old Winchester Hill (where I can remember seeing colonies of Adonis Blue and Silver Spotted Skipper that have now died out) was the sight of 20 Silver Spotted Skippers at Beachy Head where the species was not known until two years ago. +++ One butterfly seen in Hampshire today but not listed at the top sites which we have just mentioned was Wall Brown. I have several times been told that they are a regular sight on north Hayling but I have never seen one there, and I missed out again today when the Havant Wildlife Group visited the North Common open space south and east of the Northney Marina. Admittedly they only saw one of them ...

Yesterday (Aug 16) Alan Thornbury was at Beacon Hill (opposite Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley) and became the first person to see this year's Silver Spotted Skippers - at least 10 of them. With them were hundreds of Meadow Brown and Chalkhill Blue with 20 Common Blue, 12 Small Tortoiseshell, 6 Small Skipper, 5 Brown Argus and smaller numbers of Clouded Yellow, Painted Lady, Brimstone and Peacock.

Also in Hampshire today was a butterfly enthusiast from Derbyshire who is on a self-appointed mission to see every one of the regular British butterfly species during the current year. A single, very tatty, female Brown Hairstreak at Noar Hill was the last but one species on his hit list. While in Dorset to see Lulworth Skipper he noted summer brood Adonis Blues on the wing at Swanage.

FRI 16 AUG

Mark Litjens was at Needs Ore Point on the north Solent shore this morning expecting to see a large number of migrant butterflies (he refers to reports from Devon of enormous numbers of Painted Ladies there earlier this week) but he only found one Clouded Yellow and 25 Painted Ladies. Among other butterflies there were 10 Small Copper, 6 Common Blue, 3 Holly Blue, 3 Small Tortoiseshell and singles of Red Admiral, Peacock and Brimstone (probably wind driven from elsewhere as this is not their normal habitat). Also seen were 25 Ruddy Darter, 11 Migrant Hawker and, surprisingly, only 2 Common Darter. +++

Further inland in Hampshire Brimstone numbers are at record levels - in the Stockbridge area today Mike Duffy saw over 100, and at Farley Mount near Winchester Mark Litjens yesterday counted 115 of them. While at Stockbridge today Mike took this year's record (as far as I know) for Small Tortoiseshell with up to 30 (at least 25) in the area and found plenty of other butterflies (14 or more species) with both Meadow Brown and Chalkhill Blue in large numbers, though he only came on a few Common Blue, 1 Painted Lady and no Clouded Yellows. Among the day time moths were inevitably Silver Ys plus some Silver Ground Carpet and one that brought a smile to my face - a Maiden's Blush as she was flushed from the undergrowth!

THU 15 AUG

Philip Hack had his moth trap running this evening and Barry Collins' trap was used both this evening and on Tuesday night (Aug 13), producing a good haul of new species for the year for both people though only three moths are newcomers to my overall year list - Six-striped Rustic, Tawny Speckled Pug and Meal Moth, all taken by Barry in Havant. Over at Southampton Philip had five firsts for 'second broods' - Sharp Angled Peacock, The Spectacle, Setaceous Hebrew

Character, Flame Shoulder and Blood Vein. Although not claimed by him as fresh specimens I suspect that Philip's Shuttle-shaped Dart and Brimstone Moth (both taken tonight) were also first specimens of a new generation.

As the tide of Clouded Yellow immigrants continues to flood in it seems that Hook at the mouth of the Hamble River has become Hampshire's equivalent of Thorney Island in West Sussex as the hotspot for them. Trevor Carpenter has been seeing small numbers there regularly and today found 8 together near (if I understand him rightly) the electricity substation where the high tension cables from the Fawley power station emerge from the tunnel carrying them under Southampton Water and become overhead power lines by the Solent Breezes camp site.

Mark Litjens today visited Farley Mount, west of Winchester, and counted a record number of 115 Brimstone butterflies. With them were an estimated 200 Meadow Browns and at least 30 Small Whites with 26 Peacocks, 13 Small Tortoiseshell, 5 Red Admirals and singles of Painted Lady, Clouded Yellow, and Brown Argus.

WED 14 AUG

The national Migrant Moth website has two observations for last Sunday (Aug 11) which may not be local but are probably of general interest. The first was a Bedstraw Hawkmoth, the fourth to be recorded this summer, but taken in Dorset to show that one could turn up in our area. The second was the first report for the year of *Ethmia quadrilella*, taken in Essex. Also of interest is the announcement that Clouded Yellows will no longer be reported on that website - there are now just too many of them! While many individual observers are still being greatly pleased with their first sight of this colourful butterfly (as I was last week) the current news includes sightings of them everywhere (even entertaining frustrated motorists caught in the A31 roadworks at Ropley by patrolling the roadside verges). Thorney Island remains the hotspot for Clouded Yellows - today Barry Collins counted 17 there, including one helice female.

Latest moth trap reports add just one new name to my yearlist - a Flounced Rustic which came to Alan Dawson's trap in Southampton Portswood on Sunday evening (Aug 11). In Basingstoke on Monday evening Mike Wall had an extra large haul of moths (215 individuals of 45 species) which he attributes to his replacement of some old cardboard boxes with a good supply of egg boxes as hideaway places for the moths around the base of his light. None of his haul were new species but two of them (The Lychnis and Treble-bar) were almost certainly fresh examples of a summer generation (though Mike does not state this).

Andrew Brookes was out today hoping to find summer Small Blues in the Fort Nelson area at the west end of Portsdown (not far from the Portchester Hill Road chalkpits where Alan Thornbury had seen several on Aug 9). He did not find these but did see 12 Small Tortoiseshell and 20 Peacock, and he then went to Huntbourn Wood near Denmead where more than 20 Brimstone were on the wing. These counts, with one of 51 Brimstone on Magdalen Hill Down on Aug 6, show that there has been a good season for these common species (among which I would also include Comma), giving good hope for next year. +++

A Silver Washed Fritillary was still on the wing when Derek Mills carried out his transect today around Bentley Station Meadow near the Alice Holt Forest south of Fanham.

TUE 13 AUG

Earlier this summer Alan Charm-Barrett found a fresh but dead Eyed Hawkmoth near his home in Worthing, and feared that it was the first and last he would see in his lifetime, so he was delighted today to find an Eyed Hawkmoth caterpillar apparently asleep on a wall (despite the presence of a second very squashed caterpillar on the ground nearby). Keen to ensure that the one that was still alive fulfilled its task of turning into a moth Alan sent out pleas for help and these were answered by Ken Hearne, living nearby, who filled the bottom of a glass fish tank with loose soil, put the caterpillar into the tank and watched it swiftly burrow into the soil where it has presumably now pupated and will emerge next May to complete Alan's happiness.

By the Meon Canal path alongside Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter today saw a Purple Hairstreak, a butterfly which he thinks to be uncommon there. Wishful thinking on my part would like it to have been a female and to have laid some eggs near the buds of next year's leaves on the oaks near the southern end of this path. If the eggs survived the winter and hatched next spring the species could well establish a small colony there.

MON 12 AUG

Among the many moths seen this week-end 9 of them were the first 'second generation' specimens (of moths first seen earlier in the year) and 3 more were 'firsts for the year' (one of these was a second generation specimen of a species not seen earlier in the year). +++ Starting with the firsts for the year (all seen by Philip Hack) *Pyrausta nigrata* was seen by day on Old Winchester Hill and the other two came to his Southampton Nursling trap - these were the Mouse Moth and Tawny-barred Angle (and it was this last which must have been a second generation specimen without any local record of the first generation), +++ Philip also had five of the nine 'second generation' firsts - these were Double-striped Pug, Iron Prominent, Lesser Swallow Prominent, The Nutmeg, and Pale Prominent Philip's claim to the first fresh Iron Prominent may be contested by Barry Collins who recently showed me a specimen which he had trapped on Aug 6 and which did not look very fresh but was not very tatty. (Flame Shoulder was not marked as fresh by Philip and has been recorded regularly through July and early August, but fresh specimens should be out at any time now) +++ The other four 'fresh generation' species were all taken at Titchfield Haven last night and news of them reaches me via Richard Carpenter so may not be a complete list, and these four which I have marked as 'fresh' are just my guesswork based on the date. These were Chocolate-tip, Sallow Kitten, Sharp-angled Peacock and Swallow Prominent. +++ Recent sightings recorded on the national migrant moth (and butterfly) website that interested me are of another Camberwell Beauty in Norfolk, a second *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth in the Scillies, a Tree-lichen Beauty in Kent, *Dioryctria sylvestrella* at Peacehaven near Brighton and *Loxostege stictalis* at Rutland Water. Last year on around Aug 1 Pete Durnell trapped a Tree-lichen Beauty at Northney on Hayling Island and he told me it was only the sixth seen in Hampshire (and the second for Hayling) - I wonder if one will return here this year? Hampshire is lucky to have a very active branch of Butterfly Conservation which manages three major nature reserves of its own. One of these is Yew Hill, a little south of Winchester, and last Saturday Rupert Broadway noted 18 butterfly species there in a visit of just over an hour (70 minutes), To quote from the BC website {{ Regular visits to Yew Hill during the season by Rupert Broadway have produced nothing out of the ordinary up to now. On Saturday (10 Aug) however, he encountered single Clouded Yellow and Small Copper - species not regularly met there. In addition there were many Chalkhill Blues and varying numbers of Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper, Marbled White, Small and Essex Skipper, Common Blue, Large, Small and Green-veined White: and single Peacock and Holly Blue. }}

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 17 AUG

By now I had hoped to hear tales of many Hares seen running from the vanishing cover as Hampshire's cereal fields are cleared by combine harvesters but so far Trevor Carpenter is the only person to report a Hare - just one seen by him today in the Beacon Hill area of the Meon Valley, just south of Warnford.

WED 14 AUG

In March this year Lawrence Holloway told us how at least two Wood Mice braved the dangers of daylight to make forays into the open area of his patio where he feeds many Yellowhammer and other birds that come to his garden in Aldwick, Bognor Regis - the mice just could not resist the sunflower seeds. Today Ken Hearne tells a similar story from his garden at Worthing but in this case at least one of the mice working the area under a peanut feeder has become so possessive of this feeding territory that he can be seen deliberately chasing of a Dunnock innocently trying to get its share of the food. Ken writes {{ Like many bird lovers I have wood mice picking up the left-overs under the peanut feeder, and they appear to co-exist happily with birds doing the same. However, one of the mice has become aggressive and is chasing the regular dunnock until it flies away. It is quite amusing to see such a small animal dominating a bird that is bigger and claiming territorial rights over this patch. Sparrows and other birds are ignored so perhaps by trial and error it is has discovered which species it can drive away. }}

Andy Horton, well known to those interested in marine wildlife, has kindly sent me a very full answer to my recent question about whether Snakes have lungs, and I learn that the answer is yes but the lungs of reptiles are very inefficient compared to ours. The secret of getting lots of

oxygen from the air is to have lungs with a maximum of oxygen absorbing material in a given space. Our lungs are packed with such material, which is riddled with millions of tiny holes to allow the air to pass over as much of the surface as possible. Snakes have lungs which work to the same principle but are far less efficient as (while our lungs might be compared to a rubber balloon stuffed with a huge amount of 'permeable bubble wrap' those of the snake are like an almost empty plastic bag with none of the stuffing, thus reducing the oxygen absorbing surface to the internal walls of the plastic bag). Among the reptiles, which all have this primitive form of lung, the Crocodiles have the most efficient lungs - but this is a function of their body shape (the crocodile with a large tubby body can achieve a much larger inner surface to its lungs than can a long thin snake). +++

For those interested in marine life there are two links on the What's New page of my website taking you to Andy's main site (for the British Marine Life Study Society) and to his Adur Valley Nature Notes, and Andy tells me that for Brackish Water enthusiasts he has a further page of the BMLSS site based on the Widewater Lagoon at Lancing - try <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/BMLSS/brackish.htm>

On Monday we all breathed a sigh of relief when we heard that the two sickly seals found in the Wash area had been tested and found to be free of the feared Phocine distemper (seals belong to the family Phocidae so this is just a posh way of saying Seal distemper). Those two seals have been taken to a Seal rescue site and have every chance of recovery, but that is not the end of the story. Both the BBC and the local paper (Portsmouth NEWS) today tell us that Phocine distemper is already established among the British Seal population and remind us that the last epidemic of this disease (in 1988) killed 18,000 seals in the North Sea area - if I heard the figures right that represents half the current British population of Common Seals. To make matters worse the presence of the disease forces all Seal sanctuaries to close their doors to new admissions which might bring in the disease) +++

While no one would wish this AIDS like disease on any species (it weakens the Seal's defences against other diseases and leaves them to die in various prolonged ways) every natural population (including humans) needs some form of disease or predator control if it is to remain healthy and not outstrip its food supply. I am reminded of this when I read Bob Marchant's note of a Roe doe with two kids seen today at Hook/Warsash. Roe and Red Deer are both species which appear to have reached the limit of their healthy population size in Britain (I think the apparently new tendency of Roe Deer to herd together where they previously only operated in family units is just one reflection of this) and both species would be happier and healthier if they had some effective predator or disease control. Once again there are no easy answers to questions of optimal conservation.

MON 12 AUG

The publicity recently given by BBC TV to the death of two Seals in the Wash off the Norfolk/Lincolnshire Coast led to speculation that the seals had died from a Seal Distemper disease which has been raging in some continental seal populations. Allied to this speculation was the fear that the disease would spread through the British seal population with disastrous consequences. +++

Today good news on this subject comes from Emma Thompson, whose information again comes from the BBC (in this case the Children's BBC, probably the excellent Newsround team) and they say that the death of the two seals which they reported was not from Seal Distemper, and there is no evidence yet to show that the disease has reached Britain.

WEEK 32 AUG 5 - 11

BIRDS:

SUN 11 AUG

The first Spotted Crake of the autumn arrived at Titchfield Haven this afternoon, giving several sightings before the reserve closed. This news comes from Peter Morrison who also tells us of a Pied Flycatcher in his own garden at Warsash, seen briefly around midday yesterday. +++

SAT 10 AUG

Among many Hampshire sightings reported on Hoslist today is one from Trevor Carpenter of an adult Lesser Blackback Gull with two juveniles at Hook/Warsash - these are new to this site at

the mouth of Southampton Water and Trevor suggests they may be the notorious pair of youngsters from a rooftop nest in the centre of Southampton where their antics (noisily charging about the rooftops in full sight of many office workers) caused them to be christened Beckham and Owen. They may well be from that nest but could equally well come from one of the less watched nests on the roofs of buildings in the Chickenhall Lane industrial estate by the Itchen at Eastleigh. +++

At Titchfield Haven today Peter Morrison watched a Roseate Tern with a juvenile, saw three juvenile Kestrels, and noted the resident Barn Owl carrying food over the reserve in mid-afternoon, though that sighting was much briefer than those of a Kingfisher which he watched for forty minutes. +++

Another Roseate Tern was one of over 70 specise seen by Will Walmsley at Farlington Marshes today. Among the others were two Hobbies hunting over the 'Point Field', the three juvenile Shags which are still in the harbour (probable still using buoys near the harbour mouth), and the two Black-necked Grebe. At the lake on the reserve the Wood and Curlew Sandpiper were stil present with the Little Stint and three Spotted Redshank. +++

From the Lymington area Paul Winter reports a group of 29 Eider (and the arrival of summer plumaged Grey Plover), and from the Basingtoke area (the flooded area at The Vyne) Robert Watson tells us of a flock of 318 Lapwing, another of 60 Canada Geese, and the presence of a few Teal and a Shoveler. (Yesterday Martin Pitt had a Bar-headed Goose there and saw 3 Gadwall and 3 Snipe.)

All but nine of the two hundred Canada Geese that were on the Portsmouth IBM Lake for the July WeBS count had left when I made this month's count today. I may have missed a couple of them as one of the Security guards told me there were two loners which he occasionally saw near the building, and he also told me of a single Canada Goose leg found recently on the roof of the buildings! One species which had surprisingly increased in numbers was Tufted Duck - last month I saw just 6 adults, but today my count was of 26 fully feathered birds (including an estimated dozen of this year's young) plus one family of five still downy ducklings. +++

I don't know if there is less rubbish being tipped on the big landfill site across the road from the IBM Lake (the only activity I notice from distant external views is landscaping of the huge earth 'pyramids' covering old rubbish), or if the presence of a falconer is really having an effect in driving away the gulls, but today the total gull count on the IBM Lake was just four Black-headed Gulls (and none went overhead while I was there).

On Thursday (Aug 8) Lawrence Holloway and a friend had distant views of a large Tern in Pagham Harbour which attracted attention with constant calls of 'Keek, keek, keek, ...' and was big enough to launch a personal attack on a Grey Heron to which it took a dislike. The bill is described as being orange red and seemed to have a dark tip. Although no one has stuck their neck out and claimed to know its identity it sounds very like a Caspian Tern to me. +++

Earlier in the week Simon Ingram at the Eastleigh Lakeside country park had his (so far) largest flock of 56 Mistle Thrushes passing through - today in the Finchdean area (north of Rowlands Castle) I gather the Havant Wildlife Group saw Mistle Thrushes but I was given no idea of the number. A roost of Pied Wagtails seems to be building in the Eastleigh area as, on Aug 7, Simon counted 120 together on playing fields (presumably early in the morning before the birds went their separate ways).

FRI 09 AUG

The SOS website today carries news of the first Merlin to return to the coast, seen by birders watching the juvenile Montagu's Harrier that was over the fields west of Selsey Bill for the second day running. Also still showing was the White Stork on Goodwood golf course near Chichester. Taking up my comment that this Stork may be the same bird that was in Essex recently Barry Mouser tells me that the Essex bird was at Pratt's Farm (on the northern outskirts of Chelmsford) from July 21 to 25 and that you can learn more about it by visiting www.southendrspb.co.uk/sight99/july02.htm

Another ongoing saga concerns the number of Garganey being seen this summer, and today Richard Ford adds another item to that story with his own sighting of a juvenile Garganey on Woolmer Pond (is it possible that the pair of adult Garganey that were seen on Woolmer Pond from April 1 to 6 stayed on and bred withouth being spotted?). Also at the pond today were 7

Mandarin and a Wood Sandpiper.

Both Richard and Trevor Carpenter (not related!) were in the Hill Head/Titchfield Haven area today. Trevor noted an autumn build up of around 100 House Martins over the reserve but his more dramatic sighting was of a Marsh Harrier flying west over the Solent at midday, followed a few minutes later by another raptor which Trevor thought was a second Marsh Harrier, this time accompanied by a 'fighter escort' of a Hobby. I would have thought that the Hobby would find it difficult to slow its flight down enough to stay with the bigger bird, but perhaps the Hobby was new to the area and was working on the assumption that a Marsh Harrier would lead it to a marsh with lots of dragonflies! +++

Richard visited the Haven reserve and found the two young Avocets present again after two days absence (no one knows where they disappear to - could it be that they have a secret pool hidden somewhere in the reeds?). There were also reports of two Spoonbills being present although Richard did not see them together (On July 12 two Spoonbills arrived at the Haven, apparently jet-lagged and spending that day sleeping and preening. Since that date there have been regular but intermittent reports of just one Spoonbill being seen, with no indication that one of the original two departed, and I have a fanciful theory of a hidden reserve within the public reserve .. a tropical pool with flamingos, spoonbills and avocets which just occasionally emerge into the public domain). Returning to reality one Black Tern was present today.

Thanks to Will Walmsley I learn that a pair of Icterine Warblers have bred in Britain this summer - on the Orkney island of Stronsay. Will did not know if this was a first for Britain but Eddie Chapman (a member of Hoslist living in Norway) thinks that there was a previous breeding attempt in Yorkshire during 1970. +++

More local news of nesting birds comes from Brian Fellows in Emsworth where he suspects that Wrens in his garden are still focussed on a nest in some ivy, but he has no definite evidence such as parents carrying food. If there are eggs or young this would presumably be a third brood for the year (each brood occupying the birds for 6 weeks starting in April). The scolding which Brian occasionally gets from a Wren before it disappears into the ivy could, I suppose, come from a proud cock Wren who is still protecting a nest that he has built but not yet 'sold' to a female. The fact that Wren song can still be heard is also presumably evidence that they are still in the mood for breeding.

THU 08 AUG

Although there have been a couple of odd Whinchat sightings on the coast in July (one on the Isle of Wight on July 14 and another on the Lymington marshes on July 17) these were probably the result of fairly local post breeding dispersal but today Barry Collins reports the first seen back on Thorney Island and I suspect this marks the start of southward passage and will soon be followed by regular sightings at Farlington Marshes and elsewhere. +++

Another bird which has been reported through the summer from Langstone Harbour is Black-necked Grebe, and as with the Whinchat I think the presence of a summer plumaged bird on Barcombe reservoir (north of Lewes in E Sussex) probably marks the first return of birds from the north. +++

A much more definite returnee species is Golden Plover with two in full summer plumage being seen today in Pagham Harbour by Lawrence Holloway. Also seen in the harbour by Lawrence were 15 Grey Plover, 7 Wheatear, plus Turnstone, Ringed Plover, Curlew and Whimbrel. 30 Canada Geese were there with a juvenile Peregrine overhead, a Little Owl heard and a Turtle Dove seen. On the Ferry Pool Lawrence noted some 20 juvenile Shelduck with 26 Black-tailed Godwit, 18 Dunlin, 6 Common and 3 Green Sandpiper plus 3 juvenile Little Ringed Plover. +++

Still in Sussex the SOS website reports from Beachy Head a Cuckoo, 12 Wheatears, 8 Garden Warblers, Reed Warbler, 2 Lesser Whitethroats, 20 Whitethroats and 30 Willow Warblers.

From Farlington Marshes in Hampshire Bob Chapman tells us that the whole group of four young Garganey may well all be present but they are restless and moving about as individuals rather than as a family group - a new venue for them has been the main lake where the wader roost today held a Curlew Sandpiper, two Green and one Wood Sandpiper, a Little Stint and some summer plumage Grey Plover as well as the numerous Redshank, Dunlin and Black-tailed Godwit. In the harbour were 5 Black Tern with 3 Wheatear on the seawall and various passerines in the bushes, notably Willow and Sedge Warbler. +++

Another interesting observation in Hampshire comes from Adrian Martin at Southampton where he watched a Swallow bathing in the wet grass after heavy rain. Adrian asks if this is common practice among Swallows? I have not heard of it but it does seem a sensible way for these birds to bathe without drowning.

53 Egrets came into the Langstone Wade Court roost this evening to show that the expected autumn increase in numbers is well under way. I was more sure of the numbers present this evening than I have been on recent visits as what I am pretty sure was a juvenile female Sparrowhawk kept putting them up as it flew backwards and forwards around the area (by its size it must have been a female but by its incompetent hunting and juvenile cry I am sure it was a young bird). The hawk eventual gave up its futile efforts to catch Egrets, Woodpigeons and Swallows that were all present in good numbers and I was able to count the Egrets settling down and further latecomers arriving. Before going home I went to look at Langstone Pond over which the Swallows were hawking insects, and their alarm cries drew my attention to a Peregrine heading purposefully east (perhaps coming from Farlington Marshes), which flew straight and fast towards Thorney Island but then turned down the Emsworth Channel, perhaps checking for wader prey along its banks. Another sign of autumn/winter mode was the presence of seven Grey Heron roosting on the saltings just off Langstone Pond. +++

Another indication of the build up of Egret numbers came yesterday from Pagham Harbour where Lawrence Holloway counted 60 Egrets in some tall conifers by Bremere Rife, the small stream which drains the area near Halsey's Farm into the north of the harbour. These birds were seen in day time and were presumably a high tide roost of all the birds currently using the harbour. Also over Pagham harbour for 50 minutes yesterday was an Osprey, maybe presaging the autumn Osprey season in Chichester Harbour.

On July 29 (see Aug 3 notes) we had a possible hearing of a Corncrake in fields south of Chichester by the Hunston golf course, and today the SOS website carries a definite report of one heard on Chantry Hill (South Downs above Storrington) on Aug 4 - this one was calling from oilseed rape.

WED 07 AUG

A summer plumage Curlew Sandpiper was seen in Emsworth harbour by Barry Collins early this morning but the only other Sussex news for today which has reached me so far comes from Andrew Howard in Petworth where he is among those who have always had Spotted Flycatcher nesting in or close to the garden so that a family group is ever-present at this time of year - this year no regular birds have been seen. Reports from elsewhere seem to indicate that Spotted Flycatchers have done fairly well this year, but I think any breeding successes noted in Hampshire have been no more than a temporary stay of extinction (albeit a long way off).

In Hampshire Trevor Carpenter had two Wheatear and a Cuckoo in the Hook/Warsash area where he noticed signs of warbler passage with Willow Warblers and Chiffchaffs, Sedge and Reed Warblers, Whitethroats and Blackcaps in places where they are not usually seen. Along at Titchfield Haven there was nothing very special to be seen but John Shillitoe had 3 Gannets with 13 Common Scoter offshore.

A walk around the southern half of the Staunton Country Park this morning had little bird interest except for one sighting on the broad track leading south west from the Staunton Arms pub area to Hammonds Land Coppice. Far ahead of me I saw two birds on the track which through my bins seemed to be young Partridge but while I was watching them a large scraggy head (presumably the mother bird) poked out from the trackside grass, probably spotted me and disappeared as did the youngsters. It might have been the head of a Grey Partridge in full moult but it looked more like a hen pheasant so I thought I must be mistaken and the young birds were tailless young pheasants. However, as I walked past the area where they had been the two youngsters took flight close to me and I watched one glide down into the long grass of the nearby field with distinctly partridge flight and showing the tell tale orange patches at the base of the tail. I have not heard of Grey Partridge here before and may be they came from rescued eggs brooded by a pheasant under the supervision of someone at the country park - I will probably never know but would be interested in any further sightings or information.

TUE 06 AUG

The White Stork that has been over Andover and Pagham Harbour in the last few days now

seems to have settled on a golf course near Goodwood House, where Mike Collins says it shows no fear of golfers walking within a few feet of it though it has no yet, I think, been hit by a golf ball. The bird is said to be unringed and may well be a wild bird (they are not perturbed by humans on the continent). Some suggest that the bird is one that has been in Essex recently but I have no details of when and where, nor of how long it was there. If it was only there a little while it may just be a bad navigator, stopping because it is uncertain of the route it should take.

The SOS website has a number of interesting sightings for today and the one that I am most interested in is a report of 9 Crossbill flying over Church Norton - could they be the forerunners of an irruption heading our way? Another definite piece of good news is that a juvenile Montagu's Harrier was patrolling the open fields between Selsey and Wittering today, being seen from Selsey and from Bracklesham (hopefully a bird from an English nest). In the same area two Marsh Harriers were seen today. +++

At Sidlesham Ferry today the Temminck's Stints had vanished but 3 Wood, 7 Green and 4 Common Sandpiper were seen along with a Spotted Redshank. Up at Pulborough Brooks there was another Wood Sandpiper and a Little Stint with yet another Garganey, bringing the list of local sites where they have been seen recently up from the four which I quoted yesterday to five.

Bob Chapman has just put out another very welcome bulletin of news from Farlington Marshes, in which he mentions a Marsh Harrier seen over the RSPB islands today and 8 Black Tern in Langstone Harbour on Aug 4, but he does not mention something which may be commonplace for regulars at the marshes but is one of my annual excitements - the return of summer plumaged Grey Plover. Luckily Martin Gillingham took a stroll round the reserve last night (Aug 5) and reports that 81 Grey Plover, mostly in summer plumage, were there with 2 Knot also in their 'red' plumage. The lone Common Scoter was still in the harbour and 19 Turnstone were present as were 28 Ringed Plover. The return of Ringed Plover is also confirmed by Trevor Carpenter who saw 39 on the beach at Titchfield Haven today (and at least 65 Black-tailed Godwit in the reserve). +++

Flying ants were in the air over Langstone village today and, looking up from his garden there, John Chapman not only saw a great mass of gulls taking them, but, high above them and hardly visible to the naked eye, a screaming crowd of around 50 Swifts that would have passed un-noticed had they not been heard. +++

Another good garden bird tick for today comes from Doug Munts in West Wellow near the M27/A36 junction west of Southampton - he heard familiar croaking and looked up to see two Ravens circling woods near his garden before flying north west.

MON 05 AUG

Yesterday I told you how Kevin Haggard looked up from gardening just outside Andover to see a White Stork overhead and this afternoon at 2:30pm what was probably the same bird circled the Sidlesham Ferry Pool before once more vanishing back into its margarine tub (or wherever it goes to evade our eyes). A similar grand illusionist flew over the Gosport Driving Test Centre while Peter Raby was involved in a tricky bit of reversing this afternoon - I don't think Peter was taking the test himself but he was unable to have a good look at, or follow up, a pure white Heron sized bird which flew over heading from the Stokes Bay/Haslar Creek area towards Frater Lake in the northwest of Portsmouth Harbour - perhaps others will be lucky in getting a better view of this bird. I suppose it could be an albino Heron but is more likely to be a Great White Egret. +++

Going back to Sidlesham Ferry Pool I see there was a good selection to be seen there today - 2 Temminck's Stints, 2 Little Stints, 2 Wood Sandpipers plus 6 Green and 4 Common Sandpiper not to mention Black-tailed Godwits and a Marsh Harrier. +++

Further along the Sussex coast what was, I think, the first passage Honey Buzzard flew over Bexhill where a Hobby and Common Scoter were also seen (has this been an unusual year for the number of Common Scoter remaining in the English Channel area through the summer?).

Back in Hampshire it looks as if our Stilt Sandpiper has now left the Lymington Marshes. It was seen on Saturday (Aug 3) by John Chapman, who travelled all the way from Langstone to see it, and by Simon Ingram from Eastleigh but I gather from Simon that there were no sightings on Sunday and I have heard of none today. +++

A count of 20 Green Sandpiper at the Lower Test Marshes shows that this site is determined to keep its title as the place with the most Green Sandpiper on the south coast, but although this news appeared on the HWT website dated today that does not mean the birds were counted today (Bob Chapman's news from Farlington which he sent in on July 31 has only now appeared on the website). Perhaps more interesting than the expected high count of Green Sandpiper is the less expected appearance of two Garganey at this site. It sounds as if Garganey have had a fairly good year as we have had reports of two in Pagham Harbour for some time in mid July, another two at Castle Water, Rye, in East Sussex on July 14, and more recently the four juveniles in Langstone Harbour in addition to these two at the Lower Test.

+++

Another unexpected sighting at the Lower Test today gave Rosi Woods something to remember. She says {{ I can hardly believe my eyes!!! I have just seen my first ever nightjar lying along the branch of a tree at Test Valley Marshes!! It was at the back of the little woodland before you get to the gate into the field - just past the Mill and the fisherman's car park! }}

Kevin Stouse took a look around the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth today where the first Robin has started its autumn song and one of several Willow Warblers was singing well. Chiffchaffs, Reed and Sedge Warblers were heard (I wonder if the Cetti's Warbler is still there but silent?) and on the water was at least one well grown juvenile Little Grebe with 3 adults. 7 Tufted Duck were present but, thank goodness, the Canada geese were down to just 11 birds (they will be back in force before they finally head to Titchfield Haven for the winter). +++

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows saw 12 Swifts briefly around the houses on their way south and Barry Collins saw another 7 tiny Mallard ducklings on the Slipper Mill Pond (surely they must stop hatching young soon?). Brian and Barry were then joined by Pete Potts who was hoping to see the ringed Godwits which Brian has recently found in Emsworth Harbour but the Godwits managed to evade Pete (after waiting a good couple of hours Pete went home, and only then did a flock of 150 Godwits appear in the harbour). Among the birds which were seen during the wait were 4 Greenshank, 1 Whimbrel and the inevitable couple of Egrets with many Oystercatchers. +++

While watching Emsworth Harbour Barry Collins saw one adult Med Gull still in the process of moulting, but later on the Pilsey Sands he found one which had completed its moult to winter dress (the first I have heard of to have acquired full winter plumage). +++

Also seen today by Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven were a Black Tern and a Greenshank and Richard also saw the Little Owl in the Hook area (I guess this will become a regular sight there until next spring).

News from Sussex for yesterday and from the Isle of Wight for Saturday shows that a major movement of Willow Warblers has taken place. By now these birds have probably crossed the channel and gone until next year but on Sunday there were some 55 at Beachy Head with 2 Grasshopper and 2 Garden Warblers, and on the downs above Keymer, just north of Brighton, 4 Willow Warblers, 4 Whitethroats and a juvenile Wheatear, plus 20 Swifts, probably represented birds moving on a broad front all along the south coast. Another wave had reached the Isle of Wight on Saturday (Aug 3), bringing more than 60 Willow Warblers to the Bembridge Marshes, along with 8 Sedge Warblers, 6 Reed Warblers, a Spotted Flycatcher and 40 Sand Martins. The Sedge and Reed Warblers may have been summer residents in the Bembridge area but a count of more than 35 Sedge Warblers at the Sandown Canoe Lake must have been birds making an emergency stop when they found the open sea ahead of them.

Large flocks of Mistle Thrush used to be a common sight in late summer, roaming the countryside and putting down for a time on any parkland they passed over, but they are much less frequently seen nowadays so Simon Ingram is lucky to have such a flock in the Eastleigh area at the moment. Yesterday he counted 37 birds at the Lakeside country park and I see he also had a Lesser Whitethroat among the warblers passing south. +++

Wheatear are as yet not a common sight along the coast so Richard Carpenter was pleased to have his first autumn bird on the banks of the Hamble at the Bunny Meadows, just north of Warsash, yesterday - with it were 3 Whimbrel, 4 Greenshank, 5 Egrets, 18 Black-tailed Godwit and the odd Common Sandpiper and Dunlin (with 2 Reed Warblers still present). On Saturday

(Aug 3) Richard had a couple of juvenile Spotted Flycatcher in the West Walk woods near Wickham. +++

Another Wheatear was seen by John Chapman at Church Norton yesterday, along with a couple of Black Terns and many Sand Martins.

Other reports of birds seen yesterday come from the Sussex and Isle of Wight websites. At Pulborough Brooks there was a flock of 300 Lapwing (I guess we will soon be seeing similar big flocks on the coast) and on the River Ouse south of Lewes a noisy mob of 26 Common Sandpiper made their way south. +++

On the Isle of Wight 3 Wheatears were on Culver Down with a Grasshopper Warbler, a Pied Flycatcher was at Whale Chine to the west of St Catherine's Point, and a Wood Sandpiper was at Atherfield reservoir a little inland towards Yafford further along the coast. +++

At Farlington Marshes Kevin Stouse discovered the Temminck's Stint without knowing it was there (and only believed his own decision as to its identity when he heard others had also seen it!). He also saw the lone Yellow Wagtail at the lake with Bearded Tits showing well at that end of the reeds. Out in the harbour he saw the female Common Scoter and counted 20 Egrets, and he also had another Lesser Whitethroat (but no Whinchat are yet reported from the marshes). Kevin also tells me that on the evening of July 30 he counted 30 Egrets at the Langstone Wade Court roost which I have not counted recently. +++

Over at Titchfield Haven Stephen Graham came down from Berkshire in the hope of seeing Roseate Tern (which he did, but only one of the two said to be in the area). He also saw the Spoonbill and two young Avocet plus 50 Black tailed Godwit, 17 Turnstone and a Green Sandpiper.

On Saturday (Aug 3) Barry Collins counted 90 Sanderling on the Pilsey Sands to the south of Thorney Island, showing that these waders are now on the move in force (though I think the autumn peak on Pilsey Sands could be as much as 400 Sanderling in one flock). With them on Saturday were three Black Terns and 250 Common Terns,

PLANTS:

SAT 10 AUG

Plenty of wild flowers were on show at the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site today but the thing which struck me most forcibly was the amount of leaf fall that has already taken place from the many planted White Poplars, their leaves already forming drifts in parts of the carparks. A couple of other plants which caught my attention were both planted. One was the Bermuda Grass by the main reception lake, just extending its long pointed fingers, and the other was Dwarf Gorse, its bright yellow flowers attracting attention when there is not a single flower on the masses of Common Gorse around the site. Another plant which I specifically looked for and found was Fern Grass, found growing from cracks between the tarmac of the carparks and the 'kerb stones'.

Ruth Potts was with the Havant Wildlife Group walking in the Finchdean area (north of Rowlands Castle) this morning and it seems likely that the arable fields there are already starting to show the great display of wild flowers that flourish each year after harvesting lets in light to the ground. Among the plants she mentioned were Round-leaved Fluellen, Field Madder and Fool's Parsley.

FRI 09 AUG

This morning John Goodspeed took me to a place in Stansted Forest where Michael Prior (the head forester) had recently shown John some plants that Michael thought were Violet Helleborine but which were not then in flower. Today one plant was in full flower and perfect condition (except that the tip of its stem had been broken in the past and was now dead) and the other plants remained in a sorry slug eaten state as they had been when first found. The plants are located under well grown old coppice in square SU 7410 at offset 47, less than 100 yards west of the 'Broad Avenue' which runs almost due north from the Sussex Border path coming in from the fields south of the Main Avenue. They are best approached from the 'ornamental drive' on the north side of this coppice block using an almost un-noticeable path into the trees and if you find this path you follow its line south for about two thirds of the distance through this block of trees and then search! (As there is little or no ground cover here that is

not difficult).

Another first flowering, this time of Orange Balsam, was seen today in the Titchfield Haven area by Richard Carpenter. Wild Angelica was also flowering there though others have seen it elsewhere (flowers open in Emsworth's Brook Meadow in mid-July). When I was out with John Goodspeed today in Havant Thicket (to photograph the Broad-leaved Helleborine in flower for comparison with the Violet Helleborine) there was a superb stand of Angelica plants (at least one taller than I am!) with flowers at all stages of development.

WED 07 AUG

John Goodspeed was with a work party of the Friends of Portsdown Hill today when Val Henry (who recently found the *Vicia villosa* at Portchester) came on the very first of this summer's Autumn Ladies Tresses. Other plant news for Portsdown is that there are now well over 100 plants of Autumn Gentian (or Felwort) near the route of the old A3, with lots of Blue Fleabane to be seen at Fort Widley (has anyone looked on the brickwork for Fern Grass (*Catapodium rigidum*?). John also tells me that even more Lesser Centaury has now been found on the hill - it seems to have had a remarkably good year - whereas Bastard Toadflax was only glimpsed once at the site near John's home (though it was flowering at two other sites on the hill). +++ Still with Portsdown I have just received the plant list for the July 27 visit to the east end of Portsdown by the Havant Wildlife Group, and on it I see *Crepis biennis* (Rough Hawk's Beard) listed. I have not yet found out whether this was a 'definite' or just a 'possible' identification but if definite I hope to go and see the plant for myself as it is quite rare in Hampshire with only twenty sites listed for the whole county (though one is near the north west end of Portsdown in the South Boarhunt area).

The Grey Field Speedwell which lined the bottom of the wall of the Havant postal sorting office at the end of my road was eliminated by spraying earlier in the year but this morning I found a nice new cluster of it just across the road in the pavement cracks of Town Hall Road. +++

Later in the morning I drove to Leigh Park Gardens using the Staunton Country Park carpark as the base for a tour of the southern part of the park, starting in Thicket Lawn. Here I was able to check the orange edges to the calyx teeth of the Yellow Loosestrife and enjoy newly flowering PepperSaxifrage as well as the mass of Sneezewort, Knapweed and other flowers although the Meadowsweet was definitely on the way out for this year. By the lake there was plenty of Gipsywort, and along the Long Avenue leading north to Havant Thicket I found a new to me site for Lesser Skullcap and the first flowers on Water Pepper. +++

Along the southern edge of Havant Thicket a mass of Dwarf Gorse was flowering with one cluster of Betony, and on the broad track going north from the southern edge Devils Bit Scabious and Goldenrod were both in flower along with a second round of Foxgloves. Just south of the Castle Road entrance gate I found two plants of Broad Leaved Helleborine where I only saw one (still in bud) on my last visit - two weeks ago on July 24. By now one of the Helleborine plants was totally over (just seed heads) but the other was a delight to see with many open flowers, not yet going over. Also flowering here, where people from houses across the main road dump their garden waste, were pretty plants of French Cranesbill (*Geranium endressii*). Heading back from here along the southern edge of the Gipsies Plain, just before entering Hammond's Land coppice, I was pleased to see Marsh Woundwort and was able to check the Yellow Loosestrife look-alike and tell from its all green hairy calyx and brown flower centres that it was Dotted Loosestrife.

MON 05 AUG

A brief summary of the summer season at St Catherine's Hill, Winchester, appeared on the HWT website today and I noted that the first Musk orchids for several years had re-appeared in the Dongas area of this reserve (the area through which the M3 has been cut since the publication of the 1992 edition of the Wildlife Trust Reserves Guide, though it is still possible to enter the reserve from the Morestead road side via a footbridge over the motorway). The orchids were I think on the east side of the motorway, and their re-appearance may indicate a settling down of the land after the major disturbance during which a lot of topsoil was moved to 'safety'.

Last Saturday Richard Carpenter found the first Ling (Common Heather) in flower at West Walk near Wickham in the Meon valley when he was there on Saturday, marking the start of autumn in the plant world.

INSECTS:

SUN 11 AUG

Just one Brown Hairstreak (first of the year) was seen today by Mark Litjens at Noar Hill which he also visited yesterday, finding late Ringlet, Silver Washed Fritillary and Marbled White still on the wing plus a good show of Peacocks, Painted Ladies, Red Admirals and 5 Common Blue, 5 Small Heath and 2 Holly Blue.

Mike Duffy went to Stockbridge Common and Down this morning, seeing a very fresh Brown Argus and not more than 8 Common Blue (in view of the relatively small numbers here and at Noar Hill it seems that my estimate of at least 20 on the Portsmouth IBM site yesterday was not a bad showing!)

SAT 10 AUG

On a sunny summer day the south facing slope of Old Winchester Hill can have a fantastic show of butterflies, and when Mark Litjens was here this afternoon he estimates that around 3000 Chalkhill Blues were on the wing - among other things in his list were 10 Essex Skippers but no mention of Silver-spotted as yet - I would have thought there might well be some out now in this part of the Meon Valley. +++

On Portsdown Alan Thornbury visited Portchester Common (aka Fareham Common) on the north side of the M27 above Portchester, seeing more than 20 Small Tortoiseshell and singles of Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady with two each of Peacock and Brimstone though only one Chalkhill Blue (and that not a certainty).

The large areas of grassland at the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site fall into three categories - close mown ornamental, weedy grass destroyed by Canada Geese, and tall rough grass unsuited to the needs of most butterflies. In the course of the development of the site since 1970 from 'barren' dried harbour mud there was a stage when much of the grassland was short grass with plenty of wildflowers, and the site then attracted a much wider range and number of butterflies - for a few years we had both Chalkhill and Small Blues. This year the range of species is much reduced but plenty of Meadow Brown, Gatekeeper and Green-veined White are still resident, while the wild flowers bring in a number of passing insects. Common Blues have much reduced in number in recent years but I was pleased to see an estimated 20 (including several females) while I was there today. +++

My best insects seen at the IBM site today were a Small Tortoiseshell and my first Migrant Hawker dragonfly. The grass was full of grasshoppers and the Golden Orb spiders were getting close to full size feeding on them and the occasional damselfly, but I saw no bush crickets.

The number of Clouded Yellows present on Thorney Island continues to increase, and I now see that Barry Collins reckoned there were more than 10 present last Wednesday (Aug 7)

FRI 09 AUG

The first of the summer brood of Brown Argus butterflies that I have heard of were on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on Aug 7, seen by Rupert Broadway with many Chalkhill Blues, a late single Marbled White and two each of Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady. Other reports for summer brood butterflies seen on Aug 7 come from Lawrence Holloway who saw a very fresh female Holly Blue at Bognor, and from Dave Tolcher at Hook/Warsash who had his first summer Common Blues, but these were by no means the earliest dates - the first fresh Holly Blue was seen on July 10 (after a gap in records since June 23), and the first fresh Common Blue was seen on July 16 by Barry Collins on Thorney Island. Not claiming a first as he had heard they were out in Dorset, Alan Thornbury went to the small chalkpits on Portsdown (by Hill Road at Portchester), and saw several Small Blues there at lunchtime yesterday. Alan did imply that these were the first for Hampshire, but Mike Duffy had seen them on Stockbridge Down on Aug 6. +++

Still with butterflies in Hampshire Bob Chapman saw his first Clouded Yellow at Farlington Marshes yesterday, and noted a strong northward movement of Large Whites. Painted Ladies have been a common sight at the marshes for some time. +++

An unusual way of hunting butterflies adopted by Rupert Broadway yesterday was to ride a mountain bike across the north west New Forest from Frogham to Fritham - this stirred more than 20 Graylings and 2 Small Heath into action.

Moving on to moths the current batch of reports gives me nine new or fresh moths for the yearlist. A Copper Underwing was on a window of Lawrence Holloway's home at Bognor on Aug 6 and a second was taken at Mike Wall's trap at Basingstoke on Aug 8 (I have used that date but I think Mike's moths were taken on one or two earlier but unstated nights). The next three new moths were also taken by Mike - they were Lunar-spotted Pinion and Rosy Wainscot plus something which Mike names *Homeosoma sinuella* (can someone give me a B&F number or another name for this please?), and on the same night Barry Collins in Havant added Small Wainscot. Fresh brood moths were Coxcomb Prominent and Small Waved Umber, both taken by Mike Wall, and two more were taken by Alan Dawson at his Southampton Portswood trap - they were Maiden's Blush and Oak Hook-tip. +++

Barry Collins had his trap running last night and took Lesser Treble-bar which Alan Dawson had recorded on Aug 4, and Mike Wall also had two 'seconds' - one was the Old Lady which was in my house on Aug 3, and the other was The Olive which Barry Collins had found on July 15. In Southampton last night Alan Dawson was very pleased to find a specimen of The Gem in his trap (he says it is only the second he has taken there since 1995) but as this migrant has been appearing all over England since March 7 (when one was trapped at Rye Harbour in E Sussex) it fails to get a rostrum place on my list of firsts.+++

Not at a trap, a Vapourer moth was seen by Brian Fellows in his Emsworth garden today - unusually it came to rest and showed Brian its white spots. The first of these that I heard of was one found by Philip Hack on July 25 and since then I have had one 'probable' sighting of a fast flying, rich brown moth steering an erratic course across my garden but not stopping to let me confirm its identity. +++

Another good moth was a Hummingbird Hawk seen nectaring at a Buddliea in Dave Tolcher's Warsash garden on Aug 6.

WED 07 AUG

Mark Litjens was on Farley Mount, to the west of Winchester, today and there saw the first helice type female Clouded Yellow - these females lack the bright yellow colour but retain the dark markings and flight behaviour of the others so they appear as 'black and white' versions. In the same area Mark reckoned there were 70 Brimstones and over 25 Peacocks and he also saw one late specimen of a Marbled White. +++

Here on Portsdown John Goodspeed saw at least one each of Clouded Yellow and Painted Lady and Barry Collins told me that the small resident population of both these species is still enjoying the clover to be found on Thorney Island.

Walking around the south of the Staunton Country Park this morning I found myself among a great mass of Gatekeepers, Meadow Browns, Small Skippers, Large and Small Whites with just one Common Blue and - among the trees - many Speckled Woods. Also seen were one Small Tortoiseshell, two Clouded Yellows (my first), at least half a dozen very fresh Peacocks and twice that number of fresh Brimstone including at least one female. In the Long Avenue I watched a Southern Hawker actively patrolling its beat for some time and on the water lily leaves of the upper pond at the north end of the avenue there were a number of smaller dragonflies among which I looked hard at several very red darters but could not detect any black markings at the rear of the body so, despite a 'wasp waisted' look and their preference for the watery habitat rather than dry land I had to assume they were male Common Darters.

After sifting through a list of over 50 moths reported from various moth traps in today's input I could only find two that were new to my yearlist - these were the pyralid moth *Pyrausta purpuralis* in Barry Collins trap and a Currant Pug taken by Mike Wall in Basingstoke. Philip Hack had a couple of 'fresh' (new brood) moths, Pebble Hook-tip and Knot Grass, but several excellent finds failed to make the news as they had been seen by others at an earlier date. Typical of this latter group are the Marbled Green taken by Alan Dawson (Alan says this is his first for the year and only the third example he has seen since 1995, but both Barry Collins and Jon Stokes reported it this year on July 24 and 25 respectively. Another example of this was a magnificent specimen of a Gold Spot which Barry Collins showed me today (along with a Garden Tiger and Iron Prominent) - despite the pristine condition of Barry's moth I see it was reported from Titchfield Haven on May 16 and June 1 (presumably this is one of the species which continues to emerge at widely separated dates over a long period rather than all sharing

a common birthday). +++

The really exciting new entries in the yearlist are from the National Migrant Moth website (which includes butterflies) were not seen in Hampshire. Four Camberwell Beauties arrived in the country yesterday (Aug 6) in Norfolk, Lincolnshire, Bedfordshire and Yorkshire, with a fifth sighting today in Suffolk, and down in Cornwall the one and only (so far this year) Bath White was seen. On Aug 5 a Southern White Admiral arrived in England (thought to be the first ever British record) and chose to feed on Buddleia in the Southsea garden of John Langmaid, the eminent lepidopterist. The migrant moth website also carries some interesting recent moth records - two of them were of *Diasemiopsis ramburialis* and were seen in West Sussex (this species had already been seen in early June in both Dorset and Oxfordshire) and another was the first report of Bloxworth Snout and was seen at Portland in Dorset - also in Dorset there was a *Dioryctria sylvestrella* seen at Puddletown on Aug 3.

TUE 06 AUG

Mike Duffy took a trip to the Durlston Country Park in Dorset this morning, and there saw his first Lulworth Skipper (this is about the time when they first emerge though they can sometimes be seen in July). Coming back to Hampshire he visited Stockbridge Down where the first summer brood Small Blues were on the wing (though Mike only saw two).

A surprising record for yesterday comes from Andy Barker who returned to his home in Chandlers Ford in the late afternoon to find a Silver Washed Fritillary in the garden. Not only is this the first time he has seen one in the garden but the butterfly was a female and he saw her lay an egg on the wall of the house about a metre above a patch of Common Dog Violet growing in the garden. This seems to show that the butterfly is more concerned about the presence of food for its offspring than with the substrate on which it lays the egg. Normally the egg is laid in a crevice of the bark of a tree above the foodplant and I think the crevice is important as, when the caterpillar hatches out two weeks after the egg is laid, the only meal it has before next spring is its own eggshell. Having eaten that it goes into hibernation in the tree bark crevice until next spring when it comes down the tree and has to search for violet leaves before it can get its next meal. No doubt Andy will keep us updated on the life story of this individual.

MON 05 AUG

Four of the six most recent new moths to go on my yearlist come from Alan Dawson's trap in the Portswood area of Southampton. Last night (Aug 4) he found his first ever Slender Brindle along with a Lesser Treble Bar, and on the night of July 30 he found a *Trachysera suavella* and a *Batia lunaris*. Mike Wall, running a trap at Sherborne St John near Basingstoke, added a Straw Underwing last Friday night (Aug 2) while on Saturday I found an Old Lady in my room without any intention of trapping her. Both Barry Collins and Philip Hack have also given me lists from their traps, and on Friday night (Aug 2) Philip had a fresh Peacock moth and (though he does not mention it as fresh) what must have been a new generation Scalloped Hook-tip, beating Barry by one night with this one. Checking the biology of the Scalloped Hook-tip to see that a new brood is now due I also read that its caterpillars are said to look like tiny Lizards, and if the moths now out are successful more of the caterpillars will soon appear on the leaves of Silver Birch trees (the only thing about them that reminds me of a Lizard is the brownish, flecked colour). +++

The national migrant moth website has reports of three new species all seen (outside our area) on the night of Aug 3. To the west a Dingy Mocha was at Portland Bill and to the east a Scarce Dagger was taken at Dungeness and a Tree-lichen Beauty at Rye Harbour by the warden (Paul Troake). In Chichester on the same night Sarah Patton took The Vestal but this was not the first record for the year, while in Scotland a Great Brocade was taken at the Tentsmuir national nature reserve in Fife on the evening of Aug 2.

At Swanwick by the River Hamble Six Belted Clearwing moths were discovered last year and seen again on July 29 this year. Since then Andy Collins has taken a pheromone trap there to attract them and yesterday counted 70 coming to the scent in 20 minutes. +++

That last item came from the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire branch website, as does news from Whiteley Pastures near Fareham telling us that the new brood of Peacock butterflies have at last emerged in strength. Alan Thornbury counted more than 20 of them when he was there yesterday, along with 6 fresh Brimstones and a Holly Blue, and he also found 15 Silver Washed

Fritillary still on the wing. +++

Mark Litjens also visited Whitely yesterday and was rewarded with a single Purple Emperor high overhead, plus two fresh Painted Ladies, five Brimstones, five Peacocks, four Ringlets and just one Purple Hairstreak. A Golden Ringed dragonfly was also there with an Emperor. +++
In the Test Valley Dave Pearson was in the walled garden at Mottisfont Abbey yesterday, finding ten butterfly species there and telling us that he is lucky enough to see Purple Hairstreak almost daily on the oaks in the Chineham Business Park where he works (just outside Basingstoke).

Both Painted Ladies and Clouded Yellows are increasing in number, and today Barry Collins found 5 Clouded Yellow and 4 Painted Ladies on Thorney Island where the Clouded Yellows have probably been present every day since July 26. Another Clouded Yellow was seen at Bexhill today and another yesterday in the Glyne Gap between Bexhill and Hastings. +++
One butterfly which should be showing everywhere in good numbers at this time of year is Small Copper but there have been strangely few reports of them though Richard Carpenter had one at Hook/Warsash today

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 10 AUG

For the past fortnight a Badger has been a regular nightly visitor to Mike Bending's garden in the fairly densely built up area of Cowplain (between Waterlooville and Horndean). Mike writes {{ it regularly turns up around midnight and finishes off the small plate of catfood and handful of dried fruit we leave it each night. I dont know where its sett is - we are surrounded by suburban gardens, and there is no obvious rough ground or woods close by. }}

At least one new fungus was noted in woodland today by the Havant Wildlife Group, walking in the area north of Rowlands Castle. This was the tiny Horshair Fungus whose thin, but wiry stems are strongly reminiscent of horse hair (though much more rigid). +++

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth another first appearance of a fairly common fungus (and much bigger than the tiny Horsehair) was *Psathyrella candolleana*..

Some ten years ago a walk round the rough grassland of the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site on a hot dry day would have discovered hundreds of the small Pointed Snails (*Cochlicella acuta*) on most plant stems that offered the insects an alternative to frying on the ground (even a few inches off the ground the reduced reflected heat and the chance of a cooling breeze make it well worth the effort of a short climb). In one year I estimated a count of 2000 snails on one line of wooden posts but today I was pleased to see just one of these snails which I thought had vanished from the site. +++

Another observation came when I stepped into the shallow water at the 'ford' which allows vehicles to cross to the islands in the lake. As I put my first welly boot into the water I got a great surprise as the water all round me came to life with a thrashing turmoil as if I had trodden on a big crocodile - luckily the cause was not dangerous, just a group of 20 or more large carp that had been resting/spawning/feeding (?) in the shallow water.

THU 08 AUG

In the lower reaches of the River Ems at Emsworth today Brian Fellows had his first sighting of a shoal of some 20 Grey Mullet and the sadder sight of a large dead Trout (no cause of death given).

WED 07 AUG

John Goodspeed tells me that Val Henry was with a working party of conservation volunteers on the southern slope of Portsdown Hill this morning, working a little west of Fort Widley, when Val came on a fresh Badger latrine to confirm the presence of Badgers in this area. John had been told by Tony Norris in the past that there were Badgers here but this is the first recent evidence of their continuing presence.

Walking along the Long Avenue leading from Leigh Park Gardens lake to Havant Thicket this morning I met a young man coming towards me carrying a Grass Snake that was at least two feet long. He told me he was taking it home to show to a five year old girl who was staying at his house, and I had mixed feelings about the wisdom of this method of introducing the young to wildlife but clearly his intentions were good. What I did learn from the encounter was the

noisome smell which these snakes can give off - although he had been carrying the snake for some time it was unpleasant to be near it. The snake was also exhibiting another defence mechanism - feigning death. This made it easier to carry the snake as it was not struggling but I did wonder if the way he was gripping the snake just behind its head would induce the same real effect of death, and this made me realise that I do not know how snakes get their oxygen - do they have lungs (and can thus be throttled at the throat) or do they transpire through their skin? Answers on a postcard please!

WEEK 31 JULY 29 - AUG 4

BIRDS:

SUN 04 AUG

A Temminck's Stint has today joined the Little Stint at Farlington Marshes and Jason Crook tells us that both could be seen together by the stream between the main lake and the reserve building - not sure who made the discovery. Also at the Marshes today Jason saw the first autumn Wheatear to arrive there and tells us that the Common Scoter is still in the harbour and that one Yellow Wagtail and one Ruff could be seen on the reserve. Jason only saw one of the young Garganey but suspects that all four are still present. +++

Last Sunday (July 28) Brian Fellows heard the first autumn Robin song from two birds in Brook Meadow at Emsworth and I heard my first on Wednesday (July 31) from a bird enjoying the rain when I was in Dorset. Since then I have heard a couple of birds singing at dusk but this morning I heard at least half a dozen different birds singing around the Havant area, and now expect it to be a part of the daily scene.

As they start up the local Swifts are leaving - I have already noted that the main body of birds in Emsworth and my part of Havant seemed to leave a week ago (last seen July 28) but a few birds continue to pass over the garden (a group of five yesterday and two today) and when I was walking through the west of Havant this morning I had the impression that Swifts nesting there were still attached to their nests with several birds circling and screaming low over the houses with no southward movement.

There have been numerous reports of warblers reaching the coast on their way south and I can add a Lesser Whitethroat to the list with one at the south end of Southmoor Lane near Budds Farm this morning - I was made aware of its presence by a short burst of the usually quiet warble that starts their song (without the distinctive terminal rattle) and by its Blackcap like scolding before I caught a glimpse of it flying between bushes. Other song heard this morning (other than the regular Wren, Woodpigeon and Collared Dove) was from a Great Tit and from a mass gathering of Starlings.

SAT 03 AUG

The SOS website has a definite report of a Melodious Warbler at Church Norton today and an "I'm certain myself but can anyone else confirm it" report of an Ortolan Bunting at Telscombe (a village just inland from Peacehaven to the east of Brighton). Less certain is a report from a golfer whose game at Hunston (just south of Chichester) was spoilt on the evening of July 29 by the distraction of sounds which he believes came from a Corncrake. Also in West Sussex, at Ambersham Common near Midhurst yesterday, Lawrence Holloway was certain of the bird's identity when he heard a Willow Warbler in full song.

From Titchfield Haven Peter Morrison sends us news for today that the two juvenile Avocet are still present, and both male and female Marsh Harrier were seen along with a Hobby and the regular Spoonbill. The reeling of a Grasshopper Warbler was heard and a female Mandarin was seen, plus 5 Green and 2 Common Sandpiper. Two Black and one or two Roseate Tern were present while out on the sea the Scoter flock had shot up to 21 in number. Although the Scoter may have been boosted by new post breeding arrivals I suspect they are part of a larger number that has been off our shores through the summer - I see that Russell Wynn reported a maximum of 46 off the Lymington Marshes sometime in July (before July 22), and these may have been part of an eastward movement in mid-month when Barry Collins saw 30 fly east past Sandy Point on July 14 and there were various reports of up to a dozen off Hill Head on July

16-18.

FRI 02 AUG

Jason Crook was at Farlington Marshes this evening and saw all four juvenile Garganey fly up from the Deeps and head out to the RSPB reserve islands in the company of a couple of Teal. The female Common Scoter was still out in Langstone Harbour and two more of these were still on the sea off Titchfield Haven where Richard Carpenter tells us the two juvenile Avocet have disappeared from sight (no one seems to know if they have left). The male Marsh Harrier, Spoonbill and ever present Barn Owl were still there, and the Tern flock over the sea continues to grow - 330 Common, 1 Roseate and 1 Black seen today.

Last Wednesday Bob Chapman told us that 360 Black-tailed Godwit had arrived back in Langstone Harbour, coming to the Farlington Marshes lake to pass the high tide period when they cannot feed in the harbour, and I suspect that a flock of 132 seen today by Brian Fellows in the Eastney Lake area close to the harbour entrance are a part of this total and would have flown back to Farlington Marshes for the evening high tide. Another flock of 180 feeding in Emsworth Harbour and the Emsworth channel to the west of Thorney Island were seen by Barry Collins to fly in to the Thorney Great Deeps on the rising tide yesterday, and most of these are recent returnees. Elsewhere small numbers mainly represent birds that did not bother to fly to Iceland to nest - the biggest group of these is at Titchfield Haven where 93 were counted by Peter Raby yesterday and there have been around 40 in Pagham Harbour and up to 60 have been seen at Keyhaven while there have been smaller numbers seen in Fishbourne Channel (Chichester Harbour), along the north of the Isle of Wight, with less than half a dozen near the mouth of the Hamble. +++

In Emsworth Harbour today Brian Fellows scanned a feeding flock of 168 and found five of them carried colour rings - four of them followed the pattern used by Pete Potts and were ringed locally but one had a different pattern (3 rings on the left leg and 1 on the right) - it will be interesting to know where it came from.

Earlier in the day Brian had visited Baffins Pond where the Canada Goose flock is now down to just 78 birds (from 198), making me wonder how many I will see on the IBM lake on the Aug 10 WeBS count (so far the autumn flock there has never exceeded 500). Down at Eastney Lake near the mouth of Langstone Harbour he found a pair of Swans with four cygnets, while the single parent Swan with three cygnets was nowhere to be seen, re-inforcing my conjectures (see July 30) about the long distance wanderings of Swan families at this time of year.

THU 01 AUG

Another Little Stint and two Wood Sandpiper were among Jason Crook's sightings at Farlington Marshes today. He also saw a Roseate Tern and, crowded on a small island in the harbour just west of the main lake, 35 Whimbrel and over 30 Greenshank. +++

A single Sanderling was seen both at Titchfield Haven (by Peter Raby) and at Hook/Warsash by Bob Marchant - probably but not definitely the same bird. At Hook Bob heard a Cetti's Warbler still singing and saw two Turnstone and a Kingfisher, while at Titchfield Peter had a good tern flock (252 Common, 17 Sandwich, 3 Roseate and 1 Black). In the reserve the two young Avocet were still present with some 93 Black-tailed Godwit, more than a dozen Teal, and 5 Shoveler. +++

On the Southsea seafront Trevor Carpenter saw seven Med Gulls spread out between the Royal Marine barracks and the Canoe Lake - three were adults, one was approaching second winter and three were juveniles (possibly some of the few hatched from the Langstone Harbour islands this summer?).

I enjoyed a pleasant cycle ride around north Hayling this evening and was able to confirm the absence of all Little Terns from the Oysterbeds. Martin Gillingham's notes of what he saw there last Monday (July 29) made no mention of Little Terns but I was not sure if that omission was because they were so obvious as not to be worth mentioning or because there were none to be seen, and I now assume it was the latter. In their place were half a dozen Common Terns looking as if they were going to use the island as a night roost. Back at home in Havant there were also no Swifts to be seen and it seems that they left on Sunday night (July 28) as that was the last day on which I noted a big flock in the evening. There may have been a few still around on the Monday and Tuesday when I was not present to check, but Brian Fellows in Emsworth

tells me that the majority had also left Emsworth before July 30. This is the first year that I can recall when they have left before the end of July and I hope it means they have had a good breeding season, finishing their business early, rather than a poor season with no young to keep them around their nests.

There have been quite a few mentions of Green Woodpecker recently - they seem to have had a good breeding season - and I have long accepted them as visitors to gardens but I can still be surprised by their behaviour as I was when I read the following on the SOS website about one seen in the Pound Hill residential area of Crawley on July 29 where a {{ young Green Woodpecker was happily cleaning up ants from the front lawn of a house in a residential street. Hopping along the pavement and generally ignoring the passing cars. Also, a Mallard hatched 6 chicks from its nest under a bush in a front garden on the other side of the same street - in spite of cats, dogs, lawn mowers, passers by and probably foxes. Last seen leading her brood through the back gardens looking for the nearest pond. }}

WED 31 JULY

The first Merganser to return to the south coast may have been the female which Simon Boswell saw off Keyhaven today. While in the Lymington Marshes area he found the Stilt Sandpiper feeding with Snipe in the Fishtail Lagoon and also saw a juvenile Redshank (still with its parent) and a young Cuckoo. Earlier, out at Hurst Castle, Simon saw 5 juvenile Common and 1 juvenile Black Tern (could this be the one which was in Langstone Harbour yesterday evening?), plus a young Razorbill with its parents. 11 Scoter were in the Hurst Narrows area and a Balearic Shearwater was off the Needles (these autumn visitors have already been seen off Selsey Bill on July 25 and I don't think this was near enough inshore to claim it for Hampshire waters). Interestingly Simon seems to have heard reports of Gannets roosting somewhere in the Solent (do they rest on the sea at night?) which ties in with Bob Marchant's early morning observation of 34 off Hook this morning.

A welcome news bulletin from Bob Chapman today gives more detail of birds currently at Farlington Marshes, supplementing Jason Crook's sightings yesterday (see yesterday's notes) but perhaps contradicting them in one item (Bob lists a female Wigeon already back where Jason reports an eclipse male). Bob tells us that there are now 500 Redshank and 360 Black-tailed Godwit back at the reserve and visitors may also see one or two Spotted Redshank, Little Ringed Plover, Turnstone and a male Yellow Wagtail with both Hobby and Peregrine making occasional flyovers. In addition to Jason's list Bob records the presence of 9 Shoveler, 4 Gadwall and a few Teal on the reserve (where the four juvenile Garganey were still present today) plus six Brent and the two Black-necked Grebe as fairly regular sights in the harbour, and a single Roseate Tern seen last weekend.

Both Bob Marchant and Trevor Carpenter were at Hook/Warsash this morning where Trevor saw the second autumn flock of Mistle Thrushes (21 at Hook compared to the 13 at Eastleigh Lakeside on July 22) and then watched the back of a young Marsh Harrier as if flew west towards Lepe. In addition to the Gannets mentioned above Bob saw the first Turnstone back on the shore. Over at Hill Head Trevor saw a Black Tern and 3 Common Scoter, and inside Titchfield Haven John Shillitoe saw the two young Avocet and the one Spoonbill and heard that a Wood Warbler had been seen there (also back are Willow and Garden Warblers). There are now five species of Tern to be seen around the reserve - John saw Black, Little, Common and Sandwich and heard that a single Roseate is still around.

TUE 30 JULY

Jason Crook had a good evening's birding along the east side of Farlington Marshes this evening and was particularly excited by a juvenile Black Tern (seen with 4 adults) as it is the earliest by a good week that he has ever seen or heard of a youngster in the harbour. It probably came from a nest in the low countries or Germany but the early date raises hopeful thoughts of breeding in England - they ceased to breed here regularly around 1850 but a pair did breed in the Ouse Washes of East Anglia in 1966 (and in a few subsequent years). Other birds seen by Jason were a young Little Gull (first summer moulting to second winter) in Chalk Dock (between Broadmarsh and North Binness) and four juvenile Shags perched on buoys near the harbour entrance - these also are very early arrivals in the harbour but presumably have only come from the Isle of Wight. The long staying female Common Scoter was in the harbour and

at the Deeps on the reserve were 4 juvenile Garganey and an eclipse male Wigeon.

Also in Sussex but nearer to Chichester Harbour and Emsworth comes a report of two Black Swans on the roadside duckpond at West Ashling. I don't recall seeing or hearing of them there before and it is I suppose possible that the amorous male Black Swan that has been missing from Emsworth since March 4 has at last met up with a co-operative female - that would certainly explain his absence but leaves the question open as to where she came from ... I'm sure there is more to come on this story. +++

At Emsworth the female Mallards that have got plenty of willing mates are still producing fluffy ducklings, and I saw a couple myself this evening on the Hermitage stream at Broadmarsh. Also on the water here was the summer flock of 26 Mute Swans and with them was a single parent Swan with five fairly well grown but still downy cygnets - I assume that these were the family which turned up at Broadmarsh slipway in the week starting June 24 but I have not seen them since then and am now wondering whether they could be the single parent with five young that were on the Hilsea lines on July 13 - does a family group wander over such a wide area (about 6 km via open water)?

From Broadmarsh I went to the Wicor shore of Portchester and in the scrubby grassland (plenty of Hawthorn and bramble) I heard several short bursts of sweet warbling which I am fairly sure, after checking my tapes, came from a Redstart. I'm not surprised to come across one in this shoreline habitat at this time of year but I was a bit surprised that it was singing.

Last night (July 29) Barry Collins made a dusk count of 118 Little Egrets coming into their roost on Thorney Island, an increase of 25 since the count of 93 which he found there on July 15. +++

Also on Monday evening Martin Gillingham visited the Hayling Oysterbeds and I am surprised that he made no mention of Little Terns (I wouldn't have thought they have all left so soon) but he did make a very interesting observation of a pair of Common Tern on the nest island displaying and making a food offering as if they were thinking of having a new nest - what's more he saw three tern chicks among the stones close to these adults and I am left with the impression that he thought they were juvenile Common Terns (not Little) to prove that the Commons have bred here. One Turnstone was back at this site and in the harbour was a flock of 22 Great Crested Grebe with one juvenile.

MON 29 JULY

It seems that the main reason for the Stilt Sandpiper staying on at the Lymington Marshes (Oxey area) is that it is undergoing a very rapid moult. A photograph of it taken soon after it first arrived eight days ago (July 21) showed a good amount of breeding plumage but visitors are now saying that it is a dull sight, spending most of its time sleeping and looking as if it were in drab non-breeding plumage. The latest reports seem to indicate that it may even have completed sufficient of its moult to be thinking of leaving us - it has been very static (raising one wing seems to have been the extent of its movement) but it is now said to be moving around and elusive. My guess is that it will be feeling pretty hungry after taking so much time out from feeding and that it will stay on for a few more days to feed up and recover from the effort of growing its new feathers, but that may mean that it is less easy for the visiting birders to locate it.

Thanks to Dave Unsworth we at last have a first indication of the expected build up of Egrets elsewhere than Thorney Island and Langstone. Dave reports 33 went to roost at Sowley Pond (a little east of Lymington) this evening. Also at that pond were 7 Common Sandpiper, 2 Mandarin duck and a Turtle Dove. To the west of Lymington and a little earlier in the evening Steve Keen was heading for his home at Sway when a ringtail Montagu's Harrier crossed his path, heading north west up the Avon Water valley towards Burley.

To the east of Southampton Water Bob Marchant today visited the Hook shore at the mouth of the Hamble River and found three more Yellow Wagtails - the first to arrive there. Two Dartford Warblers were also seen by Bob while a Little Owl was once more to be seen when Richard Carpenter was in the area (before the breeding season Hook Park and Chilling often provided views of two or more Little Owls for visiting birders, but they have kept a low profile there as elsewhere over the past few months) +++

Richard also went up the Hamble to the Bunny Meadows area just upstream of Warsash and found 8 Little Egrets there, reminding me that last August there was a night roost of around 40

Egrets in the Badnam Creek area, a little further upstream and on the west side of the river - I wonder if it is already in use again? +++

On the shore at Hill Head, near his home, Richard estimated around 250 Common Terns were present, though he did not see one chase a Peregrine as did Paul Winter when he was at the Lymington marshes (Normandy area) today - Paul also noted a flock of 19 Eider offshore there - maybe new arrivals but more likely birds that have been in the Solent all summer and which happened to have come together close enough to the shore to be seen and counted.

Barry Collins included Hayling Island in a long cycle ride which he and his wife Margaret made today. At the Oysterbeds Little Tern were still feeding young but the young from other nests had already flown, maybe now venturing out of the harbour mouth to feed and explore, though probably returning to roost each night just inside the harbour (at this time of year big flocks of terns can be seen on most evenings inside the mouths of all three of our eastern Hampshire harbours). Hopefully we will soon get news of how many young were added to the Little Tern population - both from the Oysterbeds and the RSPB islands. At Sandy Point Barry watched a Kingfisher fly east across the mouth of Chichester Harbour towards East Head, and later he saw another at Sinah Lake (near which a large parrot was perched on a TV aerial - presumably one of the two Conures that were living free around the Kench in mid June - Mark Tutton identified them as Patagonian Conures on June 14 but I have not heard of them since then)

I have already mentioned how Paul Winter saw an aggressive Common Tern chasing a Peregrine over the Lymington marshes today, and in another of today's messages David Parker gives a further example of the perpetual hassle which greets any raptor whenever it shows itself among other birds. David was in his garden in Forestside (north edge of Stansted Forest) on Friday evening watching a couple of Buzzards high in the air when alarm calls from the local Swallows drew his attention to a Hobby which was flying low and heading for the Forest, but before the Hobby could reach the trees a Sparrowhawk flew out of them and smartly sent the Hobby packing - no poaching prey from my patch was the clear message. David is also pleased that a couple of Marsh Tits have just returned to his garden feeders.

Latest news from Sussex on the SOS website tells us that the Pectoral Sandpiper is still at Pulborough Brooks, and that what may be the West Sussex (Goring) Bee-eater (seen there last Thursday July 25) has now moved to Seaford in East Sussex where it was heard today. At Selsey Bill a single Pomarine Skua was, I think, an unusual sight in July and although Gannets are a regular sight there through the summer I think a count of 400 off the Bill today may have been a July record.

PLANTS:

SUN 04 AUG

A walk around the south west of Havant this morning gave me a list of 127 flowering plants (excluding all grasses except the Townsend's Cord Grass normally referred to as Spartina). The first surprise came at the taxi turning circle outside Havant station where Creeping Yellow Cress was flowering in the pavement. Nothing else unusual until I left the streets and took the Wayfarer's Way path beside the Hermitage stream where the Buttonweed was at its peak. Also at the streamside was what appeared to be Winter Cress (Yellow Rocket), and on checking Francis Rose's Wildflower Key I see he gives May to August as its flowering period (but that can only be in really wet places like this streamside). Near it was one plant of Branched Bur-reed (only its knobby seeds to be seen) and a Bur-Marigold which I took to be Nodding as a check of several leaves showed no tri-partite lobing, but later decided must be Trifid after reading in the Hants Flora that there are no records for Nodding in our part of south east Hants (it apparently likes acid streams, not chalk). Stace does not use the 'trifid' leaves to distinguish the species though he says that Trifid Bur-Marigold usually, but not always, has them. Stace's distinction is either by the shape of the achenes or by the presence of leaf stalks (Nodding has all leaves sessile, Trifid has most of the leaves with winged petioles), and this clinches the identity of these plants as Trifid. +++

The field between the Wayfarer's Way and Bedhampton Mill Pool would in the past have been a sheet of lovely Vervain plants but it has recently become very overgrown so I was pleased to see it had been totally cut down, giving hope of return of the Vervain (but today I had but a few

plants by the path outside the field). My next surprise item was a single perfect flower on Greater Periwinkle but there was nothing else worth comment (other than Sticky Groundsel by the Brockhampton stream) until I reached the South Moors shore where Golden Samphire is now in flower (as is the very different Rock Samphire on the seawall). I had been here briefly last night looking for Slender Hare's Ear and finding just one plant with no flowers open - this morning I found two plants and one had its terminal umbel showing yellow with a couple of tiny flowers. Continuing up the Langbrook stream path I was pleased to see seeds on a few plants of Knotted Hedge-parsley, and flowers on the Duke of Argyll's Teapant. Near the end of my walk I added Danewort flowers to the list and in my own garden ended the list with Common Fumitory and Ivy-leaved Speedwell which I had not seen earlier (plus Ivy-leaved Toadflax just outside the garden).

My morning walk also showed me that autumn is upon us, bearing edible fruits. Blackberries have been edible for a week or more and there enough to make picking them for puddings practical (from the many well established clumps of escaped 'cultivated' species growing from bird-dropped seeds). In addition to these this morning gave me my first sight of shiny blue Sloes, and on one tree of the many Cherry Plums that gave us so much white blossom in January there were large yellow plums of which I ate three and one was fully ripe and juicy (the others were edible but not at their best). Another special fruit for walkers on the Wayfarer's Way at Bedhampton are the Mulberries which can be picked from a tree growing in the Water Works but over-hanging the path. Today this had many berries but they were still mainly white with tinges of red and will have to go black before they can be enjoyed (watch out for the staining juice!)

SAT 03 AUG

John Goodspeed tells me that Michael Prior (head forester of Stansted Forest) has now shown him the plants in the Forest which are thought to be Violet Helleborines. Only one of them is in good condition and likely to flower, the other few have been eaten by Slugs. The evidence for their identity is I think just based on a violet tinge to the leaves and stem, and while probably correct I see that Stace has a fairly simple rule for separating them from Broad Leaved - this is to examine the lower stem leaves which, if wider than long, are Broad Leaved and if longer than wide they are Violet.

The Havant Wildlife Group met this morning by a tributary of the Hermitage Stream which flows from the lake in Leigh Park Gardens (part of the Staunton Country Park) to join the main stream in Leigh Park residential area, and they started in Great Copse, a wood surrounded by houses and the well known Tampax factory. Working upstream from the wood they found Marsh Woundwort alongside the stream before crossing Middle Park Way road into the Thicket Lawn area of the country park. The Yellow Loosestrife and Sneezewort which John Goodspeed found here on July 6 were still flowering, and the group also saw the 'rayed' form of Black Knapweed whose flowers look like Greater Knapweed but has the normal leaves of Black Knapweed. Hairy and Oval Sedge were both noted, and in the lake the thin flowering spikes of Spiked Water Milfoil broke the surface with the plant itself growing under water - I see that the spikes have male flowers only in the topmost whorls, females only at the bottom and bisexual flowers half-way up. Both Sharp-flowered and Jointed Rush were seen as was Apple Mint (the cross - mentha x villosa - between Spear Mint and Round-leaved Mint) which is more likely to smell of Spearmint than of Apples!

FRI 02 AUG

Barry Collins today found the first Slender Hare's Ear plants on the north west seawall of Thorney Island near the Deeps.

THU 01 AUG

On North Common (Northney, Hayling Island) I found my first Pepper Saxifrage and Hoary Ragwort flowers, along with another nice clump of Spiny Restharrow

WED 31 JULY

I had to visit Shillingstone (in the Dorset Stour valley above Blandford) today and while there found Buckwheat growing in a small patch of game crops (I think mainly Millet though still the crop has only just reached the leafy stage). This area had been a rubbish tip and I was amused by a sign, almost overgrown, put up by Dorset County Council in the past, saying boldly "If the

answer is Yes you must apply for a licence from the council" - over the years the part of the notice asking the question had vanished +++

On the journey to Shillingstone, driving through the Horton Heath area, I noticed a lovely display of what looked like Common Cow-Wheat on a shaded bank where the road winds around the edge of woodland. What impressed me was that the steep banks of the narrow winding road seemed to have been carefully cleared of other vegetation, leaving almost bare earth, but the road verge mowers had been intelligent enough to leave these plants.

TUE 30 JULY

John Goodspeed today found the very first Autumn Gentian starting to flower on Portsdown and I can add that the very last flowers could still be seen on the Hairy Vetchling (*Lathyrus hirsutus*) on the 'Broadmarsh mountain' in Havant while the Fodder Vetch (*Vicia villosa*) was still flourishing at Portchester (see my notes for July 9 and 25 respectively)

MON 29 JULY

Branched Bur Reed is reasonably easy to find in south east Hampshire but the Unbranched species is generally less common and is absent from the Havant area (though not uncommon in the New Forest and in north east Hampshire). One of the places where it can be found near Havant is the lower Meon valley where Richard Carpenter saw it today in the Meon canal just west of Titchfield Haven reserve. The Hants Flora marks it at three other points on the Meon but I guess if I wanted to see it I should look along the banks of the Wallington River, running around the north west shoulder of Portsdown Hill - the Flora indicates that it is present throughout the course of this river down to Fareham creek.

INSECTS:

SUN 04 AUG

Trevor Carpenter on Wheely Down near West Meon, and Mike Duffy at Noar Hill, both saw very fresh examples of Painted Lady today, making it more certain that the butterflies which arrived early this year have now produced local offspring. At Noar Hill there were also fresh Peacock and Small Tortoiseshell, and if I guess right the Small Heath which Mike found there were also the new summer brood. Far less fresh were some Ringlets - these have vanished from most other sites and here they were covered with red mites. Marbled White were still on the wing but I think they too are already fading out elsewhere.

Hot sunshine and many flowers brought out a good show of butterflies this morning but the only one which I thought might be of interest was an extremely tatty Comma whose reddish brown colour had completely vanished and which could only be recognised by the scalloping of the wing edges and a few dark dashes on the forewings. This individual probably emerged last August or September, and probably spent a very limited time in hibernation, so it may well have been active for as much as nine months. Also out in the Havant area were fresh Commas, Small Tortoiseshell and Red Admiral with hundreds of Gatekeepers and Small Whites plus a few Meadow Browns, Large and Green Veined Whites. While I was out I am told that a fresh Brimstone was in my garden.

SAT 03 AUG

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth today Brian Fellows found both Dark Bush Cricket and Short Winged Conehead, both of which will presumably be soon reported more widely.

Going to my bedroom last night I put the light on and disturbed a large dark moth which was fairly easily captured and released in the garden after identifying it as an Old Lady, allowing me to claim a first for at least one moth species this year.

Lawrence Holloway visited the Burton Mill Pond area in West Sussex yesterday and his website today carries a good photo of a hoverfly which I could not recognize (and which is not illustrated in Chinery's general guide to insects). Lawrence names it as *Megasyrphus annulipes*. While in the area he saw eight dragonfly species - Emperor, Brown, Migrant and Southern Hawker, Broad-bodied and Four-spotted Chaser, Ruddy Darter and Blue-tailed Damsel - plus several butterflies including Holly Blue, female Brimstone and Peacock (plus several nests of their caterpillars).

FRI 02 AUG

Last Monday Mark Litjens told us of the first Migrant Hawker dragonfly seen in Hampshire this

summer (by the Beaulieu River on July 28) and today Richard Carpenter reports the first seen at Titchfield Haven, and I suspect that - despite the insect's name - these may be residents just emerging from local ponds rather than a wave of migrants which would probably have resulted on a multiplicity of reports from many places on the day(s) of arrival. +++

Global warming is making it more and more difficult to distinguish migrants from residents with many insect species - Alan Dawson has recently given us an example of this with the European Corn Borer moth - we have a further confusion with some butterfly species that arrive as migrants in the early spring but then breed in this country with the result that at this time of year it is very difficult to distinguish new arrivals from the continent from home-bred insects. Barry Collins raises this question in my mind today when he reports a very fresh Painted Lady on Thorney Island today, and Barry also raises a second question in relation to Clouded Yellows of which he again saw two on the island today after sightings on July 26, 27 and 28.

Sometimes it is very clear that Clouded Yellows are in migrant mode, going straight by you at high speed and disappearing in the distance within moments, and at other times they seem to loiter in a particular area (perhaps searching for food or a good place to spend the night), but the question in my mind is whether migrant species ever decide they have reached journey's end and settle down in one area for the rest of their season. Barry remarks that the two Clouded Yellows he saw today were 'still there' as if they were the same individuals that arrived on July 27, and I would be very interested to hear if these insects do normally settle down in this way (like migrant birds reaching their nest site) or if they all (despite the occasional stop offs for food and rest) never stop flying once they have started (though they do sometimes turn round and head back the way they have come).

THU 01 AUG

The first *Convolvulus* Hawkmoth to reach Britain this year appeared in South Devon today according to the national Migrant Moth website. Also today Steve Nash had a less well known migrant called *Yponomeuta rorella* in Oxfordshire (the first of the year was in Essex on July 30)

Lawrence Holloway had his first Migrant Hawker dragonfly in his garden at Bognor today (and thinks it was a genuine migrant arriving on the south easterly wind) but he also had an equally unexpected male Ruddy Darter which almost certainly came from a local pond - he has an excellent photo of the latter on his website, showing the colour, pinched waist and black markings along the side of the abdomen. +++

On Thorney island Barry Collins had several Oak Eggars (presumably males if flying by day?) confirming a recent emergence of which the one I saw at Soberton on the evening of July 30 was one.

Andrew Brookes tells me that he has heard from Richard Jones (warden of the wildlife on Portsdown for Portsmouth City) that at least 100 Chalkhill Blues were flying on the hill on July 30, reminding me that last Saturday (July 27) Mark Litjens had seen more than 500 on the southern slope of Old Winchester Hill +++

Another piece of late news comes via the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website reporting what Sue Clark saw at the Bentley Station Meadow reserve when carrying out a butterfly transect on Monday (July 29) - nothing special among the butterflies but I was interested to read of the presence of two Brown Hawker dragonflies.

WED 31 JULY

New moths for the yearlist are *Acleris forsskaleana*, taken in Southampton by Alan Dawson on Monday night; Buff Footman taken by Philip Hack at Nursling on the night of July 25; Codling moth (*Cydia pomonella*) in Alan Dawson's trap on July 27; and Svensson's Copper Underwing taken by Alan on July 30. Alan also had *Euzophera pinquis* on July 27 after I had recorded the first for Barry Collins on July 26, and I thought Philip Hack had another first with Gold Fringe on July 28 until I discovered this was a second English name for the moth I already had listed as Gold Triangle (*Hypsopygia costalis*). +++

The perils of using scientific (Latin) names were yet further revealed today when I found that a moth which Barry Collins had reported as *Numonia advenella* was also reported by Alan Dawson at *Trachycera advenella*, and using the Bradley and Fletcher number which Alan gave me I saw that my 1979 list would have recorded the same moth as *Eurhodope advenella*. +++

The presence of two different individual European Corn Borer moths in one moth trap on the same evening is a pretty unlikely occurrence for a rare migrant species, and having found them in his Portswood trap Alan Dawson is the more convinced that the species is resident in the Southampton area. He says that they are not reliant on Sweet Corn as a food source for their larvae and in this country are thought to use Mugwort (*Artemisia*) as a main foodplant.

News from the national Migrant Moth website today includes a dubious report from the toilet block of the Minsmere RSPB reserve saying that a Queen of Spain Fritillary was there some time in early July - probably quite authentic but no corroborative evidence seems to be forthcoming and even the date is uncertain. (I never believe graffiti on toilet walls - someone is usually boasting).

Having reported on Monday the *Helophilus* hoverfly seen and photographed by Lawrence Holloway I now see that he has had both *Volucella zonaria* and *V. inanis* in his garden at Aldwick (Bognor) so I will be on the look-out for these beautiful insects in my garden when the sun returns. Having spent their larval stage as scavengers in bee or wasp nests they deserve their share of the sun when they emerge.

TUE 30 JULY

The only Glow worm which I have seen so far this year was putting on a fairly weak solo performance in Gwynne Johnson's garden overlooking the Meon at Soberton this evening, and with it was a much more impressive Oak Eggar moth which came to the lighted window and allowed itself to be captured for close inspection. John Goodspeed was also there and told me that he had seen a Wall Brown on Portsdown this morning and a Painted Lady at Broadmarsh yesterday.

MON 29 JULY

Checking Lawrence Holloway's website for his West Sussex news today I found a magnificent picture of a large yellow and black hoverfly which is not one of the *Volucella* species that I am familiar with but is of the genus *Helophilus* which, in addition to black bars on its bright yellow abdomen, has a thorax divided into yellow and black longitudinal bands where the *Volucella* species (the huge *V. zonaria* and the slightly smaller *V. inanis*) is all black. This *Helophilus* is one of two very similar species (*H. pendulus* or *H. hybridus*) which can only be separated by checking the amount of yellow on their back legs. At 1cm in body length it is slightly smaller than either of the yellow *Volucellas* (*V. zonaria* is 2cm long) and is likely to be found resting on waterside vegetation or hovering over the water (the larvae are aquatic). +++

Co-inciding with the appearance of this new hoverfly comes a report from Richard Carpenter of one *Volucella inanis* seen in his Hill Head garden near Titchfield Haven yesterday.

Alan Dawson tells me that the European Corn Borer moth, which is normally classed as a migrant only to Britain, is now thought to have established itself as a resident species around Southampton and Portsmouth, so my remark last Friday (July 26) that the specimen which he had just taken was 'the first to reach Hampshire this year' is likely to be untrue - my apologies to any Hampshire Corn Borers offended by this remark.

Tony Wilson spent last Friday (July 26) visiting dragonfly sites in the Romney

Marshes/Dungeness area of Kent where the most prized sight was of a tiny colony of Small Red-eyed Damselflies at a small roadside pool close to New Romney. This species (*Erythromma viridulum*) is not mentioned in either of the two recent 'all embracing' books on British dragonflies (by Dan Powell and Steve Brooks) but when this species was mentioned last summer Mark Litjens came to the rescue and I was then able to write {{ Mark Litjens has pointed me to two sources of info about the Small Red-eyed Damselfly which I mentioned on Sunday (26 Aug 2001). If you want to know more about it visit

<http://geocities.com/hertsdragonflies/red-eyed.html> or alternatively read Steve Cham's article on page 324 of British Wildlife mag (June 2000 issue). The gist of the story seems to be that this small version of the Red-eyed Damselfly is difficult to separate from the larger and commoner species (and may consequently be lurking unidentified in our midst at several sites though we are on the northern fringe of its distribution). In July 1999 it was identified at three sites in Essex and in 2000 it was found at a number of further sites. The rumour which reached Mark Litjens recently is that it has already been found in Hampshire but he knows not where. }}

+++

I have still not heard of any claims for colonies in Hampshire, but Tony Wilson gives a useful tip for picking out the new species - he says {{ The males have a habit of curving their abdomen upwards making it easy to pick them out amongst the few Red-eyed Damselflies also present particularly if you are not close enough to see the extent of blue. }} If you get a close enough look you will find that the Small species has blue all along the underside of the male body whereas the normal species just has the tail segments blue - less easy to spot differences are the colour of the eyes (the Small has brighter, less red, eyes) and the size (Small is smaller if the two species are seen side by side). +++

Still with dragonflies Mark Litjens again comes up trumps with a report of the first Migrant Hawker to reach Hampshire this summer - seen by him at the mouth of the Beaulieu River (Needs Ore Point) yesterday. Tony Wilson also had his first yesterday - three of them in his garden at Hove in West Sussex. A Ruddy Darter was also at Needs Ore when Mark was there, and he went on into the New Forest he saw one lateish White-legged Damselfly at the Ober Water +++

Going back to Tony Wilson's trip to Kent I see he also saw Grey Bush Cricket in the Dungeness area, along with 20 Peacock butterflies

The latest batch of moth reports has four new records for the year list plus one from Alan Dawson of another Small Rivulet taken at his Southampton Portswood trap on the same night (July 25) as the one taken by Philip Hack at Nursling, just outside Southampton, and already reported as a first. The only 'macro' in the current four is Toadflax Pug, taken by Barry Collins in his Havant trap last Friday night (July 26) along with The Magpie which had previously been recorded at Titchfield Haven on June 16 but no one else has reported it until now, with Tony Wilson seeing another three of them, plus an Oak Eggar, yesterday. Last night Barry took a micro called Numonia advenella which is a newcomer, and the other two that are new were both taken by Alan Dawson in Southampton Portswood - Udea lutealis on July 26 and a Garden Rose Tortrix on July 27.

Two more Clouded Yellow were seen by Barry Collins on Thorney Island yesterday (he has had a total of six there in three consecutive days), and he also had a couple of Marbled White on the island yesterday before heading for Hayling Island and finding 12 Grayling at Sandy Point

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 04 AUG

Autumn harvesting helps to reveal some of the wildlife that remains hidden (at least by day) when the crop is standing, and Hares are one of the specialities to watch for as the combine reduces the cover to a smaller and smaller island. I am reminded of this by the first report for a long time of a Hare sighting - this one comes from Trevor Carpenter who saw the Hare on Wheely Down to the west of the Meon Valley above Warnford (a little south of West Meon), though Trevor does not mention harvesting and I think his animal was probably on open grassland.

FRI 02 AUG

Two people have now told me that the outbreak of Seal distemper in this country is so far limited to the Lincolnshire coast of The Wash

WED 31 JULY

A regular user of Brook Meadow at Emsworth today told Brian Fellows that she had watched a group of six Water Voles (hopefully a female with a full litter of five young) jostling each other in the River Ems as they spotted her presence and headed for their bankside burrow entrance. No harm came to them and the news is good for the vole population there.

When I reported that BBC TV had recently carried pictures of dead Seals which had succumbed to the new Seal distemper that is reducing the Seal population all round Europe, I did not take in where these seals had been filmed (maybe it was purposely omitted from the news). If anyone does know more about which coasts are now infected, and the status of the disease, I would much like to know more about the problem - my email address is at the head and foot of this page.

MON 29 JULY

TV news today carried pictures of two dead Seals said to have succumbed to a virulent 'Seal distemper' disease that has been diminishing the north European population recently and which has now reached Britain. Let's hope the isolated small colony in Chichester Harbour is

among those which escape it.

More cheerful news comes from Dorset as I write this on Tuesday morning - Radio Solent had it's roving reporter Alan Jones out with someone from the Dorset Wildlife Trust visiting a colony of breeding female Bechstein's Bats in a Dorset wood where the females have chosen a large concrete 'bat box' (intended as a winter hibernation site with thick concrete walls) as their nursery. I think the count of 90 bats in this colony was the total of adult females (excluding any young which probably remained in their nursery when the adults were 'disturbed' into a collecting sack for their check-up), and I understood that the males were also in good fettle but living separately (during the summer) in three other colonies elsewhere in the area. Dorset probably has more Bechstein's Bats than the rest of Britain and Europe put together according to the best information available

Finally for those interested in Marsh Frogs Tony Wilson came across them in the Romney Marshes during his expedition in search of dragonflies last Friday (July 26). These marshes, where they were introduced from Hungary in 1935, are I think the only place in Britain that you can hear them croaking on May and June nights (to the annoyance of local residents) though they have spread a little in Kent and just into nearby East Sussex.

WEEK 30 JULY 22 - 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 JULY

The first Robin song of the autumn was heard today by Brian Fellows at Emsworth Alarm calls from the House Martins which still patrol above the trees along the Hayling Billy Trail at the end of my garden called me into the garden first thing this morning to see a Sparrowhawk soaring high above the area. I haven't seen a Sparrowhawk soaring in this way since early spring and, taking into account the numerous recent sightings and reports of young Sparrowhawks out of their nests, my guess is that this bird was rejoining in being free of domestic duties and also free to reveal its presence to everyone now that the nest site no longer has to be kept a secret.

Also in the air were some 30 Swifts - the approximate number that have been circling and screaming overhead for several evenings now - a similar group of around 20 congregate over Emsworth according to Brian Fellows.

SAT 27 JULY

Peter Morrison reports that a Black Kite flew north over Titchfield Haven in mid morning, and John Shillitoe saw two juvenile Yellow Wagtail there - presumably on their way south from nests elsewhere as I do not recall any mention of Yellow Wagtail here during the breeding season. I'm pretty sure there were none that even attempted breeding at Farlington Marshes this year and I am wondering if any bred in Hampshire at all. Other news from John was a sighting of a Little Tern in the Haven area - probably an indication that the nesting birds at the Hayling Oysterbeds and elsewhere in the country are breaking up and going off on their summer holidays. +++

Trevor Carpenter went to Farlington Marshes today and also reports a single Yellow Wagtail (presumably again an arrival from the north). He saw two Little Ringed Plover and one Spotted Redshank there and Bob Chapman told him that two Black and one Roseate Tern had been in the harbour earlier in the morning. +++

With flying ants in the air each day now various comments on the birds which eat them have come my way. We have all seen gulls and probably starlings hawking for them fairly awkwardly and one comment from Ken Hearne in Worthing is phrased as a question as to what is so tasty about the ants that the gulls will devote quite a lot of energy to catching what must be minute mouthfuls of food. I can't answer that but there must be something desirable as Mike Jones from Stockbridge says he has been watching a Spotted Flycatcher and a number of Rooks also after them. In addition to the awkward squad of birds that are ill adapted to the pursuit of such prey there are of course many Swifts, Swallows and Martins that will be taking a good number of the ants without our noticing anything unusual in their behaviour.

In the cool of the evening I cycled to Thorney Deeps west, and while pausing at the Little Deeps to check though the birds on the water (32 Coot were in the majority with several Mallard, few

Tufted Duck, no Swans and only one Little Grebe seen) I heard the pinging of Bearded Tit, getting just occasional glimpses of what I think was a family party of three or four (though none of them seen other than in flight). While waiting for these to show again I watched two small parties of Teal fly from the surrounding marshy fields on to the water of the Deeps where they immediately disappeared into the surrounding reeds. At the Great Deeps three hefty Herons were perched on the trees once used by roosting Egrets (none of the latter seen). Three Common Sandpiper were at the water's edge and a couple of dozen Canada Geese on the water where it bends out of site towards the guard post on the road. Nothing else on the water, but a dozen Linnets were coming to roost in gorse bushes and at least 200 Swallows flew over while a similar number of Starlings were resting on the overhead power lines near Eames Farm.

FRI 26 JULY

At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter tells us the Spoonbill and two juvenile Avocets are still present, and that a female Marsh Harrier has arrived to join the male that has been present for some time. +++

Over in Sussex today Mike Collins was working in East Lavant (on the northern outskirts of Chichester) when he noticed two Peregrines high above him - their calls and playful stoops at each other suggested that at least one of them was a juvenile and they were very likely to have come from the Chichester cathedral nest. +++

I paid a quick visit to the Wade Court Egret roost at their bedtime this evening, and although I only stayed for less than half an hour I counted 30 birds (and probably saw most of the arrivals). One thing that I noticed as the birds flew in high and then spiralled down with dangling legs - looking just like parachutists coming down to land on a marked target - was that many of the birds had several missing primary feathers indicating that they are well into moult. While waiting I twice heard a lot of loud squealing from a couple of Water Rails in the reeds around Langstone Pond - maybe a fox was prowling in there as a passer by commented on something moving the reeds, and a group of six Mallard flew around overhead for some time as if wary of landing. Earlier in the evening I made a quick cycle trip to Broadmarsh (where the Swan flock remains at 26 birds) and happened to meet Jason Crook who told me he intends to count the Horsea Island Egret roost soon - he says that Egrets from Farlington Marshes always fly west at dusk. +++

The first of a couple of other news items from Jason was that around 80 Canada Geese arrived back at Farlington Marshes in the past week, accounting for the 80 that were missing from Baffins Pond when Brian Fellows was there last Tuesday. The second was that new markers will soon appear on the mud at Broadmarsh prior to the start of a survey to investigate the benefit that shore birds may derive from feeding near the mouth of freshwater streams. The survey is being organised by Hampshire Wildlife Trust in conjunction with the Environment Agency to provide the EA with a better understanding of the damage to wildlife that may follow over abstraction of water from streams and rivers. Similar surveys will be taking place in Emsworth Harbour and the top of Fareham Creek (and no doubt elsewhere) so if you see new markers dividing the mud flats into 25 metre squares pity the poor people who are going to have to sit for hours counting how many times the shore birds peck at the mud in each of these squares. (Ideal opportunity for employment for out of work watchers of drying paint).

THU 25 JULY

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows heard Reed Warbler song to prove that the Peter Pond bird has not yet flown south, whereas a count of 19 Coot and 82 Mallard probably mean that some of these have just arrived from inland. In view of the 75 Swans missing from the mouth of the Hermitage stream this summer it is interesting to note that the Emsworth summer flock is 30 birds short of last year's peak (135 Swans on 20 July 2001, 105 today)

With the start of the summer holidays giving time to relax Andrew Howard at Petworth has been checking the birds around his Petworth home where the recent star attraction was a Hobby (which luckily did not take out any of the summer residents, ranging from Garden Warblers and Blackcap down to juvenile Chaffinches, nor any of the House Martins which Andrew believes have enjoyed a good breeding season so far). I am interested in Andrew's speculation as to whether the Hobby has a local territory (and is probably around his garden on most days

though escaping attention during its perhaps two second long transit of the area that he might see if he were watching at that moment!) or if it is a wanderer from afar. My interest stems back to once reading a statistic saying that there are 2.4 pairs of Hobby in every 10 Kilometre square south of Birmingham (or some such value!) and wondering at the time why I did not see them more often. Nowadays I suspect that the population of Hobbies is even greater, but very few people see them regularly, and this ties in with my general theory of our human ignorance of the wildlife around us. That ignorance is I think inevitable and the Hobby is a good case in point - I have already said that the 'window of opportunity' for seeing one when it is hunting is very small, and to that we must add that, in common with all raptors, they spend the great majority of their time just sitting and digesting their last dinner, only hunting when hungry. I once believed that there was another factor - the temperature - as I once read that Hobbies do not hunt unless the temperature is above 70 degrees F, but that is clearly a nonsense put about by dragonfly enthusiasts who only see Hobbies when hunting dragonflies - if the birds tried to survive on a diet of dragonflies only they would not last one summer in Britain! My conclusion is - enjoy your Hobby when you see it, and make up your own statistics based on your own observation (i.e. don't believe what others tell you!).

WED 24 JULY

On Monday (July 22) I expressed surprise when I heard that only two Avocet could be seen at Titchfield Haven and today both John Shillitoe and Richard Carpenter have been at the Haven and confirm that there are still only two present but give the good news that it is the two young birds which have survived. The fact that the adults have disappeared does not necessarily mean that they have been taken by the Marsh Harrier - they may well have decided that the youngsters can look after themselves and have gone off for a bit of peace and quiet (and perhaps a summer moult somewhere less exposed to the public gaze). +++

Putting together the bird lists reported from the Haven today by John and Richard we get a picture of the reserve becoming fuller and busier each day now. John lists the Spoonbill and Marsh Harrier with a visiting Peregrine, plus 14 Dunlin, 5 Common and 4 Green Sandpiper, 1 Ringed Plover and 2 juvenile Little Ringed Plover plus the Mandarin and 4 Scoter on the sea. Richard adds 127 Oystercatcher, 34 Black-tailed Godwit, 22 Turnstone, and 8 Redshank, with singles of Snipe and Greenshank.

Also on the SOS website is an account from Ben Rackstraw of how, while watching a recently out of the nest family of Spotted Flycatchers in a garden at Walberton (a little south west of Arundel) an odd bird was seen among them and this turned out to be an adult male Pied Flycatcher in a drab condition during its moult. Other birds on the move south now that their breeding is over for this year are more Willow Warblers. I don't think I mentioned that when Tony Wilson was out in the Hove area last Sunday (July 21) he came on his first Willow Warblers of the autumn, but today this movement south was detected more obviously by Glyn Horacek-Davis when two Willow Warblers (one a juvenile - presumably showing that fresh bright yellow tinge to its breast) appeared in his small suburban garden which is definitely not their breeding habitat! Unfortunately Glyn does not say where he lives but I have a feeling it may be in the Ringwood area as a number of his reports come from the Avon valley (remember that Bittern that almost flew into his car windscreen at the Blashford Lakes earlier this year?)

Walking in Havant Thicket today I repeatedly heard the plaintive calls of a young Sparrowhawk in trees opposite the west end of Castle Road (Rowlands Castle) but never saw the bird. Also heard was Coal Tit song and the calls of Long Tailed Tits, Bullfinch and the di-syllabic call notes of Willow Warbler plus harsh scolding from Blackcap.

TUE 23 JULY

I still have not given up hope of refinding the famous Emsworth Black Swan which has not been reported anywhere since March 4 this year, and so a report of a Black Swan on the River Adur at Shoreham today caught my eye on the SOS website (I know the chances are that this is a different bird, but if it is the Emsworth bird and if it reads this note my message to it is - please come home soon). +++

In Pagham Harbour two Curlew Sandpiper were at Sidlesham Ferry making me check the likely arrival date of the first Little Stint there - last year one arrived on July 25 but I think the expected autumn 'flock' of them did not materialise there (though there was an unexpected count of 45

juveniles made by Barry Collins at Pilsey in Chichester Harbour on Oct 6). +++

Today's issue of the Portsmouth NEWS carries the usual annual report of the smell and danger of disease caused by the droppings of 200 Canada Geese at Baffins Pond, and as usual with such articles in the press the reporter's ignorance gives some amusement to readers who know a little more than does the writer - in this case they are a year out of date in including 'scores of Barnacle Geese' in their account of the contributors to the mess. The reporter is perhaps less to blame for being out of date in another respect - he writes of 200 Canada Geese at the pond on the day that Brian Fellows regular Tuesday count of 120 birds showed that close on 80 have already re-fledged and flown from the 'scene of the grime'. My question is where have they gone? Perhaps to Farlington Marshes, or to the IBM Lake? Brian's counts also show that all 11 Barnacle Geese are still at Baffins and the single parent Swan family at Eastney still has three cygnets.

A phone call from someone in Havant today told me that at least one of the young from a Sparrowhawk nest (in a big Horse Chestnut tree within a stone's throw of Havant railway station) was making its first tentative flights.

MON 22 JULY

The latest official news from Titchfield Haven has been put on their website today, bring us up to July 18 when the young Marsh Harrier and single Spoonbill were the main attractions - the item that interested me was that the local Barn Owl could still be seen hunting, presumably by day. Unofficial news from Glyn Horacek-Davis who was there this morning is of the Spoonbill still in the river and one Roseate Tern on the wing but I was interested that he only saw two Avocets (though admittedly he was looking from outside the reserve).

Other recent news is of more gulls returning south - today Brian Fellows had a Great Blackback on Peter Pond at Emsworth and yesterday Richard Carpenter saw 6 Common Gulls inland in the Bramdean Common area (plus two separate pairs of Marsh Tits in woodlands between West Meon and Bramdean) +++

On Saturday (July 20) Kevin Stouse took a walk down the west Hayling shore on the coastal path hearing one Skylark still singing over the West Lane fields. At the Oysterbeds there were 5 Common Sandpiper in a group and 5 Whimbrel, plus plenty of Little Terns but what interested me was that a pair of Common Terns seemed to be feeding something on the nest island, so presumably they have nested on it this year.

PLANTS:

SAT 27 JULY

The Havant Wildlife Group met on Portsdown near the A3 this morning and enjoyed a walk about which produced a good flower list, though at this time of year there are few newcomers. They did however come on the first Blue Fleabane that I have heard of this summer as well as enjoying Vervain, Burnet Saxifrage, Dwarf Thistle and many other plants which included a particularly good display of Hoary Plantain where the plants dominated a large area and, I imagine, looked a bit like a swathe of Yorkshire Fog grass.

Gwynne Johnson, who gave me the above details, had also recently been 'somewhere in the New Forest' with the Wildlife Trust Flora Group - although the outing was billed as a Fern hunt they managed to see a lot of other good plants when near the ponds in which they found Pillwort with Royal Fern nearby. The ones mentioned by Gwynne were Coral Necklace, Yellow Centaury, Marsh Lousewort, Allseed, Shoreweed and something which is not recorded in the Hampshire Flora - Least Adder's Tongue. Cycling to the Thorney Deeps this evening I was interested to see that, where the soil has been disturbed along the edge of the Slipper Mill Pond on the roadside, a variety of plants that I assume come from a scattering of wildflower seed are now in flower. The majority of these are Opium Poppies but there is one clump of Cornflower plants with mixed colour flowers (white and pink as well as blue) and also one flowering plant of Corn Marigold which caused me to stop and double check what I had seen as I cycled by. +++ I could not spot any Slender Hare's Ear as yet along the north west Thorney seawall but the show of Spiny Restharrow near the Great Deeps is still good

THU 25 JULY

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth Brian Fellows has recently found Whorl Grass (Catabrosa

aquatica) growing, and I see from the Hants Flora that this had not been recorded from the Emsworth area at the time when the flora distribution maps were compiled (they show just one tetrad in SU 70 for it - presumably indicating that it is found by the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton). If anyone wants to see it in Emsworth Brian's directions are as follows ... {{ There is a good showing of the recently found Whorl-grass along the wide path going north from the Lumley Gate which we cut last year. To find the grasses walk north along this path and look for the Square-stalked St John's-wort on the right just over half way up. They are along the right edge of the path for about 10 yards. }}

This afternoon I went to Portchester to see the Fodder Vetch recently found in the Wicor Shore area by Val Henry, and was shown the plants by Val. If anyone else wants to find them they should park at the extreme southern end of Wicor Mill Lane and then walk around the seaward end of the houses west of this road. At the far side of the houses is a broad close mown area of grass and you walk up the far side of that, going north away from the sea, until there is an open area to your left and a hint of a path way going west into the lowlying area of unmown grass. If you have hit on the right path (at a guess it is less than 100 metres north of the shoreline) you will see the lovely blue and white flowers straight ahead of you not more than 4 metres in from the mown grass, with two or three smaller clusters of the Vetch to the north of the main clump. (And if you want to see the best collection of the beautiful Golden Orb spiders - *Argiope bruennichi* - that I have come across go on into the grassy area beyond the Vetch - the spiders were everywhere I looked and in a months time there should be some excellent full sized specimens there).

WED 24 JULY

I don't think I am alone in finding the identification of Willowherbs difficult, and in the past I recall a period when everything I looked at seemed (using Francis Rose's Wildflower Key) to come out as Marsh Willowherb. Luckily I did not believe this result and to date I have never knowingly seen Marsh Willowherb but I see in the Hants Flora that one of the places that it can be found is Titchfield Haven, and Richard Carpenter found it flowering there today, along with Sea Plantain.

I hoped to see both Golden Rod and Broad Leaved Helleborine in flower at Havant Thicket today but while I found both in bud neither was yet in flower. Devils Bit Scabious, which always flowers very late, did have a few tight flower buds but the only firsts for my year-list were Dwarf Gorse and Purple Moor Grass. For people who are not familiar with Dwarf Gorse this is a good time to look for it as the Common Gorse has ceased to flower, so any small gorse plants seen flowering on heathland now are probably Dwarf Gorse. For a quick check measure the length of the top petal (the 'standard') - if under 1cm long you have Dwarf Gorse, if over it is probably Common. For local interest I see that the first British record of this species came from Southsea Castle way back in 1641. +++

Other flowers noted in Havant Thicket were Lesser Skullcap which must have been out for some time without my seeing it, Heath Milkwort (pure white flowers), and lots of Jointed Rush. Also abundant if not in flower was a great mass of Toad Rush everywhere.

In the lower Ems valley, where Brian Fellows was checking the route for the walk that he will be leading this evening, he found something which I thought had vanished from the scene when I looked a little while back. This is the Branched Bur Reed in the mill stream section of the River Ems beside the path going south from Westbourne Church to Mill Lane (which accompanies the mill stream south to Lumley Mill at Emsworth). Skullcap was still flowering on the brick wall of this stream at the Westbourne end and again down at Lumley (by the cottages below the mill). In a separate foray in Brook Meadow Brian has now added a twelfth Sedge species to the Brook Meadow list with a find of Remote Sedge.

MON 22 JULY

A note from John Goodspeed today assures me that there has been some Knapweed Broomrape seen this year, but my failure to see any so far and a general lack of reports make it seem that it has not liked the weather this summer. John also reports Vervain on Portsdown. Plants which have just started to flower more or less on cue are Corn Mint (seen yesterday in the Bramdean Common area by Richard Carpenter) and Common (maybe Bifid?) Hemp Nettle recorded in Christoph Harwood's account of his weekend walk around the East Meon area.

INSECTS:

SUN 28 JULY

The promise of a Clouded Yellow invasion is still on the cards as more sightings come in from Thorney Island and Cams Bay at Fareham. The first of these was seen by Barry Collins on Thorney on Friday (July 26) and three more were there yesterday while another single turned up today at Cams Bay on Fareham Creek, seen by Trevor Carpenter. +++

With the first of these Clouded Yellows Barry Collins found the first 8 Wall Browns of the summer brood had appeared on Thorney Island. +++

On Friday evening (July 26) Barry Collins had his moth trap running in Havant and notched up another three firsts for the year - Dusky Sallow, Toadflax Pug and a pyralid called *Euzophera pinquis*

Today's news from Emsworth is of fresh Peacock butterflies (2) and a single male Brimstone all seen by Brian Fellows in Brook Meadow.

FRI 26 JULY

After hearing of the first Clouded Yellow for some time arriving at Portland Bill on July 22 (see my note for July 23) I am pleased to hear of one being seen at Keyhaven today by Simon Boswell - two butterflies may not mean a large scale invasion, but they do give hope ... Similarly, after a couple of barren years, I am grateful for all news of Small Tortoiseshells and their caterpillars and today Andrew Brookes came on a colony of small caterpillars near the banks of the river Hamble at Swanwick - which I take to mean that the fresh summer generation of Small Tortoiseshell have been about their business of mating and egg laying to continue the resurgence of this species.

If anyone is pleased, as I am, to hear that the delightful Golden Orb spiders (*Argiope bruennichi*) are flourishing, they should read the notes on my Plant News page for today describing how I found a magnificent colony of them close to the shore of Portsmouth Harbour in the Wicor area of Portchester. In about a month's time, when the spiders are nearing full size, they should afford some excellent photos to those who want them.

WED 24 JULY

Barry Collins trap was in action on Monday night (July 22) and produced three newcomers - The Phoenix (big, not Philip's Small species!), Small Fan-footed Wave and something called *Phlyctaenia coronata* which I have so far failed to find in my books.

When in Brook Meadow today Brian Fellows noticed a strange fly (black, long-tailed and long-legged) resting on a leaf and he believes it to be one of the group called Stilt Legged Flies (*Micropezidae*) whose adults Chinery tells us prey on other insects and whose larvae live in humus - there are nine British species, none of them common, and Chinery illustrates *Calobata petronella* in his Collins Guide to Insects but chooses to show *Trepidaria petronella* in his earlier Field Guide to Insects (another case of the experts changing the generic name to confuse the amateur - I'll stick to the simple Stilt Legged Fly without trying to specify it precisely) +++

When I first read of Brian's black, long legged fly seen in a damp place I was reminded of a similar fly which I last saw on 17 June 1999 on wet puddles in the sunlit rides of Havant Thicket - they were then present in thousands, mainly walking on water but also flying up to rest on tree leaves. With the help of Chris Palmer at the Havant Museum there were identified as belonging to the group called Long-legged Flies (*Dolichopodidae*) but there are 250 species of these so the choice of the name *Poecilobothrus nobilitatus* was based mainly on the nice sound of the name. These also feed on smaller insects which Chinery says are {{ enveloped in the fleshy labellae and crushed to release their juices }} - it seems that some of the species have tiny teeth to help the process along, but for the prey there must be little to choose between being sucked by a Sundew or by one of these flies.

Heather Mills (by the Brockhampton stream here in Havant) and Richard Carpenter (at Titchfield Haven) both report fresh Peacock butterflies today - Richard saw three and also had his first fresh brood Common Blue. This reminds me that last week (July 14) both Richard and Philip Hack told me of seeing Brimstone butterflies and in my notes I said I would assume they were fresh specimens (which others had just started to report), but Philip has since told me that his

specimens were definitely tatty and survivors from last year.

TUE 23 JULY

Andrew Brookes and Theo Roberts today took a trip to the Isle of Wight to look for butterflies in two woods which may well be butterfly hotspots but which I had never heard of and had to search the map of the whole island to locate. One is on the north west coast where the land is slipping into the Solent to the east of Yarmouth - this is the National Trust woodland at Bouldnor - and the other is Monkham Copse, some five miles south of Bouldnor on the east slope of the hill on which the Rowridge TV transmitter stands, overlooking the Tennyson Trail leading southwest from Newport towards Tennyson Down and on to the Needles. Andrew says of their trip {{ We saw a few White Admirals at both sites, together with some fresh looking Ringlets but little else of note amongst the myriads of browns and Marbled Whites. The scarcity of skippers was very noticeable. }} So it seems the Isle of Wight is not always a better place to see wildlife than mainland Hampshire! One thing that Andrew's message reminds me of is that people who are not familiar with butterflies often express surprise when told that Marbled Whites are in fact one of the 'Browns'. +++

MON 22 JULY

Reports of Banded Demoiselle seen in unusual places continue to come in - today we have one from the HWT Nature Reserve at Swanwick which is not miles from the nearest suitable stream (it is right alongside the River Hamble which I guess will have these insects in its upper stretches) but which nevertheless has not recorded this species since 1999. There is also another report of a Brown Hawker (common enough in much of Britain but not in our area) from Richard Carpenter who saw it over the pond at Brownwich today.

A new update to the national Migrant Moth website brings news of two unusual butterflies - a Large Tortoiseshell which flew into a house in Essex, and a Long-tailed Blue seen at Cley on the Norfolk coast (the website always carries a disclaimer saying that it cannot verify the authenticity of every item it publishes!) - and a couple of new moths. The first of these moths is a straightforward first sighting for the year (from the Scillies) of a Four-spotted Footman but the second is a report of a 'new to Britain' moth called *Cameraria ohridella* which was identified about a week ago in London by the damage its larvae had done to the leaves of a Horse Chestnut tree. This is presumably a tiny moth as its larvae are leaf miners, not wholesale gobblers of the foliage, but the website says {{ This species has spread rapidly on the Continent causing extensive damage to horse chestnut trees }} so British Blacksmiths should take heed and arm themselves against this pest. (Perhaps as a more effective alternative we could get the children, who will later in the season be hurling anything and everything at these trees, to bring forward their activity and see if they can knock the moths out of the sky).

Common Wasps have been few and far between for the past year or so but there was a fairly good showing of queens earlier in the year and Brian Fellows tells me that, while his Brook Meadow Conservation Group were having a busy day yesterday one of them (his wife Jean) took a trimmer too near a wasp nest and suffered four stings. A few days ago Lawrence Holloway published a photo on his website of the bigger wasp (*Dolichovespula media*) which started to invade this country from the continent several years ago, and I did think of sending him a warning about these particularly vicious wasps. Unlike the common wasps which nest in holes these newcomers build their nests in bushes several feet off the ground and there have been a number of cases of quite severe damage from their stings occurring when someone innocent of their presence decides to clear out a bramble patch containing one of their nests - as the gardener goes on the offensive with his bill hook the wasps rightly take offence at this threat to their home and put in a serious counter attack....

The Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website today carries the first news of a *Valezina* form Silver Washed Fritillary found in the Hawkhill Inclosure of the New Forest (northern fringe of Beaulieu Heath) by Jim Nichols last Saturday (July 20) - Jim says it is only the second time he has seen one in 30 years of searching the New Forest. The features of the *Valezina* form, which only affects females, is the addition of a pink tinge to the underside of the forewings and a dark green to the upper side. (As an aside it is even longer since I saw the real thing when, in the late 1940s, we lived close to Viscount Bolingbroke - who had an impressive 1000cc Velocette motorbike for his frequent butterfly hunting trips. I did once at his house meet -

before he married her - with Valezina Frohawk, daughter of the eminent butterfly man who named his daughter after this butterfly, but even he failed to secure the real prize as Valezina's hair was definitely as bright a red/copper as any normal male Silver Washed) +++

On Beaulieu Heath Jim found at least four Graylings and masses of Common Blues with just one Dark Green Fritillary seen, and in the woodland there were many Silver Washed (eleven seen on just one bramble bush) but not a single White Admiral.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 28 JULY

From the Eastleigh Lakeside country park Simon Ingram reports that Noctule Bats could be seen high in the sky over the Cricketers pub on most evenings during the past week.

WED 24 JULY

Two unusual stories reached me today - one exciting, the other sad - and I will start with the better news. This comes from Heather Mills who was taking a regular lunchtime walk down the Brockhampton stream to the shore of Langstone Harbour at Budds Wall (the seawall south of Budds Farm). From this wall she saw a small animal swimming in the sea and at first thought it was a rat leaving the sinking ship of Britain, but she then realised it was a much slimmer creature - a Weasel. When she first saw it it was heading out into the harbour, but when it was about twenty yards from the shore it changed its mind and swam back to hide in the wire baskets of rocks which absorb the impact of the waves here. The animal was presumably seeking pastures new without a map to guide it, and I guess Heather's sighting, although it sounds unusual, was typical of thousands of similar adventures undertaken by animals of all sizes every year as they seek new territories (crossing streams, busy roads, and electrified railways which happen to lie across the animal's chosen route). I can't help being reminded of those Shelduck which each year fly perhaps five miles inland to nest and then have to guide their ducklings (on foot) back across the same country to reach the sea - I can't imagine any of them ever make it. +++

The sad news comes from Richard Carpenter in the Titchfield Haven area where he saw a Roe doe, and then realised her reason for being there was that her kid had tried to follow her through a paling fence (which no doubt the mother jumped with ease) and had got stuck - it must have been there for some time as the kid was dead when Richard saw it, and presumably the mother would stay on even longer, not understanding what he happened to her offspring. I recall an equally sad sight seen when I visited the Heronry in Tournurbury Woods on Hayling Island many years ago - there an almost fledged young Heron had fallen from its high nest in such a way that, before it reached the ground, its neck had become wrapped round a branch, leaving the young bird's corpse hanging in mid-air - at least it probably had a quick death compared to the Roe kids probable prolonged death from starvation.

To end today on a less tearful note Brian Fellows tells me that the bracket fungus which he found on an oak tree in the Ems valley on July 1 is still present and has grown larger. This is an example of the uncommon *Inonotus dryadeus* (not without its own tears, though they are natural oozings of a reddish juice) and can be seen if you walk the field path along the west bank of the river Ems from Emsworth to Westbourne, in the first field you come to after the A27 underpass when heading north.

MON 22 JULY

Common Lizards can vary in size and colour and from time to time people think they have found Sand Lizards at new sites, giving the experts a problem in identification - I gather the only real way to be sure is to capture a female and wait until she either lays eggs early in the summer (proving she is a Sand Lizard) or holds on to them and gives birth to live offspring at this time of year. In some places there is no need for any doubt about identification and I guess that is true of much of the sandy heaths of the New Forest where a good population of large Lizards, including brightly green-flanked males, tells you they are genuine Sand Lizards. Jim Nicholds found one such last Saturday when in a part of the New Forest that I am not familiar with - Yew Tree Heath, on the north side of the road running from Beaulieu Road Station to Hythe, and south of the upper reaches of the Beaulieu River coming south from the Matley area.

Yesterday Tony Wilson was out in the Benfield Hill area of Hove and checked out the banks on

which he recently counted 89 Common Lizards. On this occasion he could only find one Lizard and two Slow Worms, convincing him that the large number seen basking on his previous visit was a function of their need to recharge their batteries by sun-bathing after a prolonged period of dull weather and rain. Probably there were still as many of the reptiles in the area but on this occasion they were mainly in hiding with no need to expose themselves to the danger of hovering Kestrels, etc, and possibly not wanting to feel uncomfortable through an excess of sun.

WEEK 29 JULY 15 - 21

BIRDS:

SUN 21 JULY

Today's excitement for local birders was the arrival of a Stilt Sandpiper at Pennington but as the only news I have of it is a four word message from Geoff Barter announcing it's presence there I cannot give more detail! +++

At the other end of the scale of birding excitement I was plant hunting on Idsworth Down this morning and was pleased to see at least one Turtle Dove still here in a traditional site, and to hear at least on Skylark singing. +++

Trevor Carpenter was at Farlington Marshes at high tide this morning and counted a total of 38 Egrets as these birds return in force to our shores and build to their autumn peak numbers in the local harbours before dispersing inland in the winter. One Curlew Sandpiper and 20 Greenshank were also a good news but I was particularly interested to hear that the four summering Brent in Langstone Harbour became six last weekend, co-inciding with the disappearance of two of the four birds that had been near the mouth of the Hamble River for a short period. I had earlier associated those birds at Hook with Brent that were originally in Portsmouth Harbour when the migrants left us this spring, then at Titchfield Haven, and now seem to have flown to Langstone Harbour. Before this year I had thought that summering Brent were both static and shy, going into hiding in traditional places (the Langstone Harbour Islands or the Thorney and Fishbourne Channels of Chichester Harbour) in May and staying out of sight until early September when they seem to come out to look for their arriving migrant friends and relations. I assume that they have a more or less flightless period during their summer moult, and perhaps that is about to overtake them, making the birds at Hook wish to return to a safer place, with good food, to pass their moult. If so, will the two birds still at Hook (seen by Bob Marchant today) stay there or also head for the safety of the Langstone Harbour RSPB reserve?

Paul Winter was at the Lower Test Marshes this morning where the Green Sandpiper count was up to 14, maintaining the tradition that this is the most popular holiday (=non breeding) resort for these birds in Hampshire. In the same message Paul Winter tells us of a count of over 50 Yellow-legged Gulls seen today (and a full count of 73 during an official low-tide count last Friday) but I think these gulls are not seen on the HWT reserve itself but at a gull roost on Eling Great Marsh which is south of the Redbridge causeway taking the A35 and 36 out of Southampton. As I expected good flocks have now appeared both here at the top of Southampton Water and in Pagham Harbour.

SAT 20 JULY

I paid a quick evening visit to the Wade Court Egret roost at Langstone this evening and found that the tide was high when I arrived at the shore (implying that the Egrets would have come into the roost an hour or so earlier and that I was unlikely to see many of them). Sure enough I could only count half a dozen in the trees, but I waited for a while and was surprised when a group of nine flew out of nearby trees where I had not spotted them and headed into the roost (they always seem reluctant to go into their final sleeping quarters until the last moment when it is almost dark). Another group of ten then made the same trip as did a few others in ones and twos so I reckon that there were at least 30 birds spending the night here, a noticeable increase on the first half of July. +++

I also noticed an increase in the number of Swifts circling over my home this evening - it is almost impossible to count them even when they come together in a tight group as they take a delight

in flying in erratic, ever varying circles which have changed their pattern before it is possible to complete a count. As I got up to 28 on a couple of attempts I think the total was between 30 and 35 birds +++

I see that Lawrence Holloway at Bognor has also noticed large numbers of Swifts over his home - he seems to think they are already on long-distance journeys heading southwest but I suspect they are still filling in time in our skies, flying high for most of the day on a course determined by the wind and food supply. I was interested to read that Lawrence first noticed the birds on this occasion when he turned his binoculars skyward to watch a passing Peregrine and found them full of Swifts that were invisible to the naked eye (I remember Trevor Carpenter reporting a similar discovery last summer or the one before).

Peter Raby was at Titchfield Haven today and noted Snipe in a long list of sightings - Snipe were also on Simon Boswell's list at Keyhaven on the previous day so it seems they are now returning to the shore. Peter's list for today also included 40+ Black-tailed Godwit, a Wood Sandpiper, one scruffy/moulting Roseate Tern and five Avocets. +++

At Keyhaven yesterday (July 19) Simon had the first juvenile Common Terns which he has seen (or I have heard of) and a juvenile Wheatear plus 30 Black-tailed Godwit, 4 Greenshank, a Wigeon and 6+ Shoveler. The most interesting item for me was a Yellow Wagtail (either two or one seen twice).

While working at Goodwood House yesterday Mike Collins glanced up and saw what he at first thought was a Heron, but then realised that it had a white body and black wings. Already distant and drifting away when he first saw it, it had vanished by the time he had made a dash for his binoculars. Mike suggests a Black Stork but it sounds to me as it could equally have been a White Stork .. maybe someone else will spot it soon. Could it be last year's Donnington bird returning to this area?

THU 18 JULY

Passengers on the Lymington to Yarmouth ferry today may have had a birding bonus when they reached the Island as an escaped White Pelican was perched in the Yarmouth Harbour area (Derek Hale has an excellent photo of it on his website - you can even read the letters 'ACF' on a big ring on its left leg). Perhaps a more interesting sighting in Yarmouth harbour for serious birders was a male Pintail. From the other end of the Island comes a report of a Curlew Sandpiper in the Bembridge area and the first news of the post breeding build up of Med Gulls offshore there - some 40 were seen today. More returning shorebirds, seen in Newtown Harbour, were 35 Dunlin. +++

Here in Hampshire today's news includes a sighting of 2 Ravens at Highclere Castle in the north of the county.

Brian Fellows found the tide and weather were ideal for watching birds in Emsworth Harbour this morning, looking from the seawall of the Emsworth marina so that the sunlight was coming from behind his left shoulder. 75 Black-tailed Godwit and 49 Redshank helped to fill the mudflats, and to spice up the scene there were two Greenshank. Gulls were even more plentiful than the waders and among the crowd of Black-headed were at least 8 juveniles while variety came in the form of 5 Common, 1 Lesser Blackback and 2 Med Gulls.

Recent reports reaching me from reliable reporters indicated that the Avocet chicks at Titchfield Haven were near to being able to fly on July 12 and actually took off on July 17, but the official Titchfield Haven website (which has just been updated to bring it up to July 13) says that the two chicks 'fledged' on July 9, and that on July 10 a Bittern was seen in flight and a Little Gull was present. Back on July 5 a Mandarin duck and 90 Black-tailed Godwit were reported. (The website never names the people who made these observations - were they staff or excitable visitors? - nor does it provide captions naming the species shown in its photos such as the Peach Blossom moth just added - in my opinion it is more constructive to educate the ignorant rather than to allow a limited circle of the 'already educated' to share their secret knowledge) +++

'Live' reports from the Haven for today come from Trevor Carpenter and Will Walmsley. Will managed to see a Spoonbill there - presumably one of the two which arrived last Friday - and a juvenile Cuckoo as well as six Green Sandpiper, a Ruff and three Sand Martins plus a few Common and Lesser Blackback Gulls. Offshore there were still 11 Common Scoter but I think

that a feeding flock of around 80 Common Terns was a much bigger number than has been seen there recently. Trevor Carpenter also visited Hook/Warsash and noted two Brent there (there have been four) - interestingly for me a question which Trevor put out on Hoslist (was it unusual to see Brent in July in the Solent as well as in Langstone Harbour?) was answered by Paul Winter who quoted the 1997 Hampshire Bird Report in which there were July records of Brent from Needs Ore, Pennington Marsh, Portsmouth Harbour and Langstone. This answers my own recent question about the presence of summer Brent in the north Solent.

The sharp differences in plumage between male and female ducks is now rapidly disappearing but I still find it slightly frustrating to see on the SOS website reports of Garganey which do not indicate their sex, and it seems that my grumbles have caused John Chapman to tell me that the Garganey which he saw at Sidlesham Ferry on July 16 was in fact a male, and John also tells me that a second Garganey which he did not see was said to be somewhere in the Pagham area. Today it seems that both birds were at the North Walls, but even if they were a pair that has been hanging about in that harbour for some time two seems to imply little breeding success! +++

Also at Pagham Harbour today, according to the SOS website, was a Wood Sandpiper, a Little Ringed Plover and two each of Spotted Redshank and Common Sandpiper. Out in the harbour were 3 Greenshank, 6 Whimbrel and some 50 Yellow Legged Gulls (the first report for this autumn of the flock which comes to roost there).

WED 17 JULY

Today's big news comes from Richard Carpenter and is that the Titchfield Haven Avocet chicks have started to fly, but John Shillitoe tells us that a young male Marsh Harrier arrived at the Haven this evening leaving the question open of whether the Avocets will survive his presence. Perhaps to provide a distraction for the Harrier it seems that the parent Avocets have just allowed a second pair of Avocets back on to the reserve.... Other birds at the Haven today include one Ruff and one Spoonbill plus 5 Green and 2 Common Sandpipers, 1 Turnstone and singles of Ringed and Little Ringed Plover. Richard also notes 23 Black-tailed Godwit, 43 Lapwing and 90+ Oystercatcher. Up to 12 Common Scoter seem to have taken up residence offshore as has at least one Roseate Tern.

Woodpigeons and Wrens seem to be the only regular songsters at this time of year (leaving aside the Swifts whose screams, when slowed down to a speed at which our sluggish brains can appreciate them, are said to be long, varied and eloquent seranades) but this morning, and at some time each recent day, the local Song Thrushes have been singing as if they were just setting up territories - I think this is unusual for mid-July. Quite a few other birds are singing from time to time, perhaps the most regular being Greenfinch, Linnet and Chiff Chaff with Whitethroat and Yellowhammer also still active in appropriate habitat. Dunnock still sing occasionally but Robins are totally silent. Today at Old Idsworth Farm I was pleased to hear Turtle Dove (though I was not quite so excited by Collared Dove!) and Coal Tit, but surprised to hear one active Chaffinch, a species that I thought had long given up for the year. Several Blackbirds were also singing quietly from time to time, but I did not hear a single Skylark (and certainly not a Corn Bunting) +++

A note from Tony Gutteridge tells me that he has seen/heard a Turtle Dove close to Stansted House today, and seen a Spotted Flycatcher in West Dean Woods, perhaps both are indications of summer birds moving south into our area.

TUE 16 JULY

A note from John Chapman, who teaches at the university in Portsmouth, tells me how he risked his life today to check that the squashed bird corpse in the middle of Queen Street was a juvenile Sparrowhawk, and this made me think of earlier messages from Martin Gillingham who works close to Queen Street in an office overlooking Victoria Park. On March 11 this year Martin told us he had {{ Just been watching a sparrowhawk (the usual one in Victoria Park, Portsmouth) out of the office window, it was perched in its usual tree when it was noticed by a group of seven magpies, who gradually came closer and closer over the next few minutes, until they were surrounding the sparrowhawk who seemed unmoved by all the disturbance. They were generally making a lot of noise calling and jumping around and still the sparrowhawk was unmoved. Then one of the magpies sat above the sparrowhawk and started pulling twigs from

the tree and dropping them onto the hawk - after three or four twigs it had enough and flew off. I was wondering if anyone else had seen this sort of behaviour (the stick throwing) before as it was new to me }}. The Sparrowhawks quite properly ignored these attempts at intimidation and on April 17 Martin told us that he had been having {{ Great views of a pair of sparrowhawks mating and building a nest right outside my office window. Should be an interesting few months ahead, I'll be spending even more time looking out of the window }} I assume today's road kill was one of their offspring, forcing me, in choosing the headline for this story, to alter the traditional 'hatch, match and despatch' sequence used for newspaper announcements of births, marriages and deaths to 'match, hatch and despatch' - such is the short and brutish life of birds. +++

Brian Fellows was also on Portsea Island today and found that two more Barnacle Geese had arrived on Baffins Pond bringing the total there back to 11 (as it had been for much of last year up to Oct 17 when the birds started to get restive and make their autumn migration to Titchfield Haven for the winter). Prior to April of 1999 there had been 42 Barnacles at Baffins and in that year I think at least two pairs hatched young there, but in July 99 an outbreak of botulism killed off at least 17 and others fled, so since the summer of 99 there have never been more than 20 Barnacles at Baffins. It still remains a mystery as to where the birds from Baffins disappear to - I have no idea where the two birds that seem to have gone from Baffins last October have been until their return this week. +++

A similar illustration of our lack of knowledge of the bird life around us comes today from the Isle of Wight where the single Cape Shelduck at St Helen's Bridge, Bembridge, has suddenly become two birds ... Another mystery bird with unknown origins is a 'possible' Pallid Harrier seen today near the Beachy Head hotel in East Sussex.

A cycle ride to the Hayling Oysterbeds in the cool of the evening had a pleasing start with the calls of Greenshank, Common Sandpiper and Ringed Plover as soon as I arrived at the Oysterbeds and before hearing the incessant chatter of the Little Terns. Coming back to Langstone there were Redshank on the shore for the first time, and at the Egret Roost I counted at least 15 birds (in line with the 17 birds which Brian Fellows saw on July 13) so I guess the roost size is still under 20 which I find surprising since there were probably 30 birds there in June and I would have thought that numbers would now be increasing rather than decreasing - no doubt they have just moved to another local roost. +++

One possibility is that the Egrets have moved back to the original main roost on Thorney Island, and it so happens that Barry Collins made a roost count there last night (July 15), recording a total of 93 birds which is an increase of 35 over the total of 58 there on June 25 (though this sort of increase is what past experience would predict as the birds return from breeding elsewhere). +++

While I was watching the Egrets at Wade Court I was joined by a couple of people who said they had come down from Richmond in London to visit local relatives - they were aware of the Egrets and had come specially to see them and I was interested to hear that they thought they had seen and heard a Ring-necked Parakeet here when they were last at Langstone - they are very familiar with them in Richmond but could not be certain of the bird seen distantly here.

Miscellaneous news reaching me today comes first from Lawrence Holloway who has just seen in his garden a third brood of juvenile Robins for this year, and Brian Fellows reports a juvenile Song Thrush with an adult at Emsworth - by the noise the Song Thrushes have been making (as they usually do immediately they have chucked one load of youngsters out of the nest) they are even thinking of starting yet another nest this year. +++

Hardly proof of local breeding is Bob Marchant's report of a single juvenile Dunlin at Hook/Warsash today - yesterday he had 4 summering Brent Geese and a Teal there, and Bob tells us that you can be almost certain of seeing a regular Yellow-legged Gull there out on the mud when the tide is down. Still at Hook Trevor Carpenter today had singles of both Greenshank and Avocet there, with 5 more Greenshank at Cams Bay later in the day. And finally, that Garganey is still at Sidlesham Ferry was seen today by John Chapman but I am still none the wiser as to whether it is male or female.

MON 15 JULY

Most visitors to the Needs Ore Point nature reserve at the mouth of the Beaulieu River are sworn

to secrecy about what they see there but I presume that English Nature have relaxed this ban to allow Dave Unsworth to pass on the news that the gull breeding colony there has met with total failure this year - maybe 7000 pairs of gulls have failed to produce a single chick. Dave does not tell us any special reason but we know from other sites (e.g. the Little Tern colony at the Hayling Oysterbeds) that the spring tide on the night of May 26/27 which was forecast as 4.7 metres was in fact 5.1 metres high on account of low atmospheric pressures and flooded the nests though this did not happen with the highest tide in June (forecast as 4.5 metres on the weekend of June 22/23 when high pressure was building and the wind was light). Perhaps there were other causes - disease? predation? - though with this site we can hopefully rule out human disturbance. One problem that has occurred recently is a lot of rain - this can quickly chill and kill newly hatched chicks. +++

I have not yet heard anything about the success of the gulls in Langstone Harbour (other than that it has been a very poor year for Med Gull breeding - thought by Chris Cockburn to be caused by hot dry weather and lack of ploughing, both making it difficult to find worms, at the time when these gulls should have been feeding up to get into the mood for breeding) but I have today heard from Brian Fellows that he (on July 13) has seen a few juvenile Black-headed Gulls on the Warblington shore between Emsworth and Langstone.

News on the SOS website tells me that the first Black Tern has been seen at Arlington Reservoir in the Cuckmere valley area of East Sussex, while shoals of Mackerel in the channel off Rye have attracted a record number of Gannets with up to 270 birds seen feeding. A Spoonbill has also been in that area, seen flying up the East Sussex River Rother.

Since the weather suddenly improved this weekend our skies (in south east Hampshire at any rate and, I suspect, more widely) have been full of noisy Swifts. I had thought this might be partly due to the need to feed newly hatched chicks but an infra-red photo just taken by Graham Roberts of one Swift pair on a nest in his house at Portsmouth proves that their eggs have not yet hatched, so we can probably attribute the noisy skies to non-breeding birds which traditionally at this time of year noisily discuss (like human teenagers) the prospect of sex and devote their energies to finding nooks for next year's 'nooky'. While walking down my own road in Havant today I watched one of the lowflying mob pause in its high speed flight to hover in front of the gable of one house not previously used for Swift nests, making me wonder if it is really possible that a two second glimpse of a potential nest site entrance made this summer can be remembered clearly enough by the bird for it to return and enter the hole a year later? +++

Going back to the photo which Graham has sent me I notice three more things which I find interesting. Firstly the nest itself is more substantial than I imagined - a cup almost as large as that of a Swallow's nest, though made of flimsier material (mainly feathers stuck together with the bird's saliva - does it taste as good as the saliva of the Swift species whose nests are used for soup making?). Secondly one of the bird's eggs is lying on the floor of the nest box outside the nest - Graham says it was pushed out of the nest early on and never retrieved. Thirdly, in addition to the sitting bird the second bird of the pair is also in the nest box, huddled up against its mate - I was under the impression the female sat alone in the nest for the whole period of incubation and the male only visited very briefly to bring food when the young had hatched (though I think I had also heard that in very bad weather both birds will sit it out in the nest).

In response to my query about the extent to which Cormorants in Britain have adopted the habits of the continental race and started nesting in trees rather than on cliffs Barry Mouser tells me that a Cormorant breeding colony has been established in trees at Abberton Reservoir in Essex for the past twelve years. Barry also adds to the discussion of inland Egrets here in Hampshire by saying that when he was on holiday in the Godshill area back in March 2000 he would walk down to the River Avon near Fordingbridge and would usually see a Little Egret feeding. My memory of a steep treelined hillside overlooking the Avon floodplain here suggests a likely candidate nest site for both Egrets and Cormorant in the future, but that is just my phantasy.

Yesterday John Clark was in the Avon valley further downstream, visiting the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood, and found a pair of Common Scoter on Ellingham Lake (these birds are rarely seen inland and John's only other record of them hereabouts dates back to April of 1981

though a more recent sighting of three drakes on a pond near Burgess Hill in Sussex is noted in my entry for July 6). Also seen by John in various parts of the Blashford Lakes complex were three Egyptian Geese, six Green Sandpiper and a Greenshank. +++

Other Hampshire observations for July 14 came from Richard Carpenter who heard a Turtle Dove still purring in the Botley Woods (with a Garden Warbler and two Yellowhammer) and from Ian Thirlwell who reckons that a flock of around 1000 Starlings flew over his house in the Milton area of Portsmouth at dusk this evening - this is of interest because I remember, when I first came to Havant in 1967, hearing stories of maybe a million Starlings descending nightly on Portsmouth from an area of perhaps 25 miles around the city. Looking at Birds of Hampshire I see a more conservative estimate of 'hundreds of thousands' using various parts of the city after the biggest roost (around Fort Brockhurst in Gosport) was eliminated by scrub clearance). With the great decline on total numbers of these birds recently it is good to see that there are flocks of 1000 birds, and of course that may have been just one of several such flocks descending on a Portsmouth area roost site from different directions.

Not too far from Martin Down but on the Dorset side of the border Paul Beckett was lucky enough to watch a male Montagu's harrier for about four minutes yesterday afternoon, and in the same open fields he heard the sharp call of a Quail with both Hobby and Turtle Dove going on his list. Going to Martin Down in the late afternoon and staying for a couple of hours Paul had no luck with the one bird he was hoping to see... +++

Observations in Sussex yesterday included Bee-eaters at both Church Norton and Rye Harbour, plus Garganey in the same two areas (one still at Sidleham Ferry, two at Rye). At Beachy Head a single Yellow Wagtail may well have been the first of the few that will soon return to the south coast as they leave us, but to my mind the most interesting observation from Beachy Head was a sighting of three Cuckoos (one adult and two juveniles) which the SOS website states were {{ feeding in association with each other }}. One Saturday (July 13) I passed on Paul Beckett's sighting of three juvenile Cuckoos in the same tree at Acres Down in the New Forest, and these reports may seem to indicate the start of a new loving and caring family relationship between members of the Cuckoo family but I suspect they are part of a normal pattern of behaviour whereby Cuckoos begin to move south towards the coast and to feed up in preparation for migration - this naturally draws together a number of Cuckoos from widely different nest sites or territories, and these concentrations of Cuckoos are increased by the presence of good food supplies - the bushes at Farlington Marshes have often in past years had a very good supply of caterpillars which Cuckos love (especially the hairy ones which other birds do not eat) - and so the density of Cuckoos at these food bars can be quite high with no blood relationship between the birds.

Late news for Saturday (July 13) includes a sighting in Botley Woods (by Richard Carpenter) of a Buzzard flying off with a large Grass Snake in its talons, and from the West Dean Woods in Sussex of a Silver Pheasant seen by Adrian Thomas. Not too many years ago this was a good place to see Golden Pheasant after they had vanished first from the woods south of Petersfield and then from Kingley Vale north of Chichester, so it looks as if the birding currency has been debased from gold to silver only? Earlier Adrian had been on Thorney Island where he noted 45 Black and 8 Bar-tailed Godwit with 7 Whimbrel and 3 Greenshank (plus 20 Dunlin). Further east in Sussex the Sand Martin count at Rye was up to 400 (an evening visit to the Thorney could produce a good number of Sand Martins and Swallows using the reeds as a night roost in the coming month), while in Hampshire Mike Bramwell was the lucky finder (or one of them) of a smart male Black Redstart in the Farlington Marshes carpark area (already reported at second hand by Will Walmsley in Saturday's notes). +++

Finally I have a report from Brian Fellows who was passing the Wade Court Egret roost at 9pm on Saturday evening and saw at least 17 birds there.

PLANTS:

SUN 21 JULY

A walk on Chalton/Idsworth Down this morning rewarded me with a plant list of just over 100 flowering species and the special prizes were my first Vervain of the summer and a good show of Basil Thyme at the southern end of the eastward facing slope of Chalton Down in the field

crossed by a public path following the line of Huckswood Lane west towards Chalton village. Above this field, just north of the stile leading onto the grass of Idsworth Down, a small cluster of white flowered Valerianella was probably *V. dentata* (which is recorded in this area in the Hants Flora) but as I earlier this year found that the flowers of the common *V. locusta* and look white when they first open (before turning blue) I will not swear to this find. Halfway down the slope of Idsworth Down I came on just two pure white flowered Self-Heal plants among hundreds of normal ones.

SAT 20 JULY

The Havant Wildlife Group walk this morning was around Fort Cumberland at Eastney (Portsmouth) and were assisted by the local knowledge of Theo Roberts - it was presumably he who showed them three special rarities of the area, Wild Clary, Hoary Cinquefoil and Wormwood. They also found the first Tansy and Prickly Lettuce in flower along with an un-named Broomrape species - could this have been the usually fairly common Knapweed Broomrape (*O. elatior*) which seems to have totally vanished this summer despite an extra good showing of Common Broomrape (*O. minor*). Brian Fellows notes add Spiked Sedge to a separate list sent by Heather Mills.

Yesterday John Goodspeed was on Portchester Common, the slope of Portsdown above the M27 where it cuts round Portchester. Somewhere at the top of this area he found more Lesser Centaury as he had recently done further east of the same hill.

THU 18 JULY

I have long known of a place where the Wayfarer's Way path, after coming down the north side of Portsdown, enters the Southwick Woods and there you can see Self-heal growing with pure white flowers. Today John Goodspeed was in that area and reports that the colony is growing in size. I have seen white (and pale pink) flowers on this plant elsewhere, but such a find adds to the interest of a walk in the same way that a short stroll that I took to Langstone this evening was brightened by my first sight of Sweet Chestnut blossom (these trees have probably been flowering in some places for a couple of weeks but this was my first sight of what I regard as the last tree to flower each year). An even more obvious reminder of the waning year came from a nearby Hawthorn on which a Squirrel was already eating unripe haws, and from a couple of black blackberries (I did not taste them but no doubt will very soon be gathering them).

WED 17 JULY

A photograph of what is almost certainly *Vicia villosa* (Fodder Vetch) was forwarded to me today by John Goodspeed who had received it from Val Henry at Portchester and I hope to contact Val and find out more about the plant and its location - at a guess it is in the Wicor shore area between the site of the old Wicor Mill and Cams Bay.

It is at least a month since I visited Old Idsworth Farm so there were many new things to see in the fields this morning but the biggest surprise was belt of *Phacelia tanacetifolia* some 300 or more metres long sown under phone lines crossing a field of wheat - the line of telegraph poles making it impractical to sow or harvest the main crop under the wires. I have heard that this plant is occasionally sown by farmers to attract bees, which may help in the pollination of other crops but I would be interested to know more about the reasons for sowing it. This is a plant which I have only seen once before, and in that case the flowers were a bright blue colour whereas these were a pale mauve - Stace gives both as colour variants. Walking around this and a couple of other fields I amassed a list of 97 flowering plants excluding grasses, many of them on downland grass where sheep have been grazing - lots of Rockrose, Marjoram, Lady's and Hedge Bedstraw and the like with Clustered Bellflower, Harebell and Pyramidal orchids. At one point some almost dead Broomrapes made me think I had at last found the Knapweed Broomrape which seems to be totally missing this year but although the stems were a good 50 cm tall the few flowers that were left at the tip had the separated purple stigma lobes of Common Broomrape which has had an exceptionally good year. Having been reminded by Debbie Allan (see Monday's notes) that Dwarf Spurge is now out I was not surprised to see this among the wonderful collection of arboreal 'weeds' sown as wildflower seed along the field edges of the public path from Idsworth Chapel to Huckswood Lane - as soon as you climb the stile into the fields north of the Idsworth to Littlegreen/Compton road you are surrounded by a massive display of Corn Marigold, Corn Cockle, Cornflower and the like (though the richest

display with a huge number of Poppies is not available to the public).

TUE 16 JULY

After my expedition to Portsdown Hill last Sunday (during which I stumbled on just two tiny plants of what, by the size of the plants and the red rather than pink single flowers looking up from the short grass, I took to be Lesser Centaury) I have now heard from John Goodspeed that there is a lot of Lesser Centaury flowering on that part of Portsdown (above the Paulsgrove Chalkpit) if you look for it. John at the same time laments the apparent loss this summer of the few plants of Round Headed Rampion that normally appear but with these it could just be that they are having a quiet year before re-appearing next year. +++

Another plant that seems to be having a year off is White Melilot. Normally it is quite common in various locations, especially at the Hayling Oysterbeds, but this year I have seen none. Maybe it will still turn up as I see that Brian Fellows found some today in the Fort Cumberland area of Eastney on Portsea Island. +++

Another new find today was of Water Mint in flower at Whiteley/Botley Woods, seen by Richard Carpenter with Lesser Skullcap.

The first Golden Samphire flowers were open today by the Hayling Coastal Path south of the Oysterbeds and Stoke Bay. Nearby I saw my first Hawkweed Oxtongue and Mugwort in flower, neither of them being firsts for the year, but these finds were outweighed by my disappointment at finding that the earth mound east of the Little Tern lagoon had been shaved of its flowers so I was never able to see the glorious display of Common Centaury that was still in bud when I last saw it. Why this should have been cut so early I do not know (maybe to get rid of the mass of Ragwort - but surely volunteers could have been found to pull it by hand?) but not all is lost as it looks as if the Milk Thistles had already set seed and some of the seed heads remain on the ground, and I saw at least one plant of Slender Thistle had survived the mow. Milk Thistle is listed as rare in the Hants Flora and this colony is the only one that I know of - one would have thought that efforts would have been made to preserve it on a nature reserve, rather than to eradicate it, especially as it is so large and handsome a plant in both leaves and flowers. Further down the coastal path was more disappointment where the Saw-wort plants (listed as extinct on Hayling as recently as the publication of Pete Durnell's book on the Wildlife of Hayling) which had recently been mown by contractors mindless of their existence or interest, have once more been attacked by hungry rabbits.

MON 15 JULY

A very informative note of plants seen in the Gosport area recently comes today from Debbie Allan (if you are interested in wildlife conservation activities check out her website via the link in my What's New page). Debbie was responding to my recent remarks that Great Horsetail may be under-recorded in south east Hampshire, she tells me she has found it by the moat around Fort Brockhurst and lots more around Fort Elson, both near the Portsmouth Harbour west shore. Within the Defence Munitions site around Fort Elson (which she was privileged to enter on July 7) were several personal firsts for the year including {{ Marsh Woundwort (*Stachys palustris*); Dwarf Spurge (*Euphorbia exigua*); Dyer's Greenweed (*Genista tinctoria*); and Brackish Water-crowfoot (*Ranunculus baudotii*). We also found quite a number of plants which are not common in Gosport, although they may be common in Hampshire e.g. Lesser Centaury, Long-bracted Sedge (*Carex extensa*). }} +++

A small amount of Goat's Rue was on the banks of the Fort Brockhurst moat near the entrance bridge, but the most interesting plants reported by Debbie are on the solent shore of Gosport near Fort Gilkicker. In particular she tells me that a small colony of Tuberous Pea can now be seen in flower some 250 yards east of the Inshore Rescue lifeboat station (approx location SZ 6097-19 with the plants at SZ 6097-39, a good 500 metres north west of Fort Gilkicker). The site is in scrub east of a small reed bed with willow. To find it Debbie says that if you {{ follow a line due east from the boat compound (next to the Inshore Rescue station), for about 250m, you should find a (slightly overgrown) opening into a small scruffy 'clearing', a small Hawthorn with Evernia and other lichen on it is the most conspicuous indicator when you are in the correct place. In the same 'clearing' there is also Adder's-tongue (*Ophioglossum vulgatum*), buried among Wood Small-reed (*Calamagrostis epigejos* - a foot or two west of the 'path') and Dotted Sedge (*Carex punctata*). If you go a little further to the SE, along the south edge of the

scrub - look out for some tiny trampled Rough Clover under your feet - there is a fine colony of Caper Spurge (*Euphorbia lathyris*) in fruit (not edible). First seen by me in 1996, this can be seen better if you follow the edge of the scrub around to the back (be prepared to wage battle with brambles and Hawthorn) there is plentiful Dotted Sedge along the north edge of the scrub, and probably 30 or more plants of the Caper Spurge, if you get to it. }} My memory tells me that while you are in that area you should have less difficulty in also finding a good colony of Pale Toadflax on the shingle immediately east of Fort Gilkicker.

Martin Rand was out botanising both yesterday and today. Yesterday he was in the Baddesley Common/Emer Bog area east of Romsey, the main find there being Tubular Water Dropwort now in flower, and this evening he was by the River Itchen at Bishopstoke close to Eastleigh. Here, among the leaves of Butterbur, he saw 8 good spikes of *Epipactis phyllanthes*, an unimpressive orchid which comes in at least four varieties and has several names (I referred to it recently as Pendulous Flowered Helleborine when Peter Whitcomb found it at Arundel but it is now generally given the English name of Green-flowered Helleborine - one of the older Latin names was *Epipactis confusa*, perhaps we should have stuck with that?). Branched Bur Reed was flowering in the river here and in a nearby meadow Common Meadow Rue could be seen distantly among Meadow Sweet with Canary Grass also out in the general area.

Richard Carpenter has also been out in the current sunshine - today he was on Old Winchester Hill where Dwarf Thistle, Harebell, Marjoram, Round Headed Rampion, Squinancywort, Wild Basil, and the Yellow Wort that makes such a brilliant display on chalk at the moment were all out. On Sunday in Botley Woods he too noted Branched Bur Reed in flower (Brian Fellows found this out in the River Ems as early as June 4), and on Saturday he found Sneezewort and Upright Hedge Parsley in a different part of those woods.

INSECTS:

SUN 21 JULY

Alan Thornbury was on Browndown at Gosport today and by going slightly off the normal paths he disturbed half a dozen Graylings - the first reported for this summer. They are virtually invisible when at rest, folding their wings down to minimise their size and lining their bodies to point to the sun so that they cast no shadow, so the only way to find them is to disturb them (or hope something else does it for you!) +++

I was on Chalton Down above the Portsmouth to London rail line near Idsworth this morning, seeing an estimated 50 Chalkhill Blues, all of them male. Nearby I noticed fresh Robin's Pincushion galls indicating the work of *Diplolepis rosae* gall wasps.

Last Tuesday (July 16) I reported the find by Dennis Crassweller on Hayling Island of a Beautiful Demoiselle far from running water, and today Tony Wilson found six of them on Benfield Hill above Hove, at least 20 miles from the nearest breeding area which he knows for them. While watching them he also saw an Emperor dragonfly catch and eat a Small White butterfly. Among a good butterfly list of 11 species was one worn Painted Lady, 150 mixed Skippers and 100 each of Gatekeepers and Marbled Whites but not a single Chalkhill Blue (just one Common Blue and 6 Holly Blue).

SAT 20 JULY

Barry Collins was working in his Havant garden today when he put up a moth which he managed to catch and identify as a Waved Black, only his second record of this species in the garden (the first was in July 1997). +++

Mike Duffy was at Whiteley Pastures/Botley Woods this morning enjoying close ups of both Purple and White-letter Hair streaks resting on bramble. He then went on to Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley, seeing 40 - 60 Chalkhill Blues, at least 6 Dark Green Fritillaries and others making a total of 17 butterfly species - among them one Small Tortoiseshell and fresh Speckled Woods. +++

On Portsdown today John Goodspeed had what were presumably fresh specimens of both Common Blue and Brimstone, and down on the coast at Fort Cumberland (Eastney area of Portsmouth) the Havant Wildlife Group encountered a Great Green Bush-Cricket.

On Friday evening (July 19) Mike Duffy was one of a group attending a Butterfly Conservation moth trap evening run by Phil Budd at Westwood on the shores of Southampton Water near

Netley. Among the moths noted by Mike was the first Brown-line Bright-eye that I have heard of for the year plus a Square-spot Rustic and a (presumably fresh generation) Ruby Tiger. Two tortrix moths that are new to my list were the Dark Fruit-tree Tortrix (*Pandemis heparana*) and what I assume was *P. cerasana* (the Barred Fruit-tree Tortrix) though Mike lists it as a 'Dark Barred ...' +++

Back on the night of July 15 the Titchfield Haven trap was in operation (result only just published), and they had the first Pine Hawkmoth, a Lesser Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing and what I guess was a fresh generation of The Specatacle. Their light also stole the limelight from Mike Duffy by pre-empting his first observation of The Drinker and Simon Woolley's Garden Tiger.

FRI 19 JULY

Moth trap reports that have just reached me come from Barry Collins in Havant, Simon Woolley (who abandoned his usual garden site in Winchester for a night in the west Hampshire wilds at Lockerley), Alan Dawson in Southampton, and belated news from Titchfield Haven for the night of July 12. Putting these together I find ten new moths for the year plus an eleventh species (The Herald) which was fairly common earlier in the year, but those were over-wintering specimens, and one seen at Titchfield Haven on July 12 was the first new specimen for this year. I read that this moth has two generations each year in the south of England, so the moths emerging now will lay eggs that will become moths in the late autumn, and it is those that will over-winter to lay their eggs in the spring, and I think the moth gets its name 'Herald of Winter' from these late emergers. +++

Simon Woolley had the best haul with The Drinker, Garden Tiger, Least Yellow Underwing, and The Shark all taken at Lockerley on the night of July 17, while Barry Collins on July 18 had September Thorn and a pyralid called *Agriphila tristella*. Barry also had the lovely Garden Tiger which Simon had just one night earlier and a Scarce Footman that had come to Philip Hack's trap on July 12. The September Thorn sounds very early but is in fact a regular for July nights. A long moth list from Titchfield Haven for July 12 started with the first Black Arches (a beautiful white moth though it does have black spots!) and Bordered Beauty (giving an earlier record than Alan Dawson's only 'first' - for July 16 - in the current batch of reports). Titchfield also had Fen Wainscot, The Herald (already mentioned above), and Single-dotted Wave (taking away Barry Collins' first for July 15).

Another correction to my table of first sightings is the substitution of Mike Gibbons name for the 'anon' which I had previously put against the sighting of the first Purple Emperor passed on to me as 'an anonymous entry in the Bentley Wood log book'. Mike tells me that he saw that one and others which were all males until he spotted his first female yesterday (July 18) and two more were seen today - these were all at Bentley Wood but were seen visiting Sallow (and hopefully egg-laying on it!). Mike may have had the first male Emperor this year but according to the Butterfly Conservation website Peter Eeles was the first to see a female on July 16 (feeding from cow dung in the wheel arch of a car at Bentley Wood as a male had done earlier). Mike tells me he thinks this has so far been a poor year for Purple Emperors, but - ever optimistic - he says it is not over yet! At least the Emperors have been luckier than was a Silver Washed Fritillary which Mike saw today (at Bentley Wood) in the mouth of an Emperor dragonfly.

THU 18 JULY

John Goodspeed was walking today in the Southwick woods north of Portsdown, and when he emerged into the fields to cross the Wallington River in the Lye Heath area he found both Banded and Beautiful Demoiselles on the wing in fair numbers, plus three Small Tortoiseshell butterflies.

An update of the national Migrant Moth website today tells us of three news items that I find interesting. The first is a sighting of a Death's Head Hawkmoth, the first this year, resting on someone's jeans on a washing line in Cornwall. The second tells us that at least one Hummingbird Hawkmoth has reached the Shetlands in its northward journey, and the third is what is thought to be only the third British record of a rare aberration of a rare enough migrant with the prosaic name of Cream-bordered Green Pea - this was seen in the Channel Islands.

WED 17 JULY

The latest batch of messages reporting moth and butterfly finds has just been through my program for checking them against previous records to see which are the new finds, and at this time of year I am realising the difficulties which official recorders must have when it comes to picking out observations of new brood insects from survivors of previous generations. For example, a small number of people have reported seeing Common Blue butterflies but only one (Barry Collins) is helpful enough to say that they were fresh specimens so he is accredited with the first of the summer generation, seen on Thorney Island yesterday. Previous sightings by Simon Woolley on July 13 and Rupert Broadway (July 6) specified they were worn specimens, but Lawrence Holloway's list from Harting Down on July 15 (a day before Barry's sighting) includes 2 male Common Blues with no mention of age Incidentally, after a little hesitation as to how to indicate fresh broods in my sightings table, I have decided to add '(Fresh)' after the Latin Name of the species so that it will not confuse the sorting on English names and gets over lengthy descriptive wording to indicate differences between second and third broods, etc. +++

Still with butterflies I see that the accolade for first White-letter Hairstreak in Hampshire has passed from Simon Wolley to Mike Gibbons, who saw one on July 13 at Whiteley (where Simon had one on July 14). Mike Gibbons also did well with a Purple Emperor at Whiteley on July 13 (equalling Mike Duffy's date at Bentley Wood but still way after the record by Anon at Bentley on July 6). +++

Coming to moths we have several clear firsts. On the night of July 15 Barry Collins' trap at Havant took The Olive, Single-dotted Wave and Canary Shouldered Thorn while at Winchester Simon Woolley's trap had a fresh Purple Thorn and a rather early August Thorn. Last night (July 16) saw the first Double Kidney and Double Square-spot in Barry's trap. Barry also recorded a migrant species, The Gem, which has been showing up all over the British Isles since March this year but with relatively few Hampshire records.

Today brings the first full-blooded observation of Chalkhill Blues - 80+ of them at the Yew Hill reserve near Winchester, seen by Mark Litjens who also had a Holly Blue and 7 Red Admirals there plus others such as 35 Gatekeepers. +++

Here in the Havant area Brian Fellows noted a strong emergence of Large White in Brook Meadow and I feel sure that all three common White species, and Speckled Woods, have recently launched new generations without being properly recorded.

In his garden at Aldwick, Bognor Regis, Lawrence Holloway today noted an insect which I had never heard of - a 'Bumble-bee mimic' hoverfly called *Meredon equestris* which looks like a Bumble Bee in flight but which has an interesting life history. Lawrence tells us that ... {{ The female lays her egg on the leaves of BLUEBELLS and the grub travels down to the bulb where it bores into the main part and remains there for some 300 days before pupating. Full details pages 202 and 203, Stubbs and Falk, 'British Hoverflies' }}

Until today the two Buddleias in my garden have been butterfly-free zones but today a Comma landed to feed at one and a first Gatekeeper was also in the garden. I actually saw my first summer Comma while I was at Old Idsworth Farm in the morning, one among nine butterfly species seen there but the only one of special interest though the Ringlets were still fresh looking.

TUE 16 JULY

The first report of Glow-worms to reach me this summer comes from Barry Collins who noted 16 when he was listening to Nightjars, roding Woodcock and juvenile Tawny Owls in Havant Thicket this evening.

Arriving at the Hayling Oysterbeds around 8pm when I was not expecting much insect activity I was excited to find myself cycling alongside a Hummingbird Hawkmoth which was checking various flowers but finding none worth stopping at. Although it never paused to give me a good look the greyish colour and the yellow of the hindwings, plus its speed and flight pattern, made it unmistakable. On getting home I found that Derek Hale had also enjoyed one of these migrant moths in his garden at Ryde today. +++

Earlier in the day my first summer Holly Blue was patrolling my garden with the first Gatekeeper also present.

Yesterday Lawrence Holloway was on Harting Down and saw 20 or more Dark Green Fritillaries

shooting past him - maybe some came round for a second time but the air here was full of other butterflies. Lawrence estimates over 100 each of Marbled Whites and Small Heaths with many Ringlets but few Gatekeepers. He saw at least 2 Common Blues and singles of Peacock, Comma and Small Tortoiseshell. Later in the summer there will hopefully be Brown Hairstreak on the wing here.

As with all wildlife our carefully recorded counts and lists seem to me to show more about our lack of knowledge than about our skill at recording. I have often said that if you start a series of competent observers out on a set route at fixed intervals - perhaps five minutes apart - they will all come back with lists of observations that differ significantly from each other, and Mike Gibbons went some way to proving this when, on July 13, he walked around the Botley Woods area where he was to lead a Butterfly Conservation walk on July 14. The latter walk was highly successful and I have seen excellent photos of both Purple Emperor and White-letter Hairstreak to prove it, but I am still intrigued that a population of over 100 Ringlets seen on the Saturday was apparently reduced to only 30 on the Sunday and (more understandably) 4 White Admirals had diminished to just 1 while a raft of new Gatekeepers had appeared on the scene. In his July 13 recce Mike noted up to 30 Silver Washed Fritillary, 15+ Purple Hairstreak, 11 Commas and 6 Red Admirals (plus others including a Small Tortoiseshell), and I think most of these showed for the walk party.

News for Saturday (July 13) is of a Clouded Yellow seen at Calshot and a very interesting observation from Dennis Crassweller, who lives on Hayling Island, of a clearly seen (for 30 minutes) male Beautiful Demoiselle at his garden pond. As these lovely insects only breed in fast, clear streams this one would have been out of luck on Hayling, though it might have been blown south from the Emsworth area. The pond is clearly attractive to dragonflies - some 40 Common Darters emerged in June and a female Emperor is currently egg-laying with Blue-tailed Damsels being regular residents. I see the Demoiselle is another addition to the Wildlife of Hayling listed in Pete Durnell's recent book!

MON 15 JULY

The first report of the song of the Great Green Bush-cricket comes today from Martin Rand who heard it in meadows near the River Itchen at Bishopstoke late in the afternoon. Other insects in the news are the ants which have been making their first mating flights of the summer over the weekend - though no one claims to have seen them on the ground the airborne crowds of gulls silently feeding on them have been reported from Emsworth to New Milton right across the county.

Butterfly newcomers at last include fresh Peacocks, seen by Richard Carpenter in the Botley Woods and by Andrew Brookes in woods at Boarhunt, north of Fareham, both on Sunday July 14. A new generation of Brimstones are also on the wing, the first being seen by Andrew Brookes at Portchester on Saturday (July 13), and I have given the benefit of the doubt to both Philip Hack and Richard Carpenter who both saw Brimstones on Sunday at a time when the overwintering insects should have ceased to show (so I am assuming their sightings were of the new brood). The first White-letter Hairstreak for Hampshire (after one in Sussex at Hove on July 6) was seen on Sunday by Simon Woolley in Botley Woods and at least one more was seen at Warsash Common on either Sunday or today. More Purple Emperors have also gone on the slate with another sighting at Bentley Wood (coming to cow dung on a carwheel hub cap!) and perhaps a more interesting one made by Lynn Fomison in the Ropley area (not sure if this was at a regular site or was a chance discovery of a new site). +++

Other butterfly sightings of interest include 6 Dark Green Fritillaries with 25+ Small Heath and 100+ Marbled White on Old Winchester Hill, with one Painted Lady and just one Chalkhill Blue, all seen today by Richard Carpenter. Yesterday a wandering Dark Green Fritillary was logged at Magdalen Hill Down (not a regular site for them though it hopefully will be in future) while at least two were seen on Stockbridge Down and many of them were out at Beachy Head in Sussex. At Bentley Wood on Sunday around 100 Silver Washed Fritillaries were out and on Saturday a count of over 25 in Botley Woods included a pair making their pre-mating chase down a ride. Also in Botley Woods 4 White Admirals were seen but they remain in short supply and time is running out on them. Still with Saturday's sightings (July 13) I see that a single Clouded Yellow was seen on Thorney Island by Adrian Thomas. +++

Ruddy Darter is the only new dragonfly to go on the list - one was seen on Sunday in the Whiteley/Botley Woods area by Richard Carpenter who also noted 5 Emerald Damselflies (Lestes sponsa), 1 Downy Emerald and two Golden-ringed Dragonflies - and two new for the year moths have been reported (Clouded Brindle and the infamous Brown-tail moth), both from the Southampton area by Philip Hack and Alan Dawson. A number of other 'not quite first' moths include a Four Dotted Footman disturbed by day on Stockbridge Common by Philip Hack who also had, at his Nursling trap, Yellow-tail, Mother of Pearl, and The Fan-foot while Alan Dawson had Lesser Yellow Underwing.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 19 JULY

Last night Brian Fellows showed the corpse of the Water Vole (found on Wednesday in Brook Meadow at Emsworth - see July 17) to Graham Roberts and Graham was of the opinion that this was a young male and thought that the injuries could have been inflicted, not by a dog, but by its own mother. These fast breeding rodents must make sure that as soon as one brood of youngsters are able to fend for themselves they are pushed out of their mother's territory leaving her with a local food supply to feed the next brood. Males in particular have to move away to set up their own territories in unclaimed stretches of the river bank, and if they are reluctant to do so the mother will not hesitate to impress the message on them. +++ This practice could be responsible for some of the Water Vole sightings at Langstone Pond (I had a phone call reporting another sighting and 'plop' heard there recently in the middle of the afternoon), and may indicate that the Voles are breeding further up the Lymbourne Stream (the most likely place) and then sending their offspring down to explore the pond itself where more disturbance and more predators (including Herons) may make it a less suitable place to settle down permanently.

WED 17 JULY

With many people hopefully coming to the talk on Water Voles to be given in Emsworth tomorrow evening (7pm to 9pm at the Emsworth Community Association in Church Path) Brian Fellows will be going along with a sad tale to set against the undoubted record of conservation success that the audience will hear. Out in Brook Meadow this afternoon he was approached by a lady who showed him the corpse of a freshly dead young Water Vole bearing marks that suggested a dog as the killer. This is the second Water Vole known to have died from dog attack this year at Brook Meadow, and with a population of only one or two adult pairs it makes one wonder if the efforts to protect them are worth while, but I take heart from the facts that a Water Vole lives at most for 18 months and is subject to all sorts of predation by Herons, Pike, and any land predators (such as foxes or badgers) that can catch them by surprise. To survive they have to have a high reproductive rate and I read that one female can produce up to 25 young in her short lifetime (four or five litters of up to five babies in a year), so a couple of deaths from dogs is nothing special for this species.

MON 15 JULY

Two early autumn toadstools found by Martin Rand at Emer Bog (east of Romsey) yesterday where the Yellow Swamp Russula and the Tawny Grisette.

WEEK 28 JULY 8 – 14 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 14 JULY

Yesterday Will Walmsley saw 5 Brent at Farlington Marshes.

Barry Collins rode over 30 miles on his bike today around our local area, starting with a couple of Med Gulls at Emsworth where around 2000 Black-headed Gulls were hawking insects above the town (first flying ants of the year?). At the Hayling Oysterbeds he saw a Hobby as well as over 200 Little Tern (sounds as if some 100 pairs have nested and are now feeding young but I have no details to confirm this) with six Common Tern (have any of them nested here?). At Sandy Point he watched some 30 Common Scoter fly east

I made a note earlier today of a first for my garden yearlist when I heard a Green Woodpecker

nearby but I have not had the luck which came Jim Berry's way today. Jim lives in the north of Rowlands Castle and does not normally have woodpeckers in his garden but today a female Green arrived on the lawn with three of her young still being fed by her, and while he was watching them he saw a Great Spotted feeding one of it's young on a tree.

On Portsdown this morning I heard and saw just one Stonechat in a traditional breeding territory at the north east corner of the big Paulsgrove chalkpit. Nearby were several Linnets and I heard both Bullfinch and Whitethroat but saw neither Yellowhammer nor the Kestrel that is usually overhead.

Here in Havant the Swifts seem to have changed their habits and be staying near their nests for much of the day - possibly meaning that eggs are about to, or have, hatched (though it could be just a response to the change of weather. Brian Fellows noted similar behaviour in Emsworth.

Kevin Stouse has just returned from a trekking holiday in Iceland - not especially with birding intent - and has sent me a fascinating list of birds that he saw - surprisingly there were only a few Black-tailed Godwit on the list. To give a flavour of what he saw I have picked out half a dozen highlights ... +++

Red Throated Divers seen on south of Island - 1 pair with 3 young - other odd birds; Slavonian Grebes - breeding pairs with young at Lake Myvatn; Fulmars on EVERY cliff face even those a good 5-6 miles from sea - they are literally everywhere!; Whooper Swans - everywhere like we have Mute Swans. +++

Eider - seen on coast wherever harbours existed - almost all females with young of one age or another - varied from small to well grown young; Long Tailed Duck - just 1 bird on Lake Myvatn; Harlequin Duck - just 1 female but other birds seen while travelling which looked like males; Barrow's Goldeneye - Many birds found most with young at Lake Myvatn. +++

Red Necked Phalarope - Once we got to south eastern corner these birds turned up all over the place at Lake Myvatn they are everywhere I estimate we say 200+ birds at least!; Arctic Tern - easily the most common bird in Iceland! Seemed to feed in fields on worms/insects as well as fish; Puffin - massive numbers in 2 colonies we visited - 5-6,000 birds we were told; Black Guillemot - just 3 birds during whale watch; Guillemot - 100+ birds at Puffin colony at Dyrholaey, including some of Bridled variety; Razorbill - 3 or 4 birds at Dyrholaey. +++

House Martin 1 bird seen at hotel near Egilsstadir - a real rarity!; Redwing - only thrush in Iceland! Everywhere there were trees there were Redwing; Raven - odd birds seen and heard as we travelled - in more remote areas; Snow Bunting - wonderful males seen when walking in lava flow areas and at Puffin Colony.

SAT 13 JULY

At the Portsmouth IBM Lake today I counted a total of 203 Canada geese and saw the beginnings of the carpet of feathers they are now dropping. At least 12 of these birds were, I think, this year's juveniles by their smaller size and smarter fresh feathers but they are all now in adult plumage. The birds were in five well separated flocks around the site. Two unusual items for the WeBS count report were firstly the presence of one adult Great Crested Grebe and secondly the absence (as far as I could see) of any Little Grebes, though I am pretty sure that at least five pairs will have been hidden in the luxuriant waterside vegetation. I suspect that the rubbish tip over the road from the IBM site was not working when I was at the lake as there were virtually no gulls (just a couple of over-flying Black-headed Gulls).

The Havant Wildlife Group were walking along Hilsea Lines to the west of Farlington Marshes this morning but had little to report in the way of birds other than a single parent Swan with 5 cygnets and a Tufted Duck with six ducklings.

FRI 12 JULY

News of Red Kite breeding success has now moved its focus from the Chilterns to East Yorkshire.

The population in the Chilterns is not only self sustaining but has provided the young birds released near Harewood House in Yorkshire and will provide more birds for a Scottish colony. The young birds destined for 'export' are taken from nests in the Chilterns when four weeks old, then kept in aviaries in Yorkshire until they can fly - so far 40 birds have been released in Yorkshire out of a planned total of 80. The first 20 of these youngsters were released in the summer of 1999, along with an older female from a bird hospital. This female paired with one of the young males and hatched two chicks in 2000 while a further 19 young birds were being

brought it. No introductions were possible in 2001 because of F & M, but more will go north this summer, some of them destined for a new release site in Scotland. It seems that the birds cannot be sexed visually at four weeks old when taken from the nest, and the processing of tests on blood taken from the chicks takes longer than their development to the flying stage when they are released. This has meant an imbalance in the Yorkshire population with more males than females - from this year on the birds will be held in the aviaries (not to be called detention centres) until their sex is known, and a more balanced population will be released (no word on what happens to the unwanted males - maybe you can buy one as a pet to raise further funds for the project).

Locally the HWT website has a brief bulletin from Farlington Marshes reporting that Black-tailed Godwit in summer plumage have started to return from Iceland, and the first Dunlin are back with other passage birds (Common and Green Sandpiper, Spotted Redshank, Greenshank, Little Ringed Plover).

At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter saw two newly arrived Spoonbill which spent the whole day sleeping or preening - the Avocets were much more exciting to watch as the chicks are very close to take off and can be seen exercising their wings for much of the day. Also at the Haven were 4 Green and 2 Common Sandpipers plus a Greenshank.

THU 11 JULY

On my way to Fishbourne I stopped off at Cutmill Creek where a minor stream enters the top of the Bosham channel in Chichester Harbour. A pair of Swans traditionally nests somewhere near here (not sure of actual nest site) and as expected the Swan pair and seven well grown but still downy cygnets were resting by the edge of the stream channel. The tide was out and I could not count the Swans seen distantly in Colner Creek (the other side of the Bosham Channel, where the Bosham stream enters the harbour) but I could only see half a dozen necks so I doubt the missing 75 Swans from Broadmarsh were hiding here - see my notes for yesterday. Among the Black-headed Gulls were my first two adult Common Gulls to come back, though I know some have been around for some time.

In the evening I had a quick look at the Wade Court Egret roost but was probably too late at 9:30pm - only half a dozen birds could be seen in the trees but probably many more were already bedded down out of sight, and only six more flew in while I was there. As I was cycling home up Wade Lane in the dusk I heard prolonged Kestrel calls from the trees to the east of me and suspect these were the Kestrel family that nested in Warblington Castle tower, now learning the ways of the wild.

WED 10 JULY

In my notes for July 8 I wondered if the presence of Cormorant on Fleet Pond could be a hint that these birds were starting to form inland breeding colonies anywhere in southern England. I know that there has for some time been inland breeding on cliffs in Wales, and that more recently some Cormorants in Britain have started nesting in trees as they do on the continent, but these are vague recollections of what I have read or heard, and not hard facts. Today Ed Griffiths contributes an interesting addition to this subject - he has heard that this year at the Little Marlow gravel pits in the Thames valley on the Berkshire/Buckinghamshire border, where trees on an island are used by roosting Cormorant, one bird laid eggs for the first time this year. The eggs were laid on the ground and nothing came of this attempt but I suspect there will be other and more successful attempts at nesting in future years.

Some 75 Mute Swans which would normally be spending their moult month in the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream have not turned up this year. Today I counted just 27 Swans there (and with the tide higher last night I could only see 15) whereas the count on July 9 last summer was 97 (with 100 counted there on both July 15 and 30). It does not appear that the missing birds have gone to either Emsworth or Fishbourne as the current counts there are very close to those at the same time last year (Fishbourne has 112 where it had 115 on July 7 last year, and Emsworth had 108 on June 28 this year compared to 122 on July 1 last year). As we don't know where the birds that form these summer flocks come from in the first place (presumably from several scattered inland sites where they would feel insecure from predators while flightless) it is impossible to say if there has been a drop in the Swan population or whether the birds have gone elsewhere for their summer moult but it will be

interesting to hear news (if we do!) of the annual Swan round-up which is scheduled to take place in Christchurch Harbour next Sunday (July 14) - the flock there I think represents the majority of the Swans from both the Hampshire Avon and the Dorsetshire Stour rivers.

MON 08 JULY

The two Avocet chicks and their parents seem to have settled in well at Titchfield Haven since their arrival on June 24 (see my note for June 28), and the latest reports on them (Peter Raby on Saturday and John Shillitoe yesterday) both say that the youngsters are already exercising their wings. With successful breeding now proven in Hampshire people have been wondering why they have not yet succeeded in Dorset where so many of them spend the winter (Peter Hockin tells us today that he has had confirmation from the Brownsea Island warden that last winter's flock in Poole Harbour peaked at over 1000 birds). John Clark has told us that the Dorset Bird Report for 1999 states that two pairs did attempt to breed at Brownsea in that year and the eggs in both nests hatched but none of the young survived, but there is no mention of breeding in the 2000 report, so if at least one of the youngsters at the Haven keeps exercising its wing muscles until it manages to get airborne Hampshire will have fully proven Avocet breeding before Dorset (getting our own back for the Egrets which did raise young on Brownsea Island at least a year before the Hampshire nests at Gosport were successful)

Going back to an earlier thread of whether there has been a crash in Willow Warbler numbers this year Peter Whitcomb tells me that not one stayed to breed in the Wildpark nature reserve in north Brighton this year, though the park had many Whitethroat and Blackcap, and this reflects the experience at many other sites where Willow Warblers were once common. Peter did however hear Willow Warbler song yesterday on Iping Common near Midhurst, and this is in line with the idea that, after a run of mild winters, the population of Tits and other small insectivores has built up to a point at which, in places where Tits abound, there is not enough food left for the Willow Warblers so they have been driven to marginal habitat such as the Midhurst heathland.

Thinking of food shortages makes me wonder what effect the current prolonged rain will have on the breeding success of Swifts this year - the young of these birds are supposed to be able to go into a sort of torpor which allows them to survive for several days without food but I suspect that not all will survive if this rain goes on for much longer.

PLANTS:

SUN 14 JULY

Portsmouth Hill near the Paulsgrove chalk pit has a magnificent display of Greater Knapweed at the moment but the plants which I was most pleased to find there this morning were a single Harebell and two tiny plants of Lesser Centaury. My first plant of flowering Burnet Saxifrage also went on my list along with Bastard Toadflax flowering in two separate locations here. Also among my list of 80 flowering species were Betony and Wild Basil with at least two different kinds of Hieracium (one probably *H. maculatum* with dark blotched leaves)

SAT 13 JULY

I came across only two new flowerings that may be of general interest when I was at the Portsmouth IBM site today - Stone Parsley and Fennel - but the find which pleased me most was Small-flowered Cranesbill. Two other interesting hangers-on at the site which have been there at least 20 years were Hairy Bird's Foot Trefoil and Corn Parsley (the former enjoys close mowing of the grass banks but I am amazed at the way the latter survives despite being mown regularly - the one or two plants consist of wiry branches snaking along the ground with a few tiny flowers desperately hanging on at their tips). Another survivor of only perhaps five years is Cornflower with just two or three survivors of the liberal sowing of wildflower seed and tree planting to disguise an unsightly pile of earth and rubble left at the west end of the buildings after a new power supply building was added. +++

Other plants which I noted were the Yellow Loosestrife, growing near the crossing point (ford) to the islands, which I checked for the bright orange edging to the calyx teeth (this is obvious with a lens but not visible to my unaided eyesight), and the vast mass of Narrow Leaved Bird's-foot Trefoil (*Lotus glaber*) which covers much of the ground near the east end of the lake and elsewhere on the site. I checked for but could not find any trace of the Small Melilot which used

to be abundant near the lake pump house but I did find the garden Eryngo (x tripartitum) still persisting elsewhere. Near the buildings I found my first Heath Speedwell of the year and saw Trailing St John's Wort in flower. +++

Also in the Portsmouth area the Havant Wildlife Group spent the morning in the Hilsea Lines (the old defences running along Ports Creek which separates Portsea Island from the mainland to the north). Among the 98 species of plant they found in flower I see the Black Mustard which has grown there for many years but the interesting new flowerings for the year were Autumn Hawkbit, Wood False Brome and Mugwort (a deceptive plant as when it opens its brown flowers it looks as if it had already 'gone over')

FRI 12 JULY

One newcomer to the flowering list today is Square-stalked St John's Wort, found in Brook Meadow at Emsworth by Brian Fellows, who was also out yesterday in the Hollybank Woods where he found Lesser Hawkbit and Hairy Brome which, with the Tufted Hair-grass, is putting on a good show at the moment. Over at Brownwich yesterday Richard Carpenter saw Betony in flower for the first time - this is one of my favourites which I have yet to see this year although it was first reported flowering on July 6.

THU 11 JULY

Today I went to see Dittander at the sewage works between Fishbourne and Apuldram on the shore of Fishbourne Channel where the River Lavant flows out after passing through nearby Chichester. The plants are normally centred on the landward side of the seawall bridge over the mouth of the Lavant, and current seawall repair work has caused the vegetation to be cut down in that area but plenty of plants have survived intact (and the others will no doubt regrow next year - the plant is a perennial). Several of the remaining plants could be seen pressed close against the regular fence of the sewage works where the vegetation further from it has been cut down, and others are growing just north of the cut area - all were in full flower today. Going a little further south along the seawall I found I was frequently brushing against the Corn Parsley plants which can always be found somewhere along the seawalls hereabouts, and at the seaward foot of the seawall here Sea Aster plants had just started flowering. Less exciting plants in flower were Sea Beet, Sea Couch grass and Sea Purslane. +++

On my way to Fishbourne I stopped at Cutmill Creek (top of Bosham Channel) and found Himalayan Balsam growing beside the small stream that enters the harbour here (where it flows between gardens north of the road). South of the road is a field that for years has been abandoned to thistles and teasels - here Lesser Burdock was in bud (no flowers open) but the most interesting find was a single large clump of what I think must be Garden Solomon's Seal in the centre of this field.

WED 10 JULY

Coming back to the Lathyrus hirsutus site at Broadmarsh (see notes for yesterday) I not only found Lathyrus nissolia also flowering there but also the first open flowers on Fleabane, co-occurring with another first sighting of Fleabane flowers by Richard Carpenter in Botley Woods where (probably in the ponds at Whiteley) he found Lesser Water Parsnip in flower.

Today's sunshine was a great contrast to Monday's rain when the Havant Wildlife Group spent their evening squelching around Brook Meadow in search of plants. They managed to produce an impressive list of grasses, sedges and rushes which included a hybrid Fescue that is still under investigation as to its identity and another example of the Carex binervis that was a surprising discovery in the meadow last year. One item in the list that intrigues me is Prickly Lettuce - for about a week I have been stopping off to look at the flowerheads on this plant wherever I find it and none has yet had a flower open - maybe one did open its flowers in the rain especially for the group visit but I suspect this plant has been given the benefit of the doubt as 'very nearly flowering'.

TUE 09 JULY

This evening I paid a brief visit to the Broadmarsh slipway to count the summer Swan flock (see Bird News for comment on 75 Swans that have 'gone missing') and then wandered along the bank of the Hermitage Stream towards the Harts Farm Way Bridge. Here Stone Parsley was in bud, but not in flower, and I found a good specimen of the big version of Greater Plantain (Plantago major major) with a very broad leaf having the full nine veins and a flower spike (or

scape) approaching the maximum 40cm - with many open flowers! Nearby Italian Ryegrass was flowering. Having seen these unimpressive plants I thought I would vary my return route by climbing the 'Broadmarsh Mountain' (old rubbish tip closed and capped with earth at least 20, maybe 30 years ago) at whose foot I was walking. Coming up through the trees planted around the base of the hill into the open rough grassland at the top I decided to leave the mown path around the edge of the area and walk through the rough grass to the very top of the hill, but before I reached the top I came on a cluster of very pretty, scrambling pea plants with red and white flowers that I could not identify - my first thought was Narrow Leaved Everlasting Pea. As there were quite a few plants I took a specimen home and got out my books from which it soon became clear that this was *Lathyrus hirsutus* or Hairy Vetchling, marked as very rare in the Hampshire Flora and, by Stace, as a casual of very scattered occurrence in England. +++

Going back to check the site in daylight on July 10 I found the plants looking very well established and covering an area of between 12 and 20 square metres, mainly in one cluster measuring 12 paces from end to end but with scattered plants around, and this gave me the impression that this was not just a one year wonder casual but had been spreading and establishing itself over several years.

If anyone wants to find the plants go to the grassland on top of this hill (one good path up starts from the slipway area, another from the junction of Harts Farm Way and the slipway approach road) and then to the extreme north east corner of the open land. Here you will find a stout marker post where another path comes up through the trees from somewhere near the road bridge over the Hermitage Stream. Now walk south along the east edge of the open area to a second stout marker post which you can see from the first one. At this second post you walk uphill through the rough grass for 50 paces and you will find you are close to the plants (they will probably be a little to the right of you if you followed the line of least resistance through the vegetation. (The most direct route is indicated by projecting a line through the corner of the marker post furthest from the hill top and then through the corner nearest the hill top)

MON 08 JULY

Peter Whitcomb drove from Brighton to see the famous Hampshire Red Helleborine yesterday when Hampshire Wildlife Trust had the last of their three open days for viewing the one flowering spike - Peter says it was worth the journey, especially as he managed to take in a few more unusual plants in West Sussex on the way. In Peter's own words he and a friend {{ decided to check out scarce plants we hadn't seen before. Couldn't find Spreading Bellflower in the NT lupin field near Rogate, but had better luck with Small Teasel beside Swanbourne Lake (alongside some scraggy Pendulous flowered Helleborines and some Wild Madder); Dwarf Elder just coming out near Cocking, Common Wintergreen after an extensive search at Midhurst Common and lastly Wild Liquorice near Bury. }} A good day's outing despite the rain, and this list prompted me to venture the quarter mile from my front door to check the Dwarf Elder on the banks of the disused Hayling Billy rail track through Havant where it is now in full flower. I prefer to call this plant Danewort and to tell people that the pink tinge in the white (elder like) flower umbels represents the blood of the maidens raped and pillaged by the Danes of long ago. I know it is uncommon and widely scattered, and believe the nearest colonies to this one in Havant are at Mottisont on the Test and East Harting just north of the Downs but I did not know it could also be found at Cocking. +++

Other plants in Peter's list which caught my attention were those at Swanbourne Lake at Arundel. Small Teasel used to be found by the River Ems at Racton and by the River Wallington in the White Dell Farm area between the M27 and Boarhunt but I have not heard of it being found at either site for many years. The other two plants at Swanbourne news to me. I can well believe that the Pendulous flowered Helleborine (*Epipactis phyllanthes*) is scruffy but I doubt it is as scruffy as plants I once found in a tidal creek at the Lower Test Marshes - they had clearly been submerged by the tide and carried a thick layer of mud on each leaf surface! Perhaps we will soon hear of more handsome plants growing by the Itchen just south of central Winchester where some fine specimens used to grow (maybe not flower as this plant usually contents itself with self fertilisation without ever opening its flowers!). The Wild Madder interests me even more as it is something I have never seen (though I gather it is not uncommon along the North

Solent shore both on the mainland and the Isle of Wight.

A much appreciated full list of the plants seen by the Havant Wildlife Group on Oxenbourne Down (south end of the Butser foothills) last Saturday starts with a five star find (my personal rating - not a national rarity) by Dave Savage of Basil Thyme. I have once seen this plant on the top of Butser and found it in several years on Chalton Down, and each time I am thrilled with the lovely blue of the flowers and the way this plant manages to survive on more or less bare chalk (rather like that other favourite of mine, Lesser Centaury). Looking at Chalton Down from the fields of Idsworth Farm recently I see that a lot more scrub clearance and scraping of the soil on the steep slope where the Basil Thyme usually grows has taken place this year and I must go and have a look at the site when the rain stops. To find it follow the line of Huckswood Lane west along the road over the rail bridge, then go straight ahead over a stile onto the down where the road to Chalton turns north. The footpath to Chalton goes northwest up the slope and the Basil Thyme is to be found at the southern end of the field you are in on the steep slope so you have to deviate from the public path but there are no fences or notices to deter you from exploring this excellent field which I think is managed under some countryside stewardship scheme though it is not a nature reserve. +++

The Oxenbourne Down flower list also has at least four other major additions to the summer scene - I picked out Lesser Burdock, Dwarf Thistle, Large Thyme and Wild Basil, but they also saw an estimated 200 Frog Orchids, Horseshoe Vetch, Thyme Leaved Sandwort, and Wall Lettuce plus Common Valerian, Heath Speedwell and Hairy Violet (what? still in flower?). Wood Sage was also on their list and was reported from Browndown by Ruchard Carpenter on this same day but, although I have not listed it previously, I think the honour of first flowering goes to Sinah Common on Hayling Island on July 4 when I tentatively identified it over the phone in response to a query from a lady who was puzzled as to the identity of a plant found that day. +++

Two other plants deserving a mention among the 126 on the Oxenbourne Down list are Wild Parsnip (this was the second find of the year after Richard Carpenter had seen it on Warsash Common last Tuesday) and that gardener's bane of a weed, Greater Plantain (aka Rat's Tail Plantain). I tend to ignore this as a flowering plant as whenever I see it it is either in tight green bud or knobbly seed with no apparent flowering in between, but today I took a close look at some in Havant and saw that at least one of the many Rat's Tails did have a few flowers showing. This year the first person to report this was Gwynne Johnson who found it in Havant Thicket on July 1 when on an evening outing with the Havant Wildlife Group. +++

INSECTS:

SUN 14 JULY

Barry Collins was at Sandy Point on Hayling today and found a colony of Bee Killer Wasps (*Philanthus triangulum*, aka Bee Wolf) active in the sandy soil - I expect he will also find them on Pilsey Island when he is next there and others will probably see them on the sandy tracks through the New Forest heaths. Also at Sandy Point Barry Collins saw 2 Small Copper butterflies but he did not spot any Graylings yet on the wing - yesterday Alan Thornbury went to Browndown at Gosport to look for Graylings but was disappointed (though he did see up to 9 Small Copper and a good list of other butterflies).

I chose to visit Portsdown on this sunny hot morning with the hope of seeing Chalkhill Blue and I was not disappointed though just two males was not a high score. Meadow Brown were also in short supply but there were quite a few Marbled White and Gatekeeper (at least a dozen of each). On the ground I spotted a large Burnet moth caterpillar, too big for this year's new generation, and this reminded me that some of these do go on for a second year as caterpillars. +++

I have yet to see one of the new brood of Holly Blue that are now out but I see that since Andrew Brookes find of the first of them on July 10 they have been seen in the Bognor area by Lawrence Holloway on both July 10 and 11 and today one was in Brian Fellows' garden at Emsworth.

SAT 13 JULY

The first Purple Emperor that I have heard of was seen today by Mike Duffy at Bentley Wood on

the Hampshire/Wiltshire border near West Tytherley. Disappointingly for Mike this beauty had been reported at Bentley Wood since July 6. +++

Here in the Havant area Barry Collins was in the Staunton Country Park just north of Havant, and after seeing around 80 Marbled Whites in the Thicket Lawn grassland he walked up the Long Avenue, lined with mature oaks, and counted 6 White Admirals against only 2 Silver Washed Fritillaries plus 7 Purple Hairstreaks.

At the IBM North Harbour (Portsmouth) site today I came on a few Marbled White and several Green Veined Whites (including one mating pair). I didn't see a single damselfly round the lake but did come on Common Darter, Southern Hawker, Black-tailed Skimmer and Broad-bodied Chaser dragonflies

FRI 12 JULY

Another good selection of newcomers to the moth and butterfly scene starts with the first summer brood Holly Blue seen by Andrew Brookes in his Portchester garden on July 10. Other reports of butterflies seem to indicate that fresh broods of all three common White species are now out, but these are less easy to pick out with overlap from long lasting spring individuals. Derek Mills observation yesterday of 5 Large Whites at Bentley Station Meadow, with singles of both Small and Green-veined Whites, are part of my evidence. Among the moths a clear case of second brood is the taking of a Nut-tree Tussock in Winchester on July 9 by Simon Woolley who also had the first Beautiful Carpet last night and the first Dwarf Cream Wave on July 9. The only other first for the year was The Fern, taken last night by Alan Dawson in Southampton (who thinks it may be using the Clematis montana in his garden as caterpillar food - normally it feeds on the wild Clematis of chalk land hedges). Two runners up with seconds for the year were Barry Collins with The Clay taken at Havant last night (first at Titchfield Haven on June 22) and Simon Woolley with the second Dun-bar following Mike Duffy's first on July 6. +++

Other reports for today come from Richard Carpenter at Titchfield Haven where he saw a Painted Lady - until recently there have been so many of these reported that they were hardly newsworthy but now they are once more becoming unusual.

From Brook Meadow in Emsworth Brian Fellows tells me of a still active nest of Peacock caterpillars in the nettles - with so many Commas already out I was wondering if the Peacocks had failed to produce a summer brood but it now seems that I must be patient.

Dragonfly reports are few at the moment but I see that Richard Carpenter had both Golden-ringed and Emperor in the Brownwich area yesterday, when John Goodspeed had a Common Darter on Catherington Down.

THU 11 JULY

My own sightings today included singles of Small Tortoiseshell and Gatekeeper, and my first Cinnabar moth caterpillars on Ragwort.

WED 10 JULY

Brian Fellows enjoyed today's sunshine in Brook Meadow at Emsworth, seeing a fresh Small Copper (only the second report of this butterfly's summer brood following a first sighting on Stockbridge Common last Saturday - July 6) and a total of 12 Small Tortoiseshell plus a couple of Ringlets. Brian also found a Squash Bug (Coreus marginatus) in the meadow area.

Here in Havant the first butterfly for more than a week appeared in my garden today - a White of some sort - and in the afternoon, at Broadmarsh, I had a fresh male Green Veined White and my first Gatekeeper as well as Meadow Browns.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 14 JULY

Grazing of some compartments of the Portsdown Hill SSSI in the past year has left a few cowpats and when I was there this morning the majority of the well dried cowpats I found in compartment 3 (above the Paulsgrove Chalk Pit) had one or more bright white toadstools growing from them, many of the caps having spilt at the rim, allowing segments of the cap to curl up. I'm pretty sure these were Coprinus niveus.

Yesterday when the Havant Wildlife Group were walking the Hilsea Lines at Portsmouth they saw a large Terrapin on the banks of the Hilsea Moat - another pet that has outgrown its welcome and been put out to live off the wildlife of the area.

FRI 12 JULY

A sighting of a single Common Lizard at Emsworth's Brook Meadow today does not beat the total of 89 seen by the A27 in Sussex (see entry for July 6) but does remind me that now is the time to start looking for the tiny black baby Lizards that are born from mid-summer on.

MON 08 JULY

Kevin Stouse has just returned from a couple of weeks exploring Iceland, and he tells me that the first thing he saw on his return to the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth was a family of Foxes on the lawn close to the main reception entrance (and overlooked by building on two sides). Foxes have always been present on this site but it seems that they have recently become more skilled in taking larger birds as they seem to have eliminated all the young of the Canada Geese (hurray) and the Swan pair they have had little impact on rabbit population

WEEK 27 JULY 1 – 7 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SAT 06 JULY

Brian Fellows counted 112 Mute Swans in the Fishbourne Channel today - the same number seen there on Thursday by Tony Gutteridge. Today there were 20 Black-tailed Godwit and a few Curlew along the shore here. In the evening I made a short visit to Langstone and saw 30 Egrets on the Wade Court night roost trees just before dusk - as the tide was high the birds had probably all come in earlier and no doubt some had already hidden themselves 'under the bed clothes' before I arrived.

Over at Titchfield Haven Peter Raby watched more than 20 Sand Martin and 40 Swallows fly out to sea, presumably intent on leaving England for warmer climes, and in Cams Bay Trevor Carpenter saw his first single autumn passage Whimbrel.

FRI 05 JULY

The first Common Gull was back at Titchfield Haven today, and the first six autumn passage Sand Martins arrived there yesterday, according to Richard Carpenter who also records the presence of a pair of Common Terns with two chicks - Richard says this is only the second time that these Terns have bred successfully at the Haven. One Common Sandpiper was also present yesterday.

THU 04 JULY

Wickham Common (east of Wickham in the Meon Valley) is less than 1 kilometre south of John Shillitoe's home so six raptors seen there in two hours this morning were almost a garden tick for John. He has come to expect Kestrel, Sparrowhawk and Buzzard to appear whenever he goes there, with regular Peregrine sightings, but today he added both Hobby and Red Kite to the normal list.

I have reported sightings of the juveniles of most of our breeding species recently, but not until today had I heard of Stonechat young - a family group were seen by Lawrence Holloway at Ambersham Common (where Tree Pipit, Willow Warbler and Dartford Warbler were still singing). +++

At Catherington Down in the early afternoon the shrill calls of young raptors were heard from several different trees as a family party of Kestrels moved around the area - I had several views of one of the parent birds but as seems usual not a glimpse of the very noisy youngsters which seemed to move invisibly from tree to tree. Returning to the down in the early evening the raucous calls of the young Kestrels were replaced by the more musical plaintive calls of a Bullfinch family. In the afternoon sunshine Yellowhammer song was regularly heard, one Whitethroat gave out a short burst, and there were occasional songs from Blackbird, Wren, Dunnock, Greeninch, Linnet, Woodpigeon and Stock Dove, and coming back in the early evening a couple of Song Thrushes were very noisy. At no time did I hear a Skylark. Have Chaffinch ceased singing altogether now?

Also on Tuesday Brian Fellows made his usual tour of Portsmouth sites, and the two highlights this week were, firstly, the absence of the Eastney Lake Swan family (probably they have come to no further harm but the cygnets are old enough to be taken away by their mother to a safer place than Eastney Lake). Secondly Brian tells us that the summer moult flock of Canada Geese at Baffins pond is now up to 196 birds (only one higher previous summer flock - that was

205 birds in 1995).

Back in Emsworth Brian noted an adult Lesser Blackback had returned to Peter Pond - unlike the Common Gulls which virtually all leave us for the breeding season, several of these have remained in our harbours but I guess this marks a similar return of these birds to the southern harbours.

WED 03 JULY

Both Richard Carpenter and John Shillitoe visited Titchfield Haven today and saw the two parent Avocet with their two chicks which Richard says are thriving. Interestingly neither of these two reports mention the other Avocets which seemed to be a regular feature of the Haven until the new family arrived - have they flown off in disgust at being upstaged? One other bird which John mentions is the ever-present Barn Owl, which was hunting at 5:30pm. In a separate message today commenting on daytime hunting by Barn Owls Adrian Martin questions whether the habit of coming out in broad daylight is restricted to those periods when the Barn Owls have to work extra hard to feed their young. Adrian says that last February he was in Norfolk and regularly saw them out several times a day then, and says that local birders did not remark on that as being uncommon. My own guess is that Barn Owl behaviour does not differ much from that of any other raptor - when they (or their offspring) are hungry they go hunting, otherwise they sit around and save energy (though clearly the owl's eyesight and instinct enable it to hunt in the dark, meaning even less daytime activity in normal circumstances). The HWT website has a short report from Farlington Marshes which tells of a White Stork which flew west over Langstone Harbour at midday on June 27. No doubt it was reported on the pagers but this is the first I have heard of it.

TUE 02 JULY

A 'new one for the books' was reported by Trevor who saw six Egrets day roosting in trees above the Lysees carpark which overlooks the damp continuation of Fareham creek west of the Delme viaduct. I take this to be another sign of the return of Egrets to our area after the breeding season, including the arrival of birds that have not been here before and so have no fixed preferences for roosts, using any likely trees that see during the shakedown period before their habits become more fixed. Probably another sign of this settling down period was the observation today, by Ian Thirlwell, of five Egrets on the Langstone Harbour mud off Milton Common.

MON 01 JULY

With short summer nights and up to six hungry youngsters making non-stop demands for food for up to 9 weeks before they leave the nest, Barn Owl parents have a hard time finding the necessary food supplies, and I was aware that they can often be seen hunting well before dark in the evening and up to mid-morning but I was surprised to see in a message from David Thelwell that a pair in the Romsey area have recently been seen hunting regularly between 11am and 2pm (when only mad dogs and Englishmen normally leave the shade of buildings). I have also noticed this summer more reports than usual of daytime Barn Owl sightings at Titchfield Haven (where Richard Carpenter saw one, and a Cuckoo, today) but have assumed that these are either early morning sightings or of the male seeking peace and quiet away from the nest, but at Romsey David says both parents hunt at midday. +++

This behaviour may be less uncommon than we would think, and it could indicate either a better than usual breeding success (more chicks) or a depleted food supply, so I will not comment on whether there has been a change in Barn Owl behaviour (though I am sure we would all welcome comments from those who have more information) but I cannot resist making one comment in answer to David's question as to when they have time to sleep. Within the last year I heard that all birds and I think many other animals that need to be always on the watch for approaching predators, rest the two halves of their brain alternately, so they are never more than half asleep - I'm sure you will have seen an apparently sleeping duck watching you with one eye. +++

Recent reports of Peregrines breeding in Southampton, Chichester and at Brighton has caused some people to ask why these birds seem to have neglected the opportunity to live off the feral pigeon population of Portsmouth. John Clark today suggests that it may well be that birders in Portsmouth have in fact overlooked their presence - John says that a number of reports he has

received in the past few years makes him think it quite likely that they are breeding somewhere in the area. Maybe the reason for there being no general knowledge of their presence is once more the Official Secrets Act which prevents people from reporting things that they see on MoD property ... +++

Good news from David Parker at his Forestside (Rowlands Castle) home this weekend is that the Spotted Flycatcher which greeted him on his return from Peru is still present and almost certainly has a nesting partner nearby. Other birds breeding in the area, as shown by their young appearing in the garden, include both Green and Great Spotted Woodpeckers, and Buzzard (though here the evidence is a group of three overhead).

Another species which David hardly ever sees over his garden is Lapwing, and so he was pleased to have four flying over recently, but I suspect this was just a chance sighting of birds en route from distant breeding grounds back to the coast rather than any indication of local birds (though a few did nest quite near to him last year, in fields beside the Finchdean Road leading into Rowlands Castle).

PLANTS:

SAT 06 JULY

Thicket Lawn is an ungrazed area of unimproved grassland open to the public as part of the Staunton Country Park on the north fringe of Havant, the Lawn lying between the Leigh Park gardens Lake and the Leigh Park housing. Broad grass paths are maintained for people to walk around the area, but between these paths there are in the summer time vast tracts of waist high, flower and butterfly rich grass. In the past I have waded out into a patch of Knapweed and many other flowers several acres in extent and felt as if I was in a small boat in the middle of the sea. John Goodspeed was there today and remarks particularly on the freshly flowering Sneezewort and the colourful Marsh Woundwort, but was most interested in a clump of what appears (from a photo) to be genuine Yellow Loosestrife. I recommend this place, on a warm summers day, to anyone interested in flowers or butterflies (let alone the occasional Grass Snake or perhaps a Hobby flying over). +++

One more new flowering plant in the Havant area today was Lax Flowered Sea Lavender which I found close to the east wall of the Langstone Mill building - the Common Sea Lavender is easy to see here but the Lax Flowered (although closer to the sea wall) is not so easy to spot.

THU 04 JULY

At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter noted the flowering of four new plants. Marsh Mallow is of special interest to me as its flowering at Titchfield tells me it is time to make my summer pilgrimage around the Cobnor peninsula in Chichester Harbour to see it flowering under the shoreline oak wood there (just west of Cobnor Point) and reminds me that it will soon be too late to make a similar visit to the Fishbourne Channel to see Dittander flowering where the River Lavant reaches the harbour alongside the sewage works. At Titchfield the second new flowering was of Hemp Agrimony which has had pinkish buds for some time (this reminds me that a Teazel in my garden has produced the first band of mauve florets in the past few days). Also out by the Meon were Common Water-Plantain and the rare Parsley Water-Dropwort that I find difficult to separate from the much commoner (in this area) Corky-fruited Water Dropwort.

In past years I have been shown Frog orchids growing on the banks of the lower lynchets at Catherington Down, but they were generally small and inconspicuous in longish grass, and it is a good many years since I saw one there at all, so I was delighted when this afternoon, having searched the lynchets to no avail, I suddenly found my self looking at the biggest and best specimen I have ever seen in the middle of open grassland at the very bottom of the down far from the lynchets. If anyone else wants to share my pleasure they should go to the little used northwest entrance to the down from the road and (as if coming in from the road) turn right at the first opportunity on a narrow path through scrub. From the turn into this path count 50 paces as you walk south along the edge of the trees. This should bring you to a smallish Hawthorn, slightly isolated from the treeline scrub, and here you turn left and take five paces east towards a slightly raised area of ground where Agrimony is growing. This should bring you to the bronze coloured orchid standing tall in very short grass and herbage - I didn't measure the

height but guess it was about 20 cm. A little further south where a path goes in among the scrub there is a lovely group of fresh Pyramidal orchids and some way further on there is a difficult to spot collection of 12 to 20 more tiny Frog orchids (2 or 3cm tall) spread out very close to the well beaten track. +++

Continuing south very nearly to the main gateway onto the road you come to the Dropwort which was at its best with many red buds and creamy white open flowers and when I was there in the afternoon I continued south to the gateway into the southern section of the reserve where, by turning left and walking through long grass close to the fence between the main gate and the second way through, I came on a cluster of Meadow Barley. On the lynchets which attract most attention there was a great display of Rock Rose, quite a lot of Squinancywort, a good few small plants of Clustered Bellflower and two or three Round-headed Rampion just beginning to uncurl their 'horns'. Other plants deserving a mention were Wild Thyme, Fairy Flax, Eyebright, Milkwort, Small and Field Scabious, and against the northern fence line there is a bright patch of Rosebay Willowherb. Not yet in flower is Restharrow, but I found it easy to prove its identity by the strong smell of sweating horses (not everyone seems to detect this smell but for me I can smell it on a hot day without going near the plants)

On June 28 I passed on the invitation from Hampshire Wildlife Trust to visit the one of the county's rarest plants - the Red Helleborine - and this evening I asked John Durnell what was on show at these open days. I gather that there was just one flowering plant, but the good news is that it is in a new place and gives hope that other flowering spikes may in the future appear at the site. The plant originally found in 1986 by Keith Turner may well have flowered its last after giving annual performances for at least 15 years.

WED 03 JULY

A short walk along the Hayling Island shore of Chichester Harbour entrance found Sea Holly starting to flower as expected and also gave me the white flowers and out-turned calyx teeth of Rough Clover on the Black Point Causeway. At the furthest point of my walk (north west corner of the Black Point sailing club site) I found one plant of Prickly Saltwort not yet in flower, and back on the Sandy Point east shore there was a great show of Common Centaury, Sea Bindweed, Sea Spurge and Yellow Horned Poppy with several plants of the very rare Sea Knotgrass in flower (two new plants have appeared at the southern end of the outer fence on its outer side). A great mass of Sea Sandwort had gone to seed, and on a spoil tip just south of the Lifeboat Station a mass of Bugloss was in flower (*Anchusa*, not the Viper's Bugloss). Mealy, upturned, triangular leaves of one prostrate plant on the shingle were, I feel sure, on a plant of Babbington's Orache.

Although I did not note it at Black Point Sticky Groundsel is a fairly common plant on shingle and near the sea whereas the lookalike Heath Groundsel is more common in woodland and on heaths away from the shore. There is no fixed association of these species with sea and inland sites - just with soil type (I have found Sticky Groundsel growing by chance in pavement cracks of my own road here in Havant!) and although they look alike it is easy to separate them by feel. These remarks are apropos of a find today by Richard Carpenter of Heath Groundsel at Titchfield Haven - not it's normal dry heathland situation.

TUE 02 JULY

Two of my favourite summer plants had their first flowerings observed today - Round-headed Rampion was seen by John Goodspeed on Catherington Down (along with Meadow Cranesbill in the Parsonage Fields that lie between the Catherington Lane carpark and the down proper), and Wild Parsnip (a favourite more for its smell than for its general look, though I like an umbellifer to show a bit of spirit and come out with yellow rather than white flowers) which was seen on Warsash Common by Richard Carpenter with Tutsan (another first) plus yet more Grass Vetchling and a colony of Goat's Rue which I was not aware of (are the flowers blue or white or mixed I wonder - on Hayling they are blue at the Oysterbeds site and pure white on North Common). I can't find Warsash Common named on any of my maps but assume it to be the large open area between Church Road and Fleetend.

MON 01 JULY

The first report of Purple Loosestrife for the summer comes today from Richard Carpenter, who saw it in the Meon Canal alongside Titchfield Haven along with Yellow Loosestrife and Greater

Willowherb. On Saturday Richard was in West Walk woods near Wickham and enjoyed the sight of Rosebay Willowherb which started to flower in the middle of last week, and he remarks on the mass of Giant Horsetail which he saw there. While common enough in the New Forest and north east Hampshire the Hants Flora distribution map shows it as present in only two tetrads of south east Hampshire, and I only know it from the Warblington Castle Farm where it is abundant. I wonder if it is underrecorded in our area as the distribution map shows a mass of it in SU 50, ending abruptly at the border of this 10km square with none on the SU 60 side of the border - that suggests to me that the recorder for SU 60 was not interested in Horsetails rather than absence of habitat for it.

INSECTS:

SAT 06 JULY

Several long lists of butterfly and moth sightings arrived in my in-box when I settled down to write these notes and I apologize in advance if I have missed something in the hurry to get the facts down for the deadline set by the need to get the notes to the Monday meeting of the Havant Wildlife Group. The two special observations of butterflies which caught my eye were the first four White-letter Hairstreaks of the year, seen by Tony Wilson near Hove in West Sussex, and two fresh Small Coppers which must be the start of a new summer brood, seen by Mike Duffy on Stockbridge Common. Both these observers also noted both Small and Essex Skippers and their first Gatekeepers, and Tony had 12 fresh Commas (is it surprising that no one has yet seen fresh Peacocks among the Tortoiseshells, Commas and Red Admirals?). Brimstones and all three common White species are still showing. +++

Peter Eeles has been seeing Purple Hairstreak since June 23 but that takes nothing away from the pleasure which Tony Gutteridge felt when he saw his first at close range when he was at Salterns Copse on the shore of the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester on July 4.

Barry Collins had his moth trap on in Havant last night and took two moths which were his firsts for the year (The Lackey and Buff Arches) but both had already been reported earlier from the Titchfield Haven trap, while the Swallow-tailed moth in his list had already been taken by him on June 26.

The only two dragonfly sightings mentioned today are a Common Darter emerging from Tony Wilson's garden pond in the Hangleton area of Hove and a Southern Hawker seen closely at rest by the Havant Wildlife Group on Oxenbourne Down below Butser Hill (and not far from the dragonfly rich pond at the Queen Elizabeth Country Park centre). I gather there was some discussion as to whether it was Common or Southern Hawker, and this was settled by close inspection, but if you do not get a close-up the chances are that it will be a Southern Hawker in our area - it is much more widespread and catholic in its choice of habitat. The Common Hawker is not common in much of Southern and Eastern England and prefers acid heathland habitat.

FRI 05 JULY

More recent news from Titchfield Haven comes from Richard Carpenter who was at the reserve this morning and found the encouraging sight of a web of Peacock caterpillars plus a single woolly bear Drinker moth caterpillar

THU 04 JULY

Brian Fellows was in the Hollybank Woods along the northern edge of Emsworth today and, to his delight, found a White Admiral resting on low vegetation in the sunlight. Earlier he had found three Small Skippers on what was once the lawn of Holly Lodge - also here were Six-spot Burnet moths and a couple of Ringlets. Holly Lodge was razed to the ground a few years ago after a fire but it has an interesting history - I'm afraid the 'facts' stored in my memory are probably not as accurate as they should be but I understand that at one point this Lodge was the home of the Coachman to Sir Philip Dimmock-White of the Southleigh/Leydene estate, and I also understand that when he was made redundant he moved to London and became famous as the Queen's head coachman. +++

Despite a sunny afternoon there was nothing special to be seen among the butterflies on Catherington Down - best were the Marbled Whites and many Ringlets, beyond them I only saw Meadow Browns, one Large Skipper and some small white pyralid moths in the grass. In

the evening, however, when the Friends of Catherington Down met for their annual barbecue, John Durnell produced an interesting moth which had come to his trap on north Hayling the previous evening (and was to be released there this evening). John said it was a Broad-bordered Yellow Underwing but when we saw it it was dormant so we could only see the closed forewings. These would normally be a dullish light brown with lighter bands across them, but this specimen was a beautiful mossy green colour with three whitish bars across them. Presumably a very fresh young specimen but very pretty to see. +++

Later in the evening, listening to the radio, I heard about ideas for radar to be used to detect invading swarms of migrant insects so that counter measures could be taken to prevent damage to crops. You might think that Locusts would be chosen to illustrate the value of such technology but I was surprised to hear the example chosen was the Diamond-backed moth which I did not realise was a serious pest in many countries - if I heard right it's main target was cabbage crops but perhaps those who know about such things will tell us more.

Emsworth's Brook Meadow had its first four Ringlets for this summer flying yesterday (July 3) when Brian Fellows was there. The Small Tortoiseshell count was down to just two (I hope there are plenty of larval nests in the nettle beds there) and only 1 Meadow Brown was seen. +++

MON 01 JULY

The only item of news for today is a sighting of a Common Darter by the Meon Canal Path south of Titchfield by Richard Carpenter, but a lot of sightings from the weekend have just arrived and the major news item is the appearance of Gatekeeper butterflies yesterday (June 30) in both Hampshire (John Goodspeed had a couple on Portsdown) and Sussex (Barry Collins had his first on Thorney Island).

A report of special interest from Andrew Howard at Petworth shows that Hornets can and do sting when really provoked - his son has just been stung on the foot by a Hornet which happened to have got into his bedclothes, and a number of things need to be said about this. Firstly, the sting is no worse than that of a Wasp (Andrew's son suffered no severe or permanent damage and I have been reminded that one person was stung last summer when a group working to clear vegetation from Brook Meadow at Emsworth disturbed a small group of them - there was no special comment about that sting being anything special). +++

The second is that I stick to my statement that Queen Hornets cannot sting (the sting is a modified ovipositor which is only found in the worker females - the Queen's ovipositor is used for egg-laying, not stinging). If anyone can disprove this I will retract my view but I am pretty sure I am right. Since it is my belief that Hornets are still building their nests and have not yet hatched any worker females (not at all sure if this is true) then perhaps the unusual number of Hornet sightings recently means that a number of last year's workers have survived the winter, and maybe it was one of these that did the damage. +++

A star item in the news is a count of 28 Small Tortoiseshell in the Winchester area by Dave Pearson to win the 'highest count' record back for Hampshire - though by a bit of bending of the rules as Dave covered quite a large area on his bike. Dave does say that the majority of these were over a field full of mauve poppies, which I think can only be Opium Poppies, so maybe the comeback made by this species this year is attributable to the a breeding programme organised by the Police to use these insects (like sniffer dogs) to locate the fields where these poppies are being grown as an illegal crop. +++

Going back to sightings made last Saturday (June 29) I am most intrigued by a sighting of something which must be commonplace but little seen by those who are not devoted to the study of lepidoptera - the sight of an Orange Tip pupa attached to the stem of a Garlic Mustard plant. Both the plant and the butterfly are common enough, but what I did not realise is that the butterfly spends a good nine months of the year as a pupa attached to the plant stem. One would imagine that few of them would survive in such an exposed and easily destroyed place, but clearly thousands do so each year. I am indebted to Rupert Broadway, via the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website, for this observation and for Rupert's sighting of a tatty male Brimstone still on the wing, possibly eleven months after it emerged (I find it much easier to understand the survival of adult insects which can find hibernation places more easily, and can move if one site is damaged, than the survival of the Orange Tip pupae). Rupert's sightings of

twelve butterfly species on Stockbridge Down included Dark Green Fritillaries, Small Tortoiseshell, Comma and Small Heath as well as many Meadow Brown, Marbled White and Ringlet. +++

A fresh Comma and a Red Admiral were in Richard Carpenter's Hill Head garden on Saturday before he headed off to the West Walk Woods in the Meon Valley to see one White Admiral and a Southern Hawker Dragonfly. +++

Finally for this update I have news of a Lesser Stag Beetle seen on Portsdown by John Goodspeed back on June 24.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 06 JULY

Walking on Oxenbourne Down, close to Butser Hill near Petersfield, today the Havant Wildlife Group came on three Adders, not remarkable here in itself but one of them was a very large female which was lying flat on the ground as if a roller had gone over it. I guess it was maximising its basking surface to re-charge its batteries after cloud and rain but I did wonder if it might have just given birth. I think that is unlikely as they normally have their young (15 to 20 baby adders can be born to one female) in August or September, but if this one had just given birth early she might well have looked 'flattened' but I'm pretty sure the young would have been seen as she moved off lethargically. (Possibly not, as the young are said to hide from danger under her body, and maybe they wriggled off under her).

MON 01 JULY

The first of the fairly common but poisonous Brown Rollrim toadstools were seen yesterday (June 30) by John Goodspeed on Portsdown, while Brian Fellows saw a less common toadstool at the base of the trunk of an old Oak tree in meadows by the River Ems. This was Inonotus dryadeus, and was a young specimen not yet developed into its full bracket shape but identifiable by the drops of reddish liquid oozing from it (not to be confused with the Beefsteak fungus that also grows on oak and is edible).

WEEK 26 JUNE 24 – 30 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 30 JUNE

Little news so far for today but at Titchfield Haven Simon Woolley saw two Roseate Terns which have probably been present since Friday (June 28) as singles were reported on that date and on June 29 by John Shillitoe. While thinking of the Haven I see from the official Haven website that at least two of the recent sightings of summering Brent there have been within the reserve on the scrapes - I had only heard of them at seen 'at Titchfield Haven' and naturally assumed that they were seen on the shoreline - I assume that if they have been in the reserve they may well be hiding away there during their moult.

SAT 29 JUNE

Barry Collins saw a Kingfisher back at the Thorney Little Deeps today. This is a regular spot to see them in the winter and I guess this is a bird just arrived at the coast from elsewhere, but I recall several reports of sightings of a pair in and around Emsworth marina and the Slipper Mill Pond in late February (two at the Slipper Mill on both Feb 24 and 25 and one at Brook Meadow on March 3) so it is possible that there has been local breeding. Coming into Hampshire Barry saw four Med Gulls on the mud off the Royal Oak pub at Langstone (2 adults and 2 first summer).

A long list of what seem to be autumn passage birds were seen by Barry Collins around Thorney and Pilsley Islands. Barry's list includes 200 Redshank, 120 Lapwing, 60 Grey Plover, 45 Black-tailed Godwit, 7 Knot, 5 Dunlin, 3 Bar-tailed Godwit, 1 Green Sandpiper and a Turnstone. Finally for today Gwynne Johnson tells me that a family group of Bullfinch were in thick yew cover in her garden at Soberton this afternoon - she only saw the male but heard much calling from other members of the family. Earlier she had been with the Havant Wildlife Group in Wildham Wood (near the north foot of Bow Hill above Kingley Vale) and had seen Treecreeper among the other birds.

FRI 28 JUNE

Birders in the Hamble area of the Solent shore have for several weeks kept quiet to protect two pairs of nesting Avocet from unwanted attention but I understand that we are now free to tell a part of the story of Hampshire's first recorded breeding by these birds after an extraordinary occurrence last Monday (June 24). That was the day when two parent Avocets and two chicks were seen on the shore outside the Titchfield Haven reserve and were led into the safety of the Haven by rangers (I hear they carried the chicks, making sure the parents could see them at all times as they followed across the road and into the reserve). Knowing that there had been regular sightings of Avocet at the Haven recently I assumed that the report of two chicks and six adults at the Haven which came from Mike Rafter on Tuesday meant that they had nested at the Haven, but I now understand that these youngsters had in fact come from a nest some six kilometres along the coast and must have walked or swum all the way to the Haven unaided. From what I hear it seems that at least one chick of this brood perished before arrival at the Haven (my guess would be that it was taken by a fox and the upheaval caused by that event was the trigger for the remaining birds forced march in search of safety), but I have no knowledge of what happened to a second nest in the same area. +++

Other news from Titchfield Haven for today is that the four Turnstone are once again present, as are 65 Black-tailed Godwit and 2 Kingfishers. In the reeds Bearded Tits can occasionally be seen or heard but on the little information which I have it sounds as if there are more of these birds at Farlington Marshes than at the Haven or Thorney Island this summer.

Tony Gutteridge and I this morning made the last of this spring's ten visits to map the breeding birds at Warblington Farm for the BTO Common Bird Census, and there was some good news as we both saw one of the adult Little Owls and Tony saw one juvenile in the same area. We also saw juvenile Pied Wagtails to show that the only pair in the area had succeeded in raising young, but the sight of four Skylarks landing as pairs in two different parts of a big Maize field brings no feeling of confidence that they will raise young. On the shore a few Curlew and Lapwing were present as they return from breeding and one very unexpected bird was a singing Garden Warbler heard and seen by Tony who also had a Grey Wagtail in the cress beds (first sighting on the farm this year so it presumably is also a bird wandering after the breeding season). +++

More returning waders in Sussex today included a Wood Sandpiper at Pulborough Brooks as well as both Common and Green Sandpipers there and elsewhere. +++

Back in the Emsworth area Brian Fellows tells me that there are now 108 Swans in and around Emsworth harbour and ponds, and he expects this figure to increase during July.

Another note from Barry Collins assures me that the Thorney Island Little Deeps Swan pair do still have all six cygnets. When I saw them the other day one parent was with four cygnets at the far end of the open water (where the Coot flock is bulding up with at least two dozen present) but as I was leaving the other Swan started to emerge from the reeds at the far end and no doubt the other cygnets were hidden in those reeds. +++

A note from Mike Bending who lives in the heavily built up area north of Waterlooville tells of a busy bird table there as a Nuthatch comes to take sunflower seed every ten minutes or so. Mike says it first appeared two or three days ago and was shy at first but is now quite at home - Nuthatch are not usually shy so perhaps this is a young bird just learning the ropes.

Finally for today a plea for any sightings or other news of a Cockatiel (with a blue ring on one leg) recently lost in the Havant area. The bird answers to the name of Pepsi, has the usual light grey and yellow colouring with a yellow crest, and is only a year old. If you have any news at all that might help the bird's owner to recapture it please email Myra at internet2000@ntlworld.com or get in touch with me and I will pass on the details

THU 27 JUNE

An exciting sight was of a female Montagu's Harrier seen briefly by Doug Robertson over fields near the Wallington River as it winds around the north west of Portsdown Hill. Presumably this was a wandering non-breeding bird, but hopefully that was not the case with a Stone Curlew seen today by David Parker in west Hampshire where a Monty's would have been a more expected sight.

Early this morning David heard the purring of a Turtle Dove in his own garden at Forestside on the

north edge of Stansted Forest. +++

Towards the end of May there was a spate of reports of Nightingales still singing when they would normally be quietening down, but they were in normal breeding territories. Today another report of one singing, heard in the central New Forest, comes from Jonathan Bills. My guess would be that this is a failed breeder that has left its first choice of territory and is desperately seeking company anywhere it happens to touch down. In the second week of June 2000 Kevin Stouse and others living on the eastern fringe of Havant heard a full throated Nightingale for several days in a place where it had not been heard in May, and similarly in 1998 two Wood Warblers arrived in the Southleigh Forest (not a normal site for them) on May 29 and sang regularly until June 10). (PS the Garden Warbler singing on Warblington Farm on June 28 must also fall into this category) +++

WED 26 JUNE

Mike Rafter visited Titchfield Haven today where three Green Sandpiper were back and a Turtle Dove was purring but his main news was of a sudden increase in the Avocet population with six adults seen and maybe others present.

At the Broadmarsh slipway where the Hermitage Stream enters Langstone Harbour a single Swan with seven very young cygnets has been present since the beginning of this week (I think Tony Gutteridge saw them on June 24) and I saw them today. Can anyone be sure of their origin? They are not from Budds Farm (the pair there are still present without any young that I can see) and I do not think a pair nested at Bedhampton Mill this year so my guess is that these come from a nest on North Binness island. Surprisingly I could only see 8 other Swans there where I had expected the summer moult flock to now number 50 or more - where are they? (On June 16 I counted 35 there)

Over on the Budds Farm Pools were 8 young Shelduck but only one adult. The young birds were made up of 6 almost full size young and two much smaller, suggesting that at least two nests have been successful. Interestingly these youngsters were doing what I have seen Mallards do when young and regularly diving for their food as if they were Tufted Duck. Plenty of Tufted Duck and Mallard were lazing about round the pool with the Swan pair that seem to have lost their young, and Little Grebe were heard. One pair of Moorhen had one youngster but none of the Coot or other duck had young. Later in the afternoon I was at Thorney Little Deeps where the Swan pair still have four well grown young, and at the Great Deeps where I could see at least six adult Shelduck but no young.

TUE 25 JUNE

This evening Barry Collins counted 58 Egrets night roosting on Thorney Island. These would be in addition to the 30 or so at Langstone so there is either a substantial increase this year in the number resident in June or the birds are returning earlier than usual. Prior to 2000 the highest June count on Thorney was only 13. In 2000 there were 9 present on June 2, and in 2001 there were 81 on June 30. July counts have always shown a big increase on those made in June, and by 1999 the July count on Thorney was up to 154 though it does not seem to have exceeded 141 in 2000, and in 2001, after a count of 114 on July 14, the birds dispersed to other roosts such as Tournbury on Hayling and no doubt Langstone (though we did not confirm their overnight presence there until later in the autumn). I hope we will again be having a series of co-ordinated counts throughout the Hampshire and surrounding areas, and that these counts will include inland birds. +++

Another species with increasing numbers in our area is Canada Goose, with 169 of them on Baffins Pond today when Brian Fellows made his regular visit. The 7 Barnacles with the Snow Goose and hybrid Bar-Head were also present but only 12 Tufted Duck were seen. Down at Eastney the Swan which lost her mate to dogs earlier this summer still survives with her four cygnets.

David Parker has just returned from a holiday in Peru (during which he saw three Condors over Macchu picchu) to find a Spotted Flycatcher in his garden on the northern edge of Stansted Forest. If I had the choice of garden birds I'd go for the Flycatcher every time - just imagine the effort required to build a suitable nest box for a Condor, let alone finding the right food to put on the bird table for it (and what would the neighbours think as this huge shadow drifted over them?) +++

Still on the subject of appropriate habitat for birds there has been an interesting correspondence on HOSLIST on the subject of Reed Warblers (and similar wetland breeding species such as Sedge Warbler and Reed Bunting) potentially nesting in dry habitat, particularly rape fields. David Harper from Sussex University points out that Nightingales are well known for being divided into two schools of thought about the best breeding areas (wet or dry) and our Marlpit Lane birds illustrate how some prefer to come back year after year to totally dry places. I have long been aware that Reed Warblers are quite commonly found in dry scrubland but I always understood that these were birds hanging about early in the season waiting for the reeds in which they would nest to grow high and strong enough to support their nests in wetland. +++ David Harper says {{ Both in Oxfordshire and Sussex, Sedge Warblers quite often breed in oilseed rape - I imagine Hants birds behave similarly. Reed Warblers in tillage away from reed-lined ditches are however extremely unusual I cannot recall a record that was not clearly a passage bird. I'm struck by how 'wet' passerines also accept very dry soils - Yellow Wags in Oxfordshire away from water and Reed Buntings on the Sussex Downs were once good examples. Now both species have retreated as numbers plummet. On a slightly different tack, the best Nightingale sites I know in Sussex are either nice and damp, or very dry. }}. +++

MON 24 JUNE

A dusk visit to the Langstone Pond seawall this evening gave me a count of at least 28 Little Egrets in the Wade Court roost - 19 could be seen in the trees when I arrived (and almost certainly there would have been more that I could not see) and another 9 flew in before I left. While there the full moon rose over Thorney Island and was a magnificent sight for the few moments while it was low in the sky, glowing a rich red colour through the air just above the ground. A big bat, probably a Noctule to judge by its pointed wings and high purposeful flight, was circling the area above tree top height, and at least five Song Thrushes were singing between my home and the roost - which reminds me that Tony Gutteridge heard the Langstone Pond Cetti's Warbler last week, though in general it seems to have gone quiet for the summer, leaving the Reed Warblers to chatter among themselves.

Cliff Oakley in Petersfield tells me that the first brood of young House Martins have just left their nest on his house, and the young in a second nest are about to join them.

PLANTS:

SUN 30 JUNE

This afternoon I found the Dodder on Sinah Common was in flower, with a good show of Pale Toadflax plants around the gorse on which it was feeding. Also on the common the first Large Flowered Evening-primroses were opening their yellow flowers and just one plant of Childing Pink had a pink flower (all the others were already dead-heads, hopefully with much seed - do they have seed or just 'bulbil-type' offspring?)

SAT 29 JUNE

Today's best news comes from Catherington Down where Stephen Harwood tells me the Dropwort and Clustered Bellflowers are both flowering - I guess Dropwort was out earlier than this at e.g. Martin Down but this is the first I have heard of. +++

The Havant Wildlife Group were just over the Sussex border today in the East Marden area, walking to that village through Wildham Wood from the grass carpark at the northern foot of Bow Hill/Kingley Vale. Their best finds (newcomers to the scene) were Squinancywort, Common Valerian and Nettle-leaved Bellflower. Over 100 flowering plants went on their list including Deadly Nightshade, Common Centaury, Scented Mayweed and both wet and dry ground sedges (Remote and Spiked). One Great Mullein had its statutory Mullein Moth caterpillar, two Strangalia maculata beetles, and a Nursery Tent spider (Pisaura mirabilis) still carrying her eggsac between her long legs.

In the evening, leaving Winchester Cathedral by a route not normally used by the public after a general melee on the Cathedral Green at the end of an ordination service in which my daughter Cate was made Priest after a first year as Deacon at Romsey Abbey, I found what must have been Ivy Broomrape of the bright yellow form monochroma. There were twenty or thirty very healthy looking plants at the foot of a stone wall which had presumably had ivy on it but there was not a trace of the ivy left above ground and the plants were growing from stony dry soil at

the foot of the wall. If you want to see the plants go to Colebrook street where it makes a right angled turn near the east end of the cathedral, then walk east along the street until you have nearly reached the exit from the carpark which is on your left. Here an unmarked lane goes off to your right and you follow it, past a pond on your right, to where it makes a right angle turn towards the cathedral. Continue towards the cathedral looking at the foot of the wall on your left and you will find the plants well before you come to the building through which the lane passes into the cathedral green area. I see from the Hants Flora this plant is fairly common in Winchester but it might be of interest to visitors from afar!

One very common summer flower that you have probably already seen started to flower here on June 26 but I forgot to mention it then - this is the tall yellow daisy called *Sonchus arvensis* or Perennial Sowthistle.

FRI 28 JUNE

Sea Lavender was flowering today, not on the shore but in a ditch just behind the seawall on Warblington Farm fields, and with it were the first flowers I have seen on what most people still call Spartina but which I think is properly known as Townsend's Cord Grass. Common Saltmarsh Grass was opening its panicles and the tiny white flowers of Sea Hardgrass were showing on the side of the single rigidly erect tiny stems of this grass. More conspicuous plants around the farm included Spiny Restharrow on the seawall of the SSSI field near the cemetery, Round-leaved Fluellen along path edges in the cemetery, and a mass of Brookweed in two of the wet fields. Also seen were my first Wild Celery and Sea Milkwort flowers, plus Black Nightshade in the Maize fields. The south eastern field of the farm had a great display of Meadow Barley though that must have been present for some time. I also noticed for the first time the new secondary growth of the Oak trees.

Just over a week ago I happened to bump into Keith Turner, not having seen him for perhaps six years, and this reminded me of Hampshire's rare Red Helleborine orchid of which he is the true and only discoverer (but has had no credit for it!). Today on the HWT website a notice proclaims that three Open Days are being held to view the plant(s) this year and if anyone is interested and knows the site I think they can turn up between 10am and 5pm on July 3 or 5 (the first day is June 29). If you don't know where to go or want other information ring John Durnell at the HWT office on 02380 - 688918.

THU 27 JUNE

Martin Rand today went back to the Portsdown Hill site where John Goodspeed recently re-found Venus's-looking-glass after an absence of many years, and by diligent searching Martin located 24 plants. In the same area Henbit Deadnettle was found with less uncommon plants such as Annual Wall-rocket. Martin's most interesting discover (to my mind) was the first Upright Hedge Parsley (*Torilis japonica*) of the year. On the other side of Portchester Common, just inside the gate leading in from the sharp bend on Skew Road, Martin noticed a clump of *Thalictrum* species plants (I think they have been present for a good many years) and wonders if anyone has worked out exactly what they are and where they came from. I have always thought of them as enforced garden escapes (i.e. chuck outs) but they may be part of a great scheme in the mind of the fabulous/mythical Portchester Postman who is supposed to have planted the Field Cow-wheat and everything else of interest in this part of Portsdown. If anyone does have knowledge of them let me know and I will pass it on to Martin.

Last night Andrew Powling led a walk through part of the West Walk Woods near Wickham in the Meon valley, and Gwynne Johnson tells me they came on the first flowering Old Man's Beard/Traveller's Joy (*Clematis vitalba*) of the high summer. Both Small and Field Scabious were out (I think this is the first record of the latter) and at one point there was a swathe of Common Cow-wheat (but sadly no Heath Fritillary butterflies!!). Alder Buckthorn was found probably with a good display of berries by now and Gwynne mentioned one unidentified plant that seemed a bit like Field Gromwell (could it have been Bugloss?). I was intrigued by this mention of Field Gromwell and excited to see that the Hants Flora distribution map indicates its presence in the tetrad which includes part of Old Idsworth Farm (which I frequently visit) - I will be keeping my eyes open for this plant which I have never seen but which I gather is quite like Common Gromwell but has larger (bluish) flowers and is less branched and bushy.

WED 26 JUNE

Less impressive plants went on my list as I cycled round the Havant area this afternoon. Down on the abandoned Broadmarsh playing fields (now scheduled for industrial development) six Bee Orchids were flowering but I was most interested to see one clump of Creeping Yellow-cress had settled there. I was also interested to see Greater Willowherb only now beginning to flower generally so long after the first flowers opened on a clump in Havant on June 2. +++

On the seawall of north west Thorney Island I saw my first Common Centaury in flower (this must have been seen by others during last week but this was my first) with lots of the violet flowers of Smooth Tare, and on the same bank was a good show of flowers on Spiny Restharrow.

Coming back to the Emsworth marina seawall I found Black Mustard in flower with young seeds already pressed to the stem, and in checking its identity became aware of a new plant as a potential confusion species in the Portsmouth area (Hoary Mustard or *Hirschfeldia incana*) which is spreading out from the port area where it originally arrived as an alien (the BSBI Plant Crib is useful here). +++

Going on to Stein Road in Southbourne I had hoped to see Crown Vetch in flower outside number 164 but all I found was an area of soil around the driveway entrance almost scraped bare of plant life (though I could detect the leaves of Crown Vetch struggling to survive). A couple of years ago the house changed hands and I found the plants cut down and a builder's lorry in the drive - I hoped this was a temporary glitch in the plant's life history but the same builder's lorry is still there so I suppose it's owner now lives in the house and likes to keep the garden tidy. +++

To end my tour I went along Old Farm Lane towards Westbourne, finding my first Rosebay Willowherb in flower in the bank of the A27 and at Westbourne saw flowers on Fool's Water Cress in the Lumley Mill canal. +++

Something I forgot to note last week was my first Wall Lettuce flowers growing on an old wall in Havant as long ago as June 17

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth Brian Fellows weekly report speaks of more Great Willowherb starting to flower with Marsh Ragwort and Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea. One puzzle from the past at this site has been resolved by Pete Selby's confirmation that a Sedge which had puzzled Brian Fellows when he found it is Green-ribbed Sedge (*Carex binervis*) which is uncommon in south east Hampshire

TUE 25 JUNE

Last year Brian Fellows found a plant in the Fort Cumberland area of the Eastney shore at Portsmouth which he could not place but which looked like a large version of a Harebell (just a single plant so he did not take a sample) and it seems this mystery has recurred this year. Maybe we can persuade one of the Portsmouth botanists such as Ian Thirlwell to locate and identify it.

MON 24 JUNE

There is a form of Southern Marsh Orchid which seems to like dry chalk sites, and I see that in Davd Lang's book on Orchids of Britain he says {{ it can also be found growing on dry chalk hills and especially in abandoned chalk quarries, with Common Spotted and Fragrant }} Martin says he has seen Southern Marsh on chalk at Farley Mount and goes on to say {{ At the Flora Group meeting on Saturday, on the slopes of Beacon Hill, Burghclere, the leader (Neil Sanderson) was giving us some interesting details on the formation of humic rendzina soils on Wessex chalk downland, and how they are able to support plants like Saw-wort and Devils-bit Scabious that one associates with damp neutral to acid pasture by forming an isolated peaty layer above the chalk. (Apparently they're largely composed of the remains of insects and other arthropods.) }} Martin wonders if the orchids rely on such isolated pockets of non-chalk soil. +++

Still with Southern Marsh Orchids I had news over the weekend from Ann Hearn, who lives in the Denvilles area of Havant, that there is a pond in the large area of market garden fields at Denvilles around which quite a few Southern Marsh Orchid grow, adding another Havant site to my local knowledge. Unfortunately the pond is well away from any public access and I was not aware of it's existence. Interestingly the water supply for the pond, which is said to never dry out, seems to come in part from the runoff rain from the rooves of an equally large area of

flower-growing greenhouses.

Plant news for June 23 from Richard Carpenter on the canal path west of Titchfield Haven includes the first flowering of two lovely wetland plants, Marsh Woundwort and Flowering Rush, with Black Horehound also out in the same area.

From the damp Brook Meadow at Emsworth I see from Brian Fellows weekly newsletter that another of my favourite plants, Wild Angelica, is now flowering (I like it for the vigour of its growth in the same way that I admire the ability of Hemlock to grow more than six feet tall, and tower over me, in the space of not much more than a month). +++

Finally for today I am indebted to Martin Rand for making me aware of a new dilemma confronting me when trying to name Sweet-briar. I did not realise that this rose comes in two species (ignoring the hybrids) but Stace tells us that there is both Sweet-briar and Small-flowered Sweet-briar. The first (*Rosa rubiginosa*) has erect stems not more than 2 metres high with erect sepals that persist until the fruit reddens, *Rosa micrantha* has arching stems (sometimes scrambling) to 3 metres high and reflexed sepals that generally fall before the fruit reddens. The Small-flowered aspect is less easy to use in distinguishing the species as, where Sweet-briar flowers vary from 2.5 to 4 cm across, those of the Small-flowered species can be from 2 to 3.5 cm across. While *rubiginosa* grows almost exclusively on chalk *micrantha* can be found on other soils.

INSECTS:

SAT 29 JUNE

There is still a surprising lack of reports of Small Skipper among the multitude of Large Skippers that have now been out since May 31. Today Barry Collins (who was first equal with Andrew Brookes in seeing the Large Skippers) may have had a sign that Small Skippers are starting to emerge when he found 3 Essex Skippers on Thorney Island. With them today was one Clouded Yellow, and yesterday elsewhere on the island Barry saw another Clouded Yellow plus 7 Small Tortoiseshell and 14 Marbled White. Barry also tells me that he had one Silver Washed Fritillary and a couple of Ringlet in Havant Thicket today. +++

The Havant Wildlife Group were in the East Marden area today, walking mainly through Wildham Wood, and at one point came on a Great Mullein plant with a Mullein moth caterpillar on it, as well as two black and yellow *Strangalia maculata* beetles and a Nursery Tent spider still carrying her egg-sac. Many of these spiders have now deposited their egg-sacs at the top of low vegetation (nettles, grass or what have you) and spun their silk tents over the vegetation making a whitish dome with the egg sac visible under the shelter of this surprisingly water and predator proof tent - if you see one of these nests you will probably find the mother spider in attendance though I don't think she does anything to assist her babies other than possibly taking out smaller insects that might eat them.

The record for the highest count of Small Tortoiseshell at one site has now passed to Tony Wilson who counted 21 along a field edge by the West Hove Golf Course on the downs (surpassing Brook Meadow's 15).

FRI 28 JUNE

On Warblington Farm Tony Gutteridge had a pretty good look at a flying butterfly which he is certain was a Fritillary by size and colour (definitely not a Comma) and the only possibility that occurs to me is a roving Dark Green Fritillary from the downs to the north (wind was north west at the time). On the same visit I saw my first adult Dark Bush Cricket.

THU 27 JUNE

Numerous butterfly sightings include 13 more Silver Washed Fritillaries and 6 White Admirals with 3 Purple Hairstreaks at Pamber Forest and fresh Small Tortoiseshells, Commas and Red Admirals elsewhere.

WED 26 JUNE

Barry Collins took a walk through some of the flower rich meadows and woodland in the Staunton Country Park, on the northern fringe of Havant, today and noted one Clouded Yellow, two White Admirals and a fresh Comma. Interestingly it seems that the Small Skippers are still holding back their general emergence - Barry saw just one among at least 10 Large Skippers

and he is only the second person to report Small Skipper with confidence (the first being Mark Litjens at Botley Woods on June 21 where he also picked out just one among many Large Skippers). There was no doubting the appearance of Marbled White and Meadow Brown with 52 of the former and at least 100 of the latter.

Andrew Brookes was in woodland north west of Portsdown at Boarhunt today and found a Silver Washed Fritillary and six Ringlets.

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth Brian Fellows has not so far seen a Ringlet despite their relative abundance elsewhere (Brook Meadow is on the southern fringe of their preferred range in south east Hampshire) but he does hold the record for Small Tortoiseshell with 15 counted there today (though I think he will not hold that title for long as this species returns to a more normal population size). Also in the meadow today Brian had two fresh Commas and four Banded Demoiselle plus a Speckled Wood.

I was also in the Emsworth area today, seeing my first Common Darter on the northwest seawall of Thorney Island where one Painted Lady flew by and a Small Heath was among the Meadow Browns and Common Blues. I looked for Marbled White near the A27 between Emsworth and Westbourne but did not see any (a female Banded Demoiselle was there) but I did see two Marbled White on the abandoned playing fields at Broadmarsh, the other side of Havant, and had my Small Tortoiseshell of the day with a Red Admiral at Budds Farm.

My guess is that the numerous Hornets people have been seeing recently are all Queens, having a bit of a holiday (and perhaps feeding up on pollen) before buckling down to the task of building a home and raising a whole tribe of offspring before the summer is out. This seems to be shown by a note from Janet Jones, at Winchfield near Hook in north Hampshire, who recently found the beginnings of a Hornet nest, already the size of an orange, in her garden shed after a couple of sightings in and around the shed (including what must have been a disturbing encounter with one spending the night in a box - presumably not seen until looking closely into the box, or handling it, and having the hornet fly out). Her most interesting sighting was of the insect at the bird bath, having a drink. +++

TUE 25 JUNE

Today Andrew Brookes was invited to see around Fort Nelson on Portsdown at close quarters and tells me that not only did he find another egg-laying Small Blue but also found larval nests of both Peacock and Tortoiseshell caterpillars - the latter were the first he has seen for three years and to make things even better two pairs of Tortoiseshell butterflies were making courtship chase flights over the nettles prior to laying more eggs. Strangely there were no Marbled Whites here and only a few Common Blues.

Down by the sea at Eastney Lake and Fort Cumberland in Portsmouth, Brian Fellows found 9 Marbled White and ten Small Heath as well as a Large Skipper and several Meadow Browns Yesterday's big news came from Sussex where a Chalkhill Blue is reported to have been seen on the downs at Cissbury Ring, just north of Worthing. In the last four years for which I have Hampshire Butterfly reports (1998-2001) the earliest appearance of this butterfly in Hampshire has been July 3 (and the latest July 7), and I personally expect to see them around July 12, so this is an early sighting. I wonder if other sites will also be early this year? +++

MON 24 JUNE

Silver Washed Fritillaries are now becoming relatively common in the woods where they can be found - today Richard Carpenter saw at least 11 in the Botley Woods and yesterday Philip Hack came on more than 15 in Bentley Wood

Richard (Richard Jones, in charge of conservation on Portsdown Hill for Portsmouth City) had a Bee Hawkmoth in the courtyard of Fort Widley though was unable to get close enough to be sure it if was Narrow or Broad-bordered.

Many reports seem to suggest that Small Blues are doing well this year and appearing in new sites, and yesterday Andrew Brookes was able to confirm this with a sighting in the Fort Nelson area at the west end of Portsdown - he saw two females egg-laying on Kidney Vetch and it is three years since he last saw a Small Blue there. Another encouraging sight there was of two larval nests of Peacock caterpillars. +++

WEEK 25 JUNE 17 – 23

BIRDS:

SUN 23 JUNE

Christoph Harwood gave me the news of not only seeing a Spotted Flycatcher in the Green Lane but also having a pair nesting in a rose at the back of his house. While out he saw the spotted breast of a juvenile Robin (second brood by now?) and was told that a Red-legged Partridge had been nesting in the long grass of the churchyard (though his informant did not I think claim to have found the nest or seen chicks).

FRI 21 JUNE

The most interesting item in the bird news reaching me today is the presence of a single summering Brent Goose at Titchfield Haven, reported by both Richard Carpenter and Richard Bonser. Summering Brent have been a regular feature of Chichester and Langstone Harbours for a good many years, and this year two seem to have stayed behind in Portsmouth Harbour for the first time (though I have no later sightings than the April WeBS count when one was off Frater Lake and one further south off Gosport). Maybe it is one of these that has wandered round to Hill Head? I would be interested to hear of any past or present summering Brent on the Hampshire shore west of Hill Head - with the last migrant birds traditionally being seen in the north Solent one might expect a few stragglers to drop off there in the same way that I think one has done this summer in the Rye Harbour area of East Sussex.

Last night Adrian Thomas of the RSPB Brighton office was on Radio Solent answering listeners questions about birding matters as best he could, and I may not have heard him very accurately as I was driving along but I understood him to say one thing that was news to me. This concerned the migration of Cuckoos which of course make their first journey south without parental guidance, but it also applies to the return of any migrant species when re-locating the very spot where it hatched in the previous year. Adrian said that before setting off the bird will fly in wider and wider circles around the spot to which it intends to return (though there may be no 'intention' in our sense) and will listen to deep sounds given off by the surrounding hills, memorising these sounds and using them to home in on its destination many months later. As I understood him he was not talking about echoes reflected from the hills but very low frequency sounds caused by (perhaps) the tidal effect of the moon on the land. If anyone out there knows what he was talking about please let me know - I wait in fascinated suspense! No mention of magnetism or star patterns or even the look of the landscape, just the noises made by the deep breathing of the earth god ...

THU 20 JUNE

At 11:15 this morning Tim Edwards found a male Collared Flycatcher in a dead elm between the Church Norton carpark and the shore, bringing rather more birders than there was room for in the carpark. Those who got there before 3:30 pm had good views of the bird, but despite some of them staying until after 7pm no one saw it again (similarly with the Rose Coloured Starling which could not be re-found today at Brighton's West Pier - see entry for June 18). Another good bird reported on the SOS website today is a Caspian Tern flying down the river Ouse near Southease bridge south of Lewes - I hope it turned right when it came to the mouth of the river

...

An equally unexpected bird was a Temminck's Stint that spent most of the day on the south scrape at Titchfield Haven and could still be seen at 4:30pm from the Meonshore Hide from which Richard Bonser also noted 15 Black-tailed Godwit. Trevor Carpenter thinks Temminck's Stint has never previously been recorded at the Haven in June (Birds of Hampshire has only one June record, Farlington Marshes on 6 June 71), and Trevor goes on to say .. {{ Given a number of other unusual wader sightings for June in the last week does this mean that there have been breeding problems further north and we may expect an early rush of returning waders? }} In anticipation of this question Richard Carpenter told me that he had had a returning Curlew fly west over his Hill Head garden today, but I don't think that is what Trevor had in mind. +++

For those interested the progress of the Peregrine chicks on Chichester Cathedral Graham Roberts has sent out the following bulletin .. {{ The Chichester Cathedral Peregrines were

putting on a fine display today, enjoyed by many, including some of those visiting the cathedral for the Antiques Roadshow. All four young are thriving and showing well. At lunchtime today, two of the young (the single male and a female) were flying from turret to turret/pinnacle. The young female was watched by many at very close quarters as she exercised her wings from a low area of the east roof. The other two young (both females) were wing flapping within the turret containing the nestbox and may not yet have attempted flight. I know that one was flying on Monday 17th June. }}

Yesterday (June 19) Richard Bonser was at Keyhaven where the most exciting sight was of the first juvenile Redshank of the year, Offshore 11 Eider and 2 Gannets were seen (the latter over the open sea off Milford). +++

Also yesterday Tony Gutteridge was in West Sussex and heard Turtle Doves in Eartham Wood (by the A285 north east of Chichester) and at Bignor Hill on the Downs just west of the River Arun at Amberley. At Bignor, near the hilltop carpark, there were also several Tree Pipits.

WED 19 JUNE

Derek Hale's news from the Isle of Wight tells us that the Black-headed Gull colony at Newtown Harbour has had a good breeding season and there are plenty of young birds, some already flying, so we must be on the look-out for ginger juveniles from now on. Last summer when I saw my first of these at Broadmarsh in Langstone Harbour Chris Cockburn, the Langstone RSPB warden, told me that none of the young on the nearby islands had yet taken flight and that the bird must have come from elsewhere - I wonder if these Isle of Wight birds will again be the first to appear here? Unsurprisingly Derek says that a fox has taken to swimming out to the nest islands to feed on the chicks, but much more surprisingly I find I am not the only person in the world to use the word 'fledged' to mean acquiring feathers rather than leaving the nest - Derek writes that the gulls are {{ doing well with many fledged chicks, some have flown }}.

Still on this subject of the meaning of the word fledged can I ask if the great majority of birders who use the word 'fledged' to mean 'having left the nest' apply it to a Lapwing chick when it leaves the nest within a few hours of hatching, with not a feather on its body? +++

John Shillitoe was on the hills above East Meon today and heard a Curlew flying over, heading for the coast, and on Monday evening (June 17) in failing light Simon Woolley heard the teetering call of a Whimbrel over Winchester (though he thought it was heading north).

These are just two of many signs that our shorebirds are already returning - you will see below that the Lapwings were back at Langstone this morning and Barry Collins tells me he saw the first Common Gull back at Thorney Island last Sunday (June 16) while a summer plumaged Spotted Redshank was back there as early as June 12. Four Greenshank and two Green Sandpiper seen by Barry on Thorney on June 16 were also presumably returnees, as was another Green Sandpiper seen at Titchfield Haven today by John Shillitoe.

An early morning visit to Warblington Farm for the Common Bird Census found juvenile birds of many species including my first young Swallow with a parent on the roof of the Old Rectory, one chick with the elusive Moorhens in the water cress beds, and at least one juvenile House Sparrow making a lot of noise over being fed in the farmyard. Three Skylarks were back over the maize fields but I doubt they will raise young, and where I had been scolded by a pair of Lesser Whitethroat on my last visit (seemingly because I was too near their nest with young) I only saw one parent watching me silently. A female Great Spotted Woodpecker was making a lot of noise and roaming far and wide over the farm, making me wonder if she has lost any family she had. Probably the best of the breeding birds was, controversially, a pair of Cuckoo - this was the first time I have seen a pair together this year, and the first time I have heard the bubbling of the female. +++

Looking out over Chichester Harbour from the shore fields I was pleased to see and hear the first few Lapwing back - I saw two near Langstone Pond and later heard others flying by. Two Great Crested Grebe were fishing near Langstone and there were a few Oystercatcher waiting for the tide to drop, plus one Cormorant and two or three Egrets, but the only numerous birds were some 70 non-breeding Herring Gulls with a couple of adult Lesser Blackbacks. +++

Later in the day I visited Old Idsworth Farm after an absence of over a month and was very pleased to hear one Corn Bunting, maybe two, singing, but not so cheered to hear from David Uren that, while the male Barn Owl can still be seen almost nightly there have been no signs of

life from the nest box where they raised young last year. Other good news was that at least a dozen pairs of Swallows were flying in and out of various buildings where they have nests and are presumably feeding young. Skylark, Whitethroat and Yellowhammer were among the more common birds singing, and in addition to one Song Thrush singing in the wood I saw two more that seemed to be hedgerow based. The only young birds I saw for certain were a family of Goldfinch. Before I left I heard the calls of a Buzzard high over the neighbouring Markwells Wood.

TUE 18 JUNE

Bad news of birds comes from Stephen Harwood at Catherington where it seems the female Swallow of the pair nesting under the eaves of Stephen's house was found dead on the ground recently (possibly after flying into a window after being chased by a Hobby - but this is just guesswork). The male stayed around for a few days but has now left, though there seems to be an unpaired male frequenting an outhouse used as a garage. To balance this bad news I have a general impression that Swallows are not doing badly this year, but that is very subjective. +++

More bad news in a different sense comes from Kevin Stouse who tells me that I was wrong when I said there were no Canada Goose goslings left at the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site when I was there on June 8 - it seems that one family with five goslings is still hanging out in an area close to the buildings which I did not look at. Just five goslings, however, is better than the 80 which I was fearing when I found 16 potentially breeding pairs of adults there during the May count. In May there were already 20 goslings and I am surprised that I did not see them in June as they do not normally acquire their adult like plumage until July, when they are almost indistinguishable from their parents as the latter finish their moult and the whole family is able to fly off together. +++

Bad news in yet another sense comes from Mike Wall who was by the River Test at Longparish today and saw an Osprey which he was told had been hanging around that part of the river for several days - the only reason for that would be a good supply of trout in the river so the bad news is not for the birders but for the fishermen (even they might allow an Osprey a share of the fish, although they would not extend that forgiveness to Cormorants!)

Now for some good news. Earlier in the spring birders visiting a certain nature reserve somewhere in western Hampshire had difficulty in spotting the Stone Curlews which they expected to see there, but today John Shillitoe says he has just been in west Hampshire and seen not only Stone Curlew but also a male Montagu's Harrier and a Honey Buzzard. I have a distinct impression that there are more Honey Buzzards in southern England following the diversion of their autumn passage route over continental Europe in 2000 to come over England - maybe some of the birds that visited us then for the first time liked what they saw? One or two sightings are no proof of a general trend, but I see that in addition to John's sighting Mike Wall was lucky enough to see one over his Basingstoke garden yesterday (along with a Common Buzzard and his first garden Hobby). Mike's bird went as far as to claim Basingstoke as its territory, turning on its back and showing its talons to the Buzzard when it got too close overhead (I always thought of Honey Buzzards as wimps in the raptor world, grubbing about in the earth for small insects rather than catching decent sized prey in an honest chase, but perhaps those digging tools are effective enough in battle if required). +++

Continuing the good news, I have already mentioned above that Nightingales are still singing at Pulborough Brooks and my notes have included reports of three or four singing at Ebernoe Common yesterday and others at Portchester on June 5, with more at Pulborough on June 6, so it seems that these birds have prolonged their normal song period well beyond the end of May this year - I hope this does not mean there has been a shortage of female Nightingales

Another song that is not as frequent as it once was is the purring of Turtle Dove, but Richard Carpenter managed to hear it twice today - once at Chappetts Copse near West Meon and again at Old Winchester Hill a few miles to the south.

MON 17 JUNE

Ian Calderwood, who works at the high security Defence Munitions site at Gosport on the west shore of Portsmouth Harbour, where both Herons and Egrets nest, today saw the first juvenile Egret out of its nest. No news yet of the number of Egret nests or their breeding success - no

one, even those with access to this site, is allowed to enter the wood where they nest without special permission so we will have to await an official MoD press release, but Ian's news is a timely reminder to keep an eye out for plumeless Egrets with greenish legs, probably in family groups.

Current correspondence on HOSLIST about the status of Willow Warblers reflects the concern of many birders that these birds are in serious decline. Dave Unsworth started the discussion back on May 15, saying that in the mid 1980s he regularly counted the territorial Willow Warblers in the Itchen flood plain from Bishopstoke south to the northern fringe of Southampton, and then expected around 35 territories to be held. This year, after the passage birds had moved through, none remained to breed. Other people joined in with similar observations, while in other places people thought the Willow Warbler breeding population was normal - last night John Clark was out on Warren Heath, in the Bramshill area north of Fleet, and says that in this area of young pine plantation with birch scrub {{ Willow Warblers were everywhere - the commonest bird - at least 12 singing a fairly small area. }} Interestingly this habitat also provides the best Willow Warbler territory around Havant in the Furzy Plain area of Havant Thicket immediately west of the carpark, and it is inevitably a transient habitat that will change as the trees mature or the foresters move in so the birds then have to find similar habitat elsewhere. +++

At least 22 Swifts were circling and screaming in a clear dusk sky this evening here in Havant, with five of them diving between the houses of Manor Close where they traditionally nest in some houses and where a new nest box has been put up for them under the eaves of one house. I did not see any of the birds enter any nest but hopefully there are at least five birds on nests to match the number flying past the houses and presumably calling to their hidden mates.

Lawrence Holloway was at Pagham North Walls area today, seeing among other birds some juvenile Stonechats (the first I have heard of this year). Another 'first family' to be seen this year were Linnets seen in the Beaulieu area by Derek Mills yesterday when here in Havant a family party of seven Goldfinch landed on the roof of the house next door to us. Richard Carpenter was on the canal path at Titchfield Haven from which he could see the familiar Barn Owl still hunting in daylight over the reserve - presumably still being forced to work overtime to feed chicks that cannot yet feed themselves. +++

Yesterday Richard was in the Haven reserve where three Egrets were seen and, much less expected, three Turnstones (coming back from breeding, still thinking about going, or young birds with no intention of breeding?)

Stephen Frampton was in Chichester yesterday (June 16) and watched some or all of the fledgling Peregrines on the Cathedral spire making first flights - this is the first news I have heard of any of them leaving the nestbox. +++

Last Friday (June 14) Lawrence Holloway went to Ebernoe Common (on the east side of the A283 just north of Petworth) where three or maybe four Nightingales were still in full song. He also noted Goldcrest song but much more interesting was the sight of two Hawfinch, possibly a locally based pair. It may be that we are getting more reports of Hawfinch sightings thanks to the ease of communication over the internet but I have a strong impression that there are more about, behaving less elusively, than usual. +++

Also on Friday Andrew Howard took an evening class group to the Chichester lakes and was very pleased to hear and see a Turtle Dove there, and to watch both Peregrine and Hobby overhead, but otherwise the birds were rather disappointing. There were five families of Swans (more than usual here?) but none of Coot or Moorhen (plenty of adult Coot including a 75 strong flock) while there were no Great Crested or Little Grebe to be seen at all. Even the passerines were thin on the ground (or rather in the trees) with one family of Long Tailed Tits being the only ones noted. +++

Going back to Andrew's recent unexpected observation of a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming (see my notes for June 13) I hope I did not give the impression that I disbelieved that the bird was drumming. If I did Andrew confirms that he saw the bird hammering away at a regular sounding post on a Cedar tree. My intention was just to remind people that the nest holes are not necessarily abandoned after the young have flown.

PLANTS:

SUN 23 JUNE

After John Goodspeed's re-find of Venus-looking-glass on Portsdown (see June 20) I went to have a look for myself this evening and eventually found a small cluster of the plants (not more than a dozen) in a tight bunch, not in an exposed place on disturbed soil but among a crowded growth of Musk Thistle, Common Ragwort, and other plants on the very edge of the undisturbed soil. If anyone wants to have a look my suggestions are to park by the roadside just west of Fort Southwick and to walk south-west over the 'set aside' fields to the boundary between the fields and Portchester Common, then south to the extreme south west corner of the fields where there is an open field gate with a dead tree lying in the field by it. Go to the high point of a mound of earth just north of this gateway and you will see three squarish scrapes of bare chalk soil at your feet north of the mound. The plants are about three paces north of the mound on the right hand side of the leftmost scrape. +++

In this area I found my first Black Bindweed in flower, and going north through the great mass of Rough Poppy to the footpath entrance to Portchester Common and turning right inside the Common I found a single fresh spike of Sainfoin. +++

Seeing the Rough Poppies instantly told me that I had been wrong in claiming to have seen Pheasant's Eye at Idsworth Farm, though the example I saw there had dropped all but one of the petals on its only flower and had not developed the unmistakable seed capsule of the Rough Poppy. (My only excuse is that the leaves of Pheasant's Eye as illustrated in Francis Rose's Wildflower Key look exactly like those of the Poppy, which this and three other books do not illustrate - though Keble Martin does).

In Stansted Forest today Brian Fellows found his first Enchanter's Nightshade which has not been reported since Richard Carpenter's find at Hook on June 12.

One other bit of miscellanea today came courtesy of the excellent British Wildlife mag that has just arrived - in an article on Carnivorous Plants I was surprised to find mention of Shepherd's Purse, but it seems that this very common plant has sticky seeds which catch and devour tiny soil insects to help with germination and initial growth.

SAT 22 JUNE

Many Frog orchids were out at Noar Hill today, and 21 spikes of Broomrape were seen by Mike Duffy when he was there. He does not specify if these were the Common Broomrape that is abundant this year but I am giving him the benefit of the doubt and assuming they were the first tall yellow Knapweed Broomrape that are often a feature of this reserve.

Not new, but worth a mention, are hundreds of plants of the lovely Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) which Ian Thirlwell says is flourishing this year on Milton Common in Portsmouth. I used to know several sites for this uncommon plant but until this news thought the only survivors were in the carpark flowerbeds at the IBM North Harbour site where I first saw it in flower on May 11. Ian also tells me that, despite Bob Chapman's statement that this is a very good year for Sea Clover (at least at Farlington Marshes), Ian has not yet seen it on Milton Common.

THU 20 JUNE

On June 12, when commenting on the plants seen during the Wednesday evening walk on Portsdown led by John Goodspeed, I mentioned that the area where they found Rough Poppy used to be the place to see Venus Looking-glass. This is the arable field south west of Fort Southwick alongside a path leading down through Portchester Common and over the M27 footbridge - since the field ceased to be cultivated regularly the plants have not been seen but no doubt their seed is there waiting to be disturbed into life. It seems that disturbance has been provided by the digging of a ditch and bank to prevent travellers or motor-cycle scramblers gaining access to the open downland of Portchester Common from the hilltop road west of Fort Southwick, and having seen my comment John returned to the area and found this lovely plant was flowering among the Rough Poppies that they had already seen.

On the HWT website I see that Mark Langford, the warden of Winnall Moors and St Catherine's Hill, reports a good year for orchids on the hill, saying {{ Bee, Fragrant, Southern Marsh and Musk orchids can be found on the reserve along with Common spotted and Common Twayblade }} I thought this might be of general interest as I did not know that Musk orchids

grew there (nor Southern Marsh, though I assume these are in some damp spot at the foot of the hill). Looking in the HWT Reserves Guide I see that both Musk and Frog orchids are recorded here, but so far this year I have not heard of any Frog orchid finds.

WED 19 JUNE

At Old Idsworth Farm this morning I greatly enjoyed the 500 metre walk from the farm to Huckswood along a track lined on both sides with a swathe, several metres wide, of Poppies, Corn Marigolds, Cornflower and Corn Cockle where more wildflower seed has been sown to supplement previous years sowing. This is where last summer I found *Anthemis austriaca*, a close relative of Corn Chamomile and initially mistaken by me for that plant, and there is a lot more of it this year. No new discoveries here this time, but coming back down the public path from Huckswood Lane towards Old Idsworth Chapel I found not one but two plants that do occur in Hampshire but which I never expected to see. The most impressive of these was Pheasant's Eye, the second was Corn Buttercup (*Ranunculus arvensis*). There was only one plant of each that I could see and while the latter was flowering well the Pheasant's Eye had only one petal left of the single flower that had opened so far so I did not get the full effect of its glory. A much more impressive introduction by the woodland pond was a magnificent clump of Southern Marsh-orchid with the distinctively 'ring-spotted' leaves of var *pardalina* - these plants came from a garden pond where some plants, originally bought from a garden centre, have flourished and multiplied to provide this offering to enhance the newly created pond in the Huckswood area. +++

Three more plants which I found in flower here for the first time and which are not introductions were Hairy St John's Wort, Red Bartsia, and the delightful Long-Stalked Cranesbill - back in April I mistakenly thought I had seen this plant but what I saw must have been a form of Herb Robert holding its flowers on long pedicels.

One plant that was nearly flowering at Idsworth was fully out near the Solent shore when Richard Carpenter was at Brownwich, west of Titchfield Haven, today. This was the bright yellow Ladies Bedstraw.

TUE 18 JUNE

Away to the west of Idsworth, on Old Winchester Hill above the Meon Valley, Richard Carpenter found three plants that I have been expecting to hear of. First and best were many Fragrant orchids, second came Wild Thyme and third was Hoary Plantain - I may have overlooked news of the last two which I would have thought to have been out on the chalk for a little time now, though I did not spot the usual carpet of mauve where Wild Thyme grows (by the sliproad from the hilltop road to join the A3 going down into Portsmouth) when I last drove that way. A few Cowslips were still flowering on Old Winchester Hill.

Off the chalk, down in the low ground by the Wallington River at the north foot of Portsdown, John Goodspeed was at the HWT Hookheath Nature Reserve today, finding the expected Southern Marsh and Heath Spotted orchids (though not as many as usual - perhaps a bit overshadowed here compared to the open situations in which both species normally grow?). With them were the lovely Meadow Thistles which Richard Carpenter had already seen in the Botley Woods as early as May 26, but there were also two new plants for the year list. Himalayan Balsam was one that may not be looked on with favour by everyone, but the other, Zig-zag Clover was a surprise to me as I thought of it as a dry chalkhill plant though I see from the Hampshire Flora that I am wrong and that it likes heavy basic soil in damp shady areas. Meadow-sweet, Marsh Bedstraw and other plants of shady wetland were present, as surprisingly was a late Dog Violet.

Greater Sea Spurrey was flowering on the shore of Hayling Island when I arrived there today, and I soon added Greater Mullein to my flowering list as I headed down the coastal path. At Stoke Bay (or North Hayling Halt in railway terms) the Goats Rue was starting to flower in the overflow carpark behind the garage. A little further south the Dyers Greenweed was flowering well in what some people still call the Hoopoe Field after a past visitation by the bird and a couple of plants had escaped to the trackside. Before reaching the pillbox at the path to West Lane I refound the two clumps of Bee Orchid that I had seen last week, and saw the third larger cluster which Alistair Martin discovered around the posts of the Wildlife Interpretation board near the Pill Box but on the seaward side of the track - south of the pillbox there was one more

large lone Bee Orchid under the rails separating horses from walkers. On the Beachlands shore east of the funfair, where the first hundred yards or so of the new railtrack have already been laid over the SSSI, I at last found the "Rough Clover" that I have been searching for and saw that the flowers were already over (but on inspection after getting home I found this was Knotted Clover, with inflated red-ribbed calyx). Carrying on to the Childing Pink site I was very pleased to see that at least three plants have crossed from the west side of the 'track' beside which they grow to the east side and are heading for the area where gorse was cleared to provide a good home for these rare plants. After this, on the bank between the road and the skateboard rink, I took a sample of what I thought was Suffocated Clover, and when I got home this proved correct but the flowers were not yet showing in the tight flowerhead balls, situated at the bottom of the leaf stalks and completely shaded from the light of day by the leaves held up like vertical open umbrellas. Good news at the Pale Toadflax site - three plants are now in flower and several have raised their heads again where they were trampled by people looking at the Dodder. Close to this site I found my last new flower for the day - a single spike of Dark Mullein. Heading home I stopped at the Oysterbeds and saw that the Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea flowers are now open on the bund wall south of the tern island, but the great display of Common Centaury on the earth mound bank east of the island is still a couple of days from starting its show of pink - among a thousand plants I could see a good hundred buds showing pink petals, but not one open flower.

MON 17 JUNE

Walking past the New Lane allotments here in Havant today I once more saw the small cluster of Weasel's Snout plants on recently disturbed soil within the allotments and again saw no flowers but then happened to glance along the fence line and saw, outside the fence, one plant covered with tiny reddish antirrhinum-like flowers.

INSECTS:

SUN 23 JUNE

The Common Darter, an insect that will soon be seen by everyone interested, made its first appearance today at Hook where the lucky finder was Dave Tolcher (who saw both male and female). Dave also had a Black-tailed Skimmer (of which not many have been seen since Barry Collins first noted one on May 31). Another first find that will hopefully soon be common if not easily seen is Purple Hairstreak, and Peter Eeles saw the first of these in Pamber Forest, north of Basingstoke, today along with another single White Admiral and two Holly Blues, one of them ovipositing on Holly. The third newcomer was a Blackneck moth, seen by Simon Woolley at the Yew Hill butterfly reserve south of Winchester where he added yet another Small Blue sighting to the unusually widespread appearances of this butterfly this year.. +++

Also near Winchester, at Farley Mount, Simon Woolley saw more than five Dark Green Fritillary, and Mike Duffy had two or three more on Stockbridge Common where the Marbled White season was fully underway with at least 80 seen. Stockbridge Common also gave Mike another Small Blue along with Small Tortoiseshell, Small Heath, Meadow Brown, Painted Lady, and many Ringlet. +++

Continuing the good news of Small Tortoiseshell Brian Fellows upped the count for Brook Meadow at Emsworth from the 8 I saw there recently to 10 seen today.

Another insect that made its first reported appearance today was the very colourful Vapourer Moth caterpillar with the toothbrush tufts on its back which show it to be a member of the Tussock Moth group - this seen at East Meon by Christoph Harwood.

SAT 22 JUNE

A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was nectaring on Honeysuckle and Wild Rose when Mike Duffy was in Whiteley Pastures (Botley Woods) today. Many Burnet Moths (assumedly 6 spot) were on the wing or emerging and one, possibly two, Silver Washed Fritillary were seen. At Old Winchester Hill Mike heard from a warden that the Dark Green Fritillary were already out there and at Noar Hill Mike had another Small Tortoiseshell. +++

Yesterday another late Holly Blue was in Lawrence Holloway's garden at Aldwick (Bognor).

FRI 21 JUNE

The first Southern Hawker dragonfly emerged at Titchfield Haven today to be seen by Richard

Carpenter. Dan Powell gives the flight period for this species as not starting until mid-July but Steve Brooks says that they can start to appear any time from mid-June onwards though they are exceptional before July. Similarly early were what I take to be the first three summer brood Comma butterflies seen today by Mark Litjens at Whiteley Pastures, though Mark was so pleased with his first three Silver Washed Fritillaries that he saw at the same time that he does not remark on the state of the Commas. +++

Another first for the year was a single Small Skipper which Mark picked out from several active Large Skippers, but this first needs to be qualified by the report from John Goodspeed which I noted last Tuesday (June 18) - John thought that the Skippers he saw then were Small or Essex but did not speak of seeing the main difference between Large and Small which is not size but the presence or absence of patterning on the wings (both above and below) - no patterning in the Small Skipper but noticeable variation in the quality of the colour in different areas of the Large Skipper wings.

The only other news for today came from Eric Castle when I met him while shopping in Waitrose. We got onto the subject of Stag Beetles, of which several have been seen in the Denvilles area of Havant where Eric lives, and he told me that he had just seen a Stag Beetle walking across a road but not looking very happy. On closer inspection Eric found that almost all the underside of the abdomen was missing, though the elytra (wing cases) were intact so the damage was not obvious from above. His thought was that the insect had been partly eaten by mice but I suppose it could easily have landed on its back where a Magpie might have taken a quick peck before the insect scuttled off. Judging by the way they fly I would think another cause could be mid-air collision with some sharp fixed object such as a metal fence top spike. Any thoughts on the subject?

THU 20 JUNE

The first White Admiral of the year was reported today by Graham Dennis in the Pamber Forest in north Hampshire near the Berkshire border north of Basingstoke, and on the Wiltshire border, at Bentley Wood near Salisbury, someone saw a Silver Washed Fritillary, though the very first of these that I have heard of was seen in Surrey yesterday, in Tugley Wood near Chiddingfold, by Lawrence Holloway. Lawrence also saw Wood Whites in that area. +++

Another first for the year is the Emerald Damselfly (*Lestes sponsa*) which Mark Litjens found in Botley Woods near Fareham today along with a couple more Downy Emeralds. Mark saw his first Downy Emerald on June 1 and another on June 8, and so far no one else has reported this species. Another dragonfly at the start of its season is the Black Tailed Skimmer, of which Barry Collins saw one on May 31 on Thorney Island, but no more were reported until Richard Carpenter saw one yesterday at Titchfield Haven and Mark saw the third today in Whiteley Pastures.

Other sightings which have been added to my first sightings table were of the second Marbled White of the year, seen by Jenny Mallett on Magdalen Hill Down on Tuesday (June 18), and a Ringlet seen yesterday (June 19) in Eartham Wood north east of Chichester by Tony Gutteridge who thought this was very early for the species but in fact his was the fifth to be reported this year.

The first Burnet Companion (a common day flying moth looking a bit like a Grizzled Skipper) was recorded by Julia Casson on Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester yesterday, and the fifth new moth for the year was a Tortrix known only as *Clepsis consimilana* found, according to Derek Mill's Butterfly Conservation website, by a Paul Boswell but no location is given and as Derek got the info from a national source it could have been anywhere and Paul is not necessarily one of the well known Boswell family of Lyndhurst. +++

Another interesting piece of information from Derek Mills is that Duke of Burgundy butterflies have been seen on Stockbridge Down this year for the first time ever - the first was found on May 11 by Rupert Broadway who saw more of them when he went again on May 25.

WED 19 JUNE

Soon after 8am this morning as I was finishing the Common Bird Census visit to Warblington Farm the first butterflies began to appear, including at least three fresh Small Tortoiseshell in widely different places and one tatty Painted Lady. While here I also saw my first Ladybird larvae of the year, only two of them but hopefully there will be many more. +++

Later in the day, when it was hotter, I was at Old Idsworth Farm and came on eight butterfly species including three Marbled White and a female Brimstone. A good many Meadow Brown were out and I saw both Painted Lady and Red Admiral but the best butterfly was Small Heath - at least half a dozen in one grassy field. The other species seen were Common Blue, Speckled Wood and Large Skipper. Over the pond a Broad-bodied Chaser and an Emperor (with drooping tip) were active and in the vegetation around the edge a number of Azure damselflies were flying. Another insect worth a mention is yet another Hornet which roared noisily past me at high speed in the wood and I also saw a small but eye-catching fly on bramble - only about 1 cm from nose to tail, the head and thorax were jet black but the abdomen was a bright mustard yellow, seen through large translucent wings forming a large flat triangle (parallel to the ground) above the body. I assume this was the sawfly *Arge cyanocrocea* illustrated in Chinery's Collins Guide - its larvae feed on bramble.

More Marbled Whites were seen in the Farley Mount area west of Winchester today by Mark Litjens. He was at the same site yesterday and did not see them then, though he did find five Small and one Holly Blue still on the wing plus four fresh Ringlets and 28 Meadow Browns. Other late butterflies yesterday were one tatty Peacock and an equally aged Tortoiseshell, though this was with a fresh specimen to show the generations overlapping. To end Mark's list for yesterday there were 8 Common Blues and 3 Painted Ladies though these latter are now so abundant that I have more or less given up reporting them. Going back to the Ringlets I see that both Mark and Andrew Brookes saw this species on June 18 and share second place after Dave Pearson's find of the first for the year in Bentley Wood last Sunday (June 16) +++

That last remark about Painted Ladies does not apply to Clouded Yellows, and I am pleased to pass on two more sightings of them made by Carole Dennis (according to Richard Carpenter) - both sightings were made today, one in Titchfield Village and one in Wickham further up the Meon valley. Richard himself was at Brownwich, west of Titchfield Haven, and seems to have been the first in Hampshire to have seen this summer's outburst of 6-spot Burnet moths - more than 30 of them along with a similar number of Meadow Browns, a couple of Cinnabar moths, 5 Large Skippers and the odd Common Blue, Red Admiral and Large White.

TUE 18 JUNE

John Goodspeed was in the Hookheath Nature Reserve at the north foot of Portsdown today tells me that he saw 'lots of Skippers' which he thought were Small or Essex Skippers - these should be on the wing by now but as no one else has reported them and as John does not make a point of them as being something special and new to the scene I will not say that he is definitely claiming they have emerged until I have checked with him. Last year the first was reported in Hampshire on June 20, in 2000 the first was flying on June 9 and in the previous year the date was May 31, but I saw a very small looking Skipper today and chased it for a little way before I saw that its upper wings had not got the requisite bright orange to be a Small Skipper. One thing that John is quite certain about it is that while he was at Hookheath a Hornet settled on his leg and he came to no harm - whether he was wearing trousers or shorts I do not know - my claim that they never sting might be put to the test if one crawled up the inside of a trouser leg! +++

Following on with another Hornet story Andrew Howard has sent me the following in connection with my remark that it is best not to block the route that Hornets use to leave and enter their nest .. {{We had a hornets' nest at the top of a high stone wall in our garden two summers ago. We would watch them leave and zoom off and away in a dead straight line to some fairly distant point. They would equally come straight back to the nest. There was none of the general wandering around being a general nuisance in the way that wasps do. However, one night we stayed out on the patio till dark (the only warm evening of the year it seemed) but retreated indoors when we saw the outside light was literally crawling with hornets. }} I wonder if the attraction was not so much the light itself as the host of moths and small flies attracted to it, providing a fast food take away service for the hornets whose queen was demanding more food for her children?

This evening Tony Gutteridge showed me a collection of perhaps half a dozen wild bee nests in the topsoil of a part of his lawn that had been covered by dead vegetation which he has recently removed, exposing the bees and their nests. One of the nests had apparently lost its roof in the

removal of the vegetation exposing a neat lining of moss and three or four eggchamber cells (tiny vertical cylinders with open tops - I didn't look closely enough to see if they were in fact the traditional hexagonal, or is it octagonal, shape of the cells in a honeycomb). In this nest were two 'bees' with brownish hair on their thoraxes plus dark shiny abdomens. Both looked fairly similar other than for a not great size difference. As we investigated they flew off (slower than I would have expected and with no audible buzz), and neither Tony nor I could be sure if they were a species of Anthophora (Flower Bees) or lookalike Cuckoo Bees that had usurped the nest, but as the nest seemed to have a lot of mites in it, and the fact that these bees would have been near the end of their life cycle (adults not normally seen after June), it seems likely that they were sluggish old Anthophora bees. +++

Bees of this type are sometimes called burrowing bees, and the other nests looked like very large worm casts (or more accurately the casts left by marine molluscs on a sandy or muddy sea bottom when the tide has gone out). I was aware of the mining bees which leave little pyramids of earth or sand grains above the vertical entrance to their underground egg chambers, but not of these hummocks of soil that seem to be pushed up from below, and which have a non-vertical large entrance hole., indicating the work of this group of bees.

Earlier in the day, cycling to Hayling, I met Tim Timlick on the coastal path and he told me that he had seen a Clouded Yellow at Gunner Point on Hayling last Friday (June 14), when his first Meadow Browns were out - I saw my first definite one today. My own sightings along the coastal path included at least three Painted Ladies and half a dozen Red Admirals but nothing else other than Whites (probably both Large and Small).

Two large and easy to identify caterpillars were reported today. Lawrence Holloway has just put a very good photo of a Mullein Moth caterpillar on his website having found it on Mullein plants in his garden. The bright colours of this caterpillar apparently tell birds that it does not taste good, allowing the caterpillar to remain on the Mullein leaves for our enjoyment of its large size and colourful dress until it has eaten the leaves away. What I want to know is what else eats the leaves of Great Mullein? Today and in past years I have found plants with large random holes in the leaves (not eaten methodically from the edge inwards) but a search of the plants has failed to find the culprit (most caterpillars only eat at night and hide themselves very effectively during the day but the Mullein moth normally, I think, remains in open view on the plant where I have quite often found them without searching). My caterpillar book only lists three moths that may feed on Mullein and all three look very similar with a white background colour superimposed with bright black and yellow markings, so presumably they all share the same immunity from attack. Of these the Striped Lychnis caterpillars do not appear until August and the other two (Mullein and Water Betony moths) are both out now and should both be seen easily - what I want to know is who is the secret Mullein eater? +++

The other caterpillar in today's news is that of the Drinker moth, of which Barry Collins found more than 30 on reeds at the Thorney Great Deeps today. With the name Drinker you would think this might be the normal habitat, living above water with easy access when they wanted to drink, but in fact I think they are normally found on Couch and other grasses in much drier situations, only occasionally taking a sip of dew from the grass in early morning. This is the time of year when they are most commonly seen, the woolly bear type caterpillars being fully grown and ready to pupate. Also seen at Thorney Deeps was Barry's first Emperor Dragonfly of the season. +++

On June 11 Richard Carpenter mentioned the appearance of the largish hoverfly (black with a white band around the middle of the abdomen) called *Volucella pelluscens*, and today Lawrence Holloway also mentions it, adding something that I did not know - that is that its larvae find their food by scavenging in wasp nests. Today Richard Carpenter was at Old Winchester Hill, seeing 6 Small Heath, 7 Brimstone and 10 Common Blue butterflies. Andrew Brookes was also out seeking butterflies in Huntbourn Woods west of Denmead where there were plenty of Meadow Browns, at least two Ringlets, a Brimstone and late Holly Blue and Grizzled Skipper. +++

MON 17 JUNE

I think the butterfly hunters union will soon be summoning a mass meeting to vote for strike action unless the weather improves but there is one glimmer of good news for them from Dave

Pearson who was at Bentley Wood on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border yesterday and saw the first Ringlet. Very few butterflies were on the wing at Bentley Wood and the place to look for them there was in the log book, which recorded 30+ Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries for June 14. +++

The only two butterflies which do seem to be showing are Painted Ladies and, to a much lesser extent, Small Tortoiseshell. I myself had a fresh Painted Lady here in Havant today but on the Pagham North Walls Lawrence Holloway saw around 20 of them as well as 6 Small Tortoiseshell. Back in his Aldwick garden at Bognor Lawrence was also lucky enough to see a very late Holly Blue, and from Richard Carpenter I hear that another Small Tortoiseshell was out by the canal at Titchfield Haven along with a Large Skipper and at least 5 Banded Demoiselles (Richard uses the Banded Agrion name which appears in Chinery's Insect book but I prefer the more delicate sounding name used by both Dan Powell and Steve Brooks in their recent Dragonfly books). Perhaps illustrating the dearth of butterflies is a message from Lynn Fomison rejoicing in the sight of one Meadow Brown - her first of the summer seen at Ropley yesterday a full week after the first appeared in Hampshire.

My garden gate poster today mentioned that I had only heard of two Stag Beetle sightings so far this year, and this immediately brought news of several seen recently in the Denvilles area of Havant. Also in today's messages I find two more reports of Hornets. The first of these is from Andrew Howard at Petworth who found one in the kitchen of his house, managed to get it out, but wonders about the danger to his life in so doing! The other Hornet sighting comes from Lawrence Holloway who found one in the West Dean area north of Chichester last Thursday (June 13) +++

I would welcome more information about Hornets. What I understand, maybe wrongly, is that they are very closely related to the other social wasps and that only the large Queens survive the winter to start a new colony in the spring. The Queen builds a nest unaided and lays eggs from which female workers, smaller in size than the Queen, hatch. After the Queen has started the process the first workers help to extend the nest and feed the young that hatch after them (the Queen continuing to lay eggs through the summer). Towards the end of the summer some of the Queen's eggs hatch as males and new Queens (both these are the same size as the Queen) and the process ends with these mating, the mated Queens hibernating and all the others dying off. +++

All the adult Hornets and other wasps feed themselves on pollen, but they feed their young on meat (smaller insects which they catch and carry home). This would explain my observation (see June 14) of one seeming to feed from Hogweed blossom and taking no notice of other small insects all around the same flower head. What I do not understand is whether all the recent sightings are of Queens (certainly the observers have been impressed by the size of the insects). My guess is that the Queens have finished their first task of building the initial nest and laying their first eggs and are perhaps having a bit of a brief holiday before those first eggs hatch and there are larvae to be fed. Any comments? And any info on the sizes of Queens and workers, or other tips for distinguishing them? +++

Finally back to Andrew Howard's concern about the likelihood of being stung by a Hornet and the consequences if you are stung. My understanding is that Hornets are the most docile of the wasps, and I have never heard of anyone being stung by them. Only the worker females can sting as the Queen's ovipositor is used for the true purpose of egg-laying, the males do not have one, but in the workers the ovipositor is modified into a stinging mechanism. I think it was Simon King who once did a TV piece on Hornet's nests, and I seem to remember him saying that you were in no danger of being attacked while close to the nest providing that you did not block the route by which the workers flew in and out of the nest, and most importantly did not breathe into the nest area - he said they hate them smell of human breath and will attack you if you breathe over them. Once again this is a very vague understanding of the dangers involved so any expert advice would be welcome.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 20 JUNE

Tony Gutteridge found a headless Slow-worm in his garden today and suspects the local cat of

being the killer - if so there should be a series of pin-prick holes in the lizard's body where the cat's claws have grasped it. I hope that these finds of dead or dying Slow-worms mean that there are a lot around this year

At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter saw a Grass Snake. Not very unusual there I would think, but it comes as a reminder that this is the time of year when Grass Snakes may make relatively long journeys in search of a place to lay their eggs in a compost or dung heap that will generate enough heat to hatch the untended eggs in a couple of months time. The fewer such hot beds become the longer the journeys the snakes have to make and the greater the chance of finding many snakes all converging on one location.

WED 19 JUNE

The SOS website today carries the news that a White-sided Dolphin was found in Newhaven Harbour last Saturday (June 15) and subsequently died. Looking up this creature, which I had not previously heard of, I see that it is way out of its normal range as it does not like warm water and is only normally found in British waters around Scotland. In the cold waters of the north it is relatively common and goes about in large schools of up to 1000 animals. It grows to 2 or 3 metres in length and as well as white belly and light grey flanks it has a prominent white patch high on its side behind the dorsal fin, sometimes tinged yellow. No doubt it was already in trouble of some sort before it came south, perhaps drifting on a current against its will, and thinking of this and the severe Atlantic storms we have had recently I am wondering if the unprecedented stream of Storm Petrels going west past Selsey Bill recently have suffered from the same difficulties as this animal, eventually being driven past the north of Scotland and down into the North Sea, escaping as best they can through the English Channel? No doubt many of the Petrels did not make it but their demise would go un-noticed, unlike the dolphin.

MON 17 JUNE

Another milestone in the natural year was reported today by Richard Carpenter who saw the first young frog leaving a Titchfield Haven pond at the end of its tadpole stage. Cloudy and wet weather will probably help them to do well this year, unlike some which I encountered many years ago in a very hot period trying to leave a pond that was surrounded by a broad stone-paved area. The sun had heated up the stone so that the tiny frogs were literally fried before they could reach the surrounding grass until the pond owner saw their plight and turned on a hose to water and cool the stone.

WEEK 24 JUNE 10 – 16 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 16 JUNE

The summer Swan flock has just started to build up at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream off Broadmarsh Slipway in Langstone Harbour. Today I found 35 Swans present where there have been only one or two for several weeks now. While I was there Chris Cockburn was launching his boat to go out to warden the RSPB islands and he told me that the female Common Scoter which has recently been reported off Farlington Marshes is now a regular sight off Long Island and North Binness and he has seen it among the boats moored between Broadmarsh and the islands.

He also told me that he had recently watched a Fox make its way from Farlington Marshes to Round Nap, the furthest point of the islands away from the marshes, where it ate one gull chick before heading back. This trip involves crossing three major channels and some swimming even if the tide was at its lowest, and two of the three main gaps of mud and water between the islands are each about 200 metres across. The fox is probably not a major predator on the gull and tern nests (as it is of the Lapwing nests on the Farlington land) but the increased number of Lesser Blackback gulls this year are a real threat to the eggs and chicks of the smaller birds.

SAT 15 JUNE

A short visit to the seawall near Langstone Mill Pond at around 9:30pm coincided with the time chosen by the majority of the local Egrets to go to roost. When I arrived I could see 4 Egrets

already on the roost trees (there may well have been more out of sight) and ten still fishing in the harbour. Within about ten minutes those that I could see in the harbour, and others from elsewhere, flew in to the Wade Court roost giving me a minimum count of 21 settling down for the night (excluding two which flew into the roost then flew off again over Langstone village). A chance meeting with Tony Gutteridge, who had been out on the South Downs in the North Marden/Harting Down area, gave me the interesting news that he had heard Woodlark song and seen more than one bird thereabouts.

FRI 14 JUNE

Still with shorebirds Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven and tells me that 60 Black-tailed Godwit are still present, but on checking Birds of Hampshire I see that ten years ago when the book was written this was within the numbers expected to summer at coastal sites. Also not unprecedented, but more unusual, is the presence there of a single summering Whimbrel, while the continuing presence of Avocet at more than one Hampshire site is encouraging news for the future as the British Avocet population continues to grow - today there were three at the Haven.

A note from Mark Tutton this evening tells me that he has seen the escaped parrots at the Kench on Hayling and he believes they are Patagonian Conures. His first thought was that they might be Ring-necked Parakeets (which we are now supposed to call Rose-ringed Parakeets to be politically correct!) and if so there would be a chance of their surviving in the wild and even breeding in Hampshire as they do in vast numbers nearer London, but it seems that they are in the 'doomed to die' (or perhaps be recaptured) category of exotics not intended to live here. The name Conure (and I think there are quite a few species in this family) reminds me that we once, several years ago, had one for several weeks based on the Nore Barn woodland between our Warblington Farm Common Bird Census plot and the Emsworth shoreline - it was a very noisy bird and probably was eventually eaten by the young Sparrowhawks that may have nested in that woodland (I have never seen a nest but we usually hear the calling young and see them in July). +++

THU 13 JUNE

Top story for today comes from John Clark who has received a record of a Goosander seen recently on the Hampshire Avon with ten half-grown ducklings to prove breeding in the county. This is the second such record - the first was in 1998 when a female with six young was seen on the Avon south of Ringwood on July 1, and I see that prior to that they were known to have bred in both Devon and Somerset. Since then they have been proved to breed in Dorset (in 2000), and I think they have always bred in Scotland and the Lake District, but the increasing numbers that we see in Hampshire each winter predominantly come from Scandinavia and northern Europe.

Local news from Trevor Carpenter who was in Gosport today is topped by a Raven which Trevor saw flying south over the A32 near Fort Brockhurst and the MoD Bedenham/Frater site. This was Trevor's first ever Hampshire Raven but not the first report of one in the Gosport area though I doubt we will be seeing them in any numbers, unlike the large numbers of other corvids which have a huge winter roost somewhere here. +++

More local news comes from Bob Chapman in an update on Farlington Marshes that he put on the HWT website today. This includes the first report of a Green Sandpiper for some time (seen at the Marshes last Saturday, June 8) which Bob takes to be the first 'autumn passage' bird on its way back from breeding. In my comment on the Red-necked Phalarope seen at the Marshes last Friday (see my entry for June 7) I assumed that this too was a bird returning from the arctic but I am sure Bob is right in thinking that that bird was still on its way north (the arctic breeding grounds will only now just be unfreezing and able to provide food for arriving birds). More general news is that there are now several broods of Bearded Tits to be seen in the reeds along the stream, and that you have a good chance of seeing both Peregrine and Hobby at least once each day. A single female Common Scoter has been in Langstone Harbour - seen off 'the Point' last Saturday, June 8.

Alan Thurbon last night enjoyed the sight of two Barn Owls hunting over the rough ground of Milton Common on the Portsmouth shore of Langstone Harbour. I hope these are wild birds resident in the area (perhaps nesting at Fort Cumberland?) but I find it strange that there have

been no previous sightings in this area this year. I fear they may be 'tame birds' reared in a Portsmouth garden shed (or even kept indoors) and now released into the wild by someone who has outgrown his pets or has been forced to move away or go on holiday - if my fears are correct there will probably be a few more sightings of these tame but hungry birds, which have never learnt the art of feeding themselves, before they die.

Andrew Howard, living in the Petworth area, tells me that he was surprised to hear a Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming on a tree near his garden yesterday evening and asks if this is not rather late in the year for drumming. My answer to that would be yes (though birds do sing erratically at unexpected dates) but the fact that it was in the evening is also unusual. This reminds me of strange noises that I heard coming from a tree in woods near Rowlands Castle during the summer a few years ago - I tracked the noise down to one tree but could not see the bird and eventually concluded that it was inside a nest hole either cleaning it up after the young had left or extending an old hole to make a comfortable night roost. I think Woodpeckers do generally use their nest holes as night roosts in the non-breeding season, so I suggest (half-seriously) that the noise Andrew heard was from an over zealous woodpecker preparing a bed for the night in a rather messy old nest which the young have recently left. +++

WED 12 JUNE

Most people who watch the early evening BBC TV News will in the past few days have seen pictures of four healthy Peregrine chicks in a nest box at the foot of the spire of Chichester cathedral, and other pictures of the parent birds hanging in the wind near the nest. This is of course another success story for Graham Roberts who put up the nest box in 1995, though the birds which have been roosting on the spire (at least in winter months) since the early 1990s ignored it until last year (when there was no news as the eggs failed to hatch). This year, no doubt to coincide with the jubilee celebrations (and perhaps to make up for the unexpected failure of the famous Brighton nest box), a pair of Peregrines has hatched four young (sometime in early May) and they are expected to make their first flights within the nest week or so. So far the only complaints seem to have come from the cathedral choir whose singing has sometimes been drowned out by the noisy falcon screaming above them, but we can perhaps expect more such complaints of excessive noise from curmudgeonly citizens when the young are fluttering around the spire and their mother is shouting flying instructions and warnings to them, I won't be one of those complaining. +++

Still thinking of the strong winds Bob Chapman told us recently that they were giving the birds which nest in the reeds at Farlington Marshes a hard time (could you build a nest or raise a family with the reeds swaying violently all the time?). However further news from Bob on the HWT website today tells us that the Bearded Tits are continuing to fledge despite the weather. Bob also tells us that a second pair of Swans should soon hatch their two eggs at the Deeps (one pair has already hatched six cygnets in the reserve), but there is no news from him of any success among the Lapwing that will have attempted to nest, nor of course any Yellow Wagtails even attempting to nest this year...

Alistair Martin met Chris Cockburn at the Hayling Oysterbeds today and Alistair tells me that Chris reports a great reduction in the number of nesting Med Gulls on the RSPB islands this year. Where there were 46 pairs last year I think Alistair quoted Chris as saying there are only 11 pairs this year, and Chris attributes this to a combination of the weather and the feeding habits of these gulls. For some reason the Med Gulls never feed on what can be found in the harbour, but fly inland to feed on what they can find in the soil or in rubbish tips. In earlier years they have had a plentiful supply of earthworms, mainly gathered behind the plough, to feed up on just before breeding but this year a combination of less spring ploughing of fields near the harbour and very hard soil caused by an absence of rain (unlike the present!) meant that the birds never got into the mood for breeding. This also explains the many widespread reports of Med Gulls seen in the past couple of months far from their nesting colonies. These, I gather, are Chris's personal ideas on what has happened and are not to be quoted as proven fact, but they do tie in well with general observation.

TUE 11 JUNE

A first summer Spoonbill spent 12 minutes at Farlington Marshes this morning, seen by Jason Crook, before vanishing back into the parallel universe inhabited by non-birders who do not

notice unusual birds flying over or see them feeding. Jason says it was last seen heading for Titchfield Haven but we will have to wait and see if it re-materialised when it got there.

In contrast to these momentary sightings of unexpected birds the scene which greeted Brian Fellows at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth was one that will probably remain static for more than a month to come as the Canada Geese take advantage of free food handouts during their enforced flightless summer moult. There were 148 of them back today (I wonder if anyone working at the IBM North Harbour site has noticed a reduction in the large flock that was on the lake there last Saturday when I counted 124 of them?) +++

Baffins Pond may look a pretty mundane scene to the visiting birder but it is certainly not without its mysteries - today 7 Barnacle Geese, the hybrid Bar-Head, and the Snow Goose had all re-appeared out of that parallel universe into which they vanished in dribbles over the period starting May 14. These members of the roving 'Baffins Gang' presumably feel the same need for security of food supplies during their summer moult as do the Canada geese.

MON 10 JUNE

Despite a lot of sunshine this afternoon the wind is still far too strong for enjoying birds or butterflies so I am not surprised that there is little news for today, but despite the rain yesterday Kevin Stouse still led his walk on an anticlockwise circular route north from Buriton, coming back via Petersfield. During the morning the weather was dull but dry and a good range of farmland birds were seen, including Skylark, Yellow hammer and Linnet (just two of these - are they too now becoming rarities?), but by far the best birds were two pairs of Flycatcher, one just within Hampshire at Old Ditcham and the other in Sussex by the Mill Lake at Nursted. At Petersfield Heath Pond three Greylag Geese seem to be resident and from what Kevin says I think there were three young Canada Geese without their parents. Interestingly a Cormorant was still present at this inland lake.

PLANTS:

SUN 16 JUNE

A trip down Havant's Hermitage Stream from the Bedhampton Water Works to Broadmarsh gave me my first sight of Marsh Ragwort in flower at Bedhampton (close to the flourishing Buttonweed), both Lucerne and Black Horehound at Broadmarsh, and one large plant of Spear Thistle covered in fully open flowers as I came back alongside the A27. At Broadmarsh, on the stream bank path just south of Harts Farm Way, there is yet another great display of the Grass Vetchling that is doing so well this year. +++

In the early evening, when the sun at last came through, I cycled to Nutbourne and found the 'Dwarf Mallow' that I was looking for was just starting to flower, but looking at the plants and subsequently checking the books, I think there may be two species present. The first plants I saw were of the fairly prostrate form that I was expecting (assumed to be *Malva neglecta*) and they did not yet have flowers, a little further on I came on more plants which did have flowers just opening, but these, while not more than 20 or 30 cm high, had multiple stiffly erect stems and may have been the Chinese Mallow (*Malva verticillata*) - clearly more checking is required. If anyone wants to check them they are easy to find starting from Farm Lane at Nutbourne. You follow the lane to its end where it becomes a footpath through the orchards (after a hidden chicane round a brick wall under some conifers) and should see the Mallows under the rows of apple trees close to the path (nearer the house than the start of the path, but none under the trees west of the house). +++

Continuing towards Prinsted shore through the field edge path I found a good stand of freshly flowering Rough Chervil with the requisite purple blotched stems and rough hairs (the stems were almost entirely dark purple but there were a few green patches). I erroneously reported finding this some time ago, being deceived by rough, dark stemmed plants of Cow Parsley.

SAT 15 JUNE

A careful count of the Southern Marsh Orchids was made this morning by members of the Havant Wildlife Group and they came up with a total of 5084 plants showing that this has been a good year. Totals vary greatly from year to year and the results of this annual count for the past eight years have been:- 1995 = 6763; 1996 = 4319; 1997 = 2407; 1998 = 4890; 1999 = 340; 2000 = 5614; 2001 = 491; 2002 = 5084. The meadow has benefitted from increased grazing in recent

years and from the additional fencing which allows the cattle to be kept out of the orchid area while the plants are flowering and setting seed (they do eat them as well as trample them!). Walking round the old rail track behind my garden today I found my first Meadowsweet flowers of the year, suddenly becoming 'candy floss' after an age in hard bud form. Near them the first Opium Poppies were out and at the New Lane allotments a plant of Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea was covered with red flowers. In the same allotments there is now a good show of Weasel's Snout plants (*Misopates orontium*) but with no flowers as yet.

FRI 14 JUNE

Bob Chapman, writing on the HWT website, tells us that this is a very good year for Sea Clover at Farlington Marshes and probably at other sites. I seem to remember that the best place to see it on the seawall at Farlington was where the path runs closest to the Deeps. At a casual glance you might think this plant was just another bush of Red Clover (though each flower-head has a pair of trifoliate leaves immediately below the flowerhead where Red Clover has just one) but as the flower die off and fall to reveal the star shaped persistent calyx anyone who is looking for it should have no difficulty in picking it out. +++

Another plant that gets a mention as being prolific this summer is the lovely Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*) which I remarked on finding in abundance at the IBM North Harbour site last Saturday. The HWT website reports it from the Swanwick nature reserve by the Hamble but you might find it in any natural grassland - again it is very easily overlooked but once you spot one of the bright scarlet 'drops of blood' that are its flowers hanging in mid-air up to 40cm off the ground (with such a thin stem as to be invisible) you will probably find there are many such flowers all around, and you will be delighted with their discovery. +++

Many other members of the pea family are now flowering and Richard Carpenter today found his first yellow Meadow Vetchling and blueish Tufted Vetch in the Chilling area. An unmissable member of this family which must be out now is the Broad-leaved Everlasting Pea (wild Sweet Pea) which I have seen in a garden but not in the wild - it should be on the seawall of the Hayling Oysterbeds immediately south of the Little Tern island, and on the A27 banks in the Chalk Dock area east of Farlington Marshes (plus many other sites ...)

WED 12 JUNE

John Goodspeed led today's 'Wednesday evening walk', this time on Portsdown. I guess they visited the Field Cow-wheat and Small Yellow Foxgloves at the Skew Road site and saw many interesting plants but two newcomers which John tells me were found by Andrew Powling in the fields south west of Fort Southwick and east of Portchester Common were the deep red Rough Poppy and the less eye-catching Thyme-leaved Sandwort. These fields used to be the place to see Venus Looking-glass on Portsdown but I can't recall when that was last seen here (it, like many annuals, can only survive when the fields are cultivated regularly and not 'left to nature') +++

Earlier in the day Richard Carpenter had been in the Hook area and found the first Enchanter's Nightshade in flower, reminding me that the path along the Hook Lake valley used to be a good site for Climbing Corydalis, a plant that is very uncommon in south east Hampshire and should be out now.

Last Saturday (June 8) I listed a whole lot of plants seen around the IBM Lake site in Portsmouth but realised later that I had omitted one that some people will be interested in - the Hoary Mallow, or Rough Marsh-mallow (*Althea hirsuta*) - which was once again thriving despite/because of the attacks on it by mowers and grazing geese. No one that I have come across knows the origin of these plants but they were almost certainly introduced in the 1970s or 1980s when IBM were doing their best to turn recently dried out harbour mud into a typical English country park (for many years everything died). For this reason they are not recognised by botanists as anything other than garden plants but they do deserve a small prize for continuin to come up each year despite the best efforts of the gardeners and geese to get rid of them. The only years in which they were not seen were these after Dick Barrett had discovered the plants and persuaded the gardeners to create a 'no-mowing area' in which a jungle of other growth crowded them out until they escaped into the close mowing zone and could once more see the light. As a result of this situation do not expect to see plants standing tall - all you see is the almost bare grass bank covered with perhaps a hundred flowers from the creeping plants

that survive the mowing (most people would dismiss them as pale flowers of Field Bindweed) Alistair Martin today went to have a look at the Bee Orchids which I found yesterday by the Hayling Coastal path (see yesterday's notes for details) and tells me that he had a look round the area I described and found a lot more of them - as many as 60.

TUE 11 JUNE

My regular Tuesday cycle ride to south Hayling today gave me eight newly flowering plants for the year plus one, Common Toadflax, which was first reported in flower on May 4 in the Prinsted area but which I have not seen until today (not unusual with this plant which comes into its own in high summer but occasionally flowers early). Best of the new flowers for me was the lovely Sea Bindweed on the south Hayling sandy shore but it was run a close second by the bright yellow of Dyers Greenweed in the fields close to the coastal path just north of the path to the West Lane bends. While thinking of this area some people might like to know that there is now a lovely show of 25 Bee Orchids along the seaward side of the coastal path a little north of the pillbox marking the west end of the path to West Lane - to see them go north from that pillbox for about 200 metres until there is a tall hummock of earth on the seaward side of the path (with a well used path over the top of the hummock) and look alongside the path at both the south and north ends of the hummock (SU 7102-62). +++

Also flowering by the Coastal Path at its north end was my first Greater Knapweed, and all along the path Agrimony (not new) was well out. The Common Toadflax was seen when passing Stoke Bay, and on the earth mound overlooking the Little Tern nests at the Oysterbeds the Milk Thistles are now in flower (you have to go up on the mound and look on the east facing slope to see the thistles but very soon there will be a great show of Common Centaury on the slope leading down to the lagoon). In and around the carpark behind the Esso garage the Goats Rue was still not out but if you want to see Slender Thistles go to the far - northern - end of it to see some good specimens). +++

Going back to south Hayling I found Restharrow flowering in several places and Hare's Foot Clover in many places (I was left wondering if the Rough Clover reported as seen last night was in fact this clover in its young stages as I could not find any Rough Clover, though I did find several patches of tiny clover leaves, held erect like umbrellas, which I am pretty sure belonged to Suffocated Clover not yet in flower - these are on the bank between the skateboard park and the "road which should never have been built" across Beachlands. I counted 56 plants of Childing Pink and was encouraged to see at least one new cluster of plants out on the open grass away from the gorse. +++

Coming to the Pale Toadflax site, having been assured the the plants were in flower by those visiting it last night, I at first thought the plants must have vanished as I could see none as I approached but getting closer the sad truth dawned. Just one plant was in flower at the back of the site and many people wanting to look closely at the Dodder had trampled down the majority of the plants, presumably not seeing them as they were not in flower. Hopefully most of them will recover but I hope the Dodder does not attract other passers by to take a closer look. An equally sad site greeted me as I cycled down the coastal path and came to place where Pete Durnell had discovered Saw-wort before he left us - I had placed a wall of gorse around the plants to stop the rabbits eating them but it could not stop the mechanical verge cutter that has recently been along the track. Luckily a couple of the plants have just escaped destruction so all is not lost. +++

To complete my list of new plants seen today I must add Field Rose and Hedge Bedstraw, both seen beside the Coastal Path, and will also mention that I came on a large patch of white flowered Storksbill on the sandy soil of Beachlands, but could see no sign of the Musk Storksbill that normally flourishes outside 164 Seafront, between the pavement and the garden wall.

MON 10 JUNE

The Havant Wildlife Group which normally meets as an Evening Class each Monday in termtime sensibly abandon the classroom on sunny summer evenings, and today was scheduled to be the first such outing. Despite the wind they went to Sinah Common on Hayling and found three new plants in flower (since I was there last week) plus a good selection of the regulars such as Viper's Bugloss, Thrift, Sheep's Bit and Yellow Horned Poppy, not to mention the Childing Pink

colony though the flowers of these, tiny enough at the best of times, were closed for the night. The new plants were the omni-present English Stonecrop, the equally common here but easily overlooked Rough Clover, and the lovely and unmissable (if you go to the right place as there is only one small cluster of plants on Hayling) Pale Toadflax. If you do want to see this last plant go to the Ice cream kiosk/Public loos just north of the Inn on the Beach as you drive in to the west Beachlands carparks, then walk about 100 yards west to the corner post of the mini-golf course, and there look on the south side of the path along the southern edge of the mini-golf course. The Pale Toadflax may not immediately catch your eye but the huge growth of Dodder (not yet flowering) on the gorse beside it certainly will!

Earlier in the day John Goodspeed was out on Portsdown checking the Skew Road site above the M27 at Portchester. Here (at the Nelson Lane west end of the area) the steep bank had many Small Yellow Foxgloves (sometimes called Straw Foxgloves) now in flower as they have been each year here since at least 1970. Near the end of the road bridge over the motorway, where Skew Road and Nelson Lane diverge, you should find examples of the Belgarum variation of Bee Orchids, and at the foot of the steep bank immediately north of the bridge at least two plants of Field Cow-wheat are now flowering to show that the colony on the motorway bank itself is spreading. To see the hundreds of plants in the main colony park in the large 'layby' between Skew Road and the motorway fence, then walk down that fence line towards the bridge until you see the lovely purple and gold flowers just over the fence on the flat top of the motorway bank.

INSECTS:

SUN 16 JUNE

Happening to pass through Brook Meadow at Emsworth this afternoon just after warm sunshine had broken through the clouds I was delighted to see two Small Tortoiseshell flying in close formation (courtship) over a bank of nettles and then to find six more fresh Small Tortoiseshell on bramble flowers. Just one Large Skipper was with them. The only other butterflies seen today were a few Small White and Red Admirals. In other vegetation at Brook Meadow I saw a bright 'Marmelade Fly' (the common hoverfly *Episyrphus balteatus*), a black and red *Cercopis vulnerata* Froghopper and several of the beetles with swollen thighs (*Oedemera nobilis*) which feed on pollen as adults and wood as larvae.

SAT 15 JUNE

It is now a week since I saw two Marbled White on the wing at the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site and I am surprised that none have been reported since then but at least one new butterfly was added to the Hampshire year list this week with Silver-studded Blue seen by John Collman at Hazeley Heath (just north of the M3 as it approaches the county boundary after the Hook interchange). +++

There have been a few more new moths this week and the latest to go on the list is the Heart and Club taken at Philip Hack's Southampton (Nursling) trap this evening. I see that Philip also scored a 'first equal' with Barry Collins for a Small Magpie taken last week (June 6). Elephant Hawkmoths are clearly having a widespread emergence at the moment (Philip had two at his trap this evening) but Mark Litjens was nevertheless delighted to find one that had just emerged drying out on grass in his garden at Hedge End near Southampton today - it stayed in the same place all day but flew in the evening. Less delightful was the find of a dead Eyed Hawkmoth in Hove this morning by Alan Barrett - though Alan was delighted as he had waited 50 years for a first sight of this moth! Although the first Eyed Hawkmoth was seen over a month ago by Graham Roberts it seems that they have only been emerging generally since June 2, so this dead one could be one that failed to take off (as these large Hawkmoths all seem to spend the first day after emerging hanging in one place, often very exposed on fences or walls, etc, I am surprised that more are not taken by cats or children). +++

FRI 14 JUNE

It would seem that Hornets are thriving in our area, extending their hunting range to places that they are not normally seen (though I think they do fly a good many miles from their nests when hunting for small insects as food). This thought came to me today as I found myself watching a Hornet working the umbels of a tall Hogweed plant only a foot or so from my face as I walked

the 'Selangor Avenue' footpath down the eastern boundary of the Warblington Farm fields. I have seen Hornets carrying off worker wasps which they grabbed among the New Forest heather but in this case it almost seemed as if the Hornet was actually tanking up on nectar from the flowers rather than carrying out its shopping instructions to bring home meat - at any rate many other insects were buzzing round the same flowers showing no concern about the Hornet's presence (do insects react to the presence of predators?) while it was going from ray to ray of the umbel showing great interest in the flowers themselves. +++

Another recent Hornet sighting was in the 'bushes' at Farlington Marshes, seen last Wednesday June 12, according to Bob Chapman on the HWT website.

The national Migrant Moth website today carries news of three more Hummingbird Hawkmoths in the past week - none near us on the south coast but still holding promise for local sightings here. One item on that website which is of local interest is a report of a Clouded Yellow at Langstone on June 8, but the usual info about the person who saw it is missing (as is Chris Cockburn's sighting of a Clouded Yellow over the Langstone Harbour islands on June 2) and I think there may have been a mix-up between these two sightings. +++

Not perhaps of national significance was the first Meadow Brown at Titchfield Haven today, reported by Richard Carpenter.

THU 13 JUNE

An impressive moth on an earlier than usual date was the first Oak Eggar of the year seen today by Barry Collins on Thonrey Island. Although Barry does not say so I assume the Oak Eggar was a male, not only because of the general rule that males of all species tend to appear before the females, but mainly because I understand that the females tend to hide during the day and fly at night while the males are prepared to go searching for females by day as well as at night. +++

Back at home on the northern fringe of Havant Barry had his moth trap on tonight and took two more firsts for the year, The Lychnis and Middle-barred Minor (don't confuse the common but pretty Lychnis moth with the Striped Lychnis - a rarity that gets a lot of press nowadays). Two other moths in Barry's trap were second finds for the year - Elephant Hawkmoth and Treble Brown Spot, and the overall number of moths was perhaps indicated by the presence of 72 Heart and Dart.

A phone call from Mike Harris this evening was prompted by a close encounter with a low-flying Stag Beetle in his Portsmouth (Drayton) garden. Surprisingly this is only the second report of a Stag Beetle to reach me this year. On nearby Farlington Marshes Bob Chapman tells us that the first Horseflies of the year are now flying. Horseflies are a group with at least six species regularly found in southern England - Bob does not tell us the species but all of them are to be avoided as the females are voracious blood-suckers that go for humans as well as horses. Less harmful insects now on the wing at Farlington Marshes are Meadow Brown and Large Skipper.

TUE 11 JUNE

Looking for Glanville Fritillary at Hordle Cliffs (just one tatty specimen seen) Peter Eeles found another fresh Small Tortoiseshell today, and when visiting Magdalen Hill Down east of Winchester today Derek Mills heard that a Small Tortoiseshell had just been seen there, so it looks as if Brian Fellows find of three at Emsworth yesterday (June 10) did mark the start of the widespread emergence of a summer brood.

On Thorney Island today Barry Collins saw two more Meadow Brown after seeing his first in Havant Thicket yesterday, when Stephen Harwood saw them out in the Catherington area, showing that the sightings of them last Saturday (June 8) were the start of general emergence for this year. Maybe of interest was Peter Eeles sight of a Green Hairstreak egg-laying at Noar Hill today (just 3 Small Heath were the only other butterflies braving the wind there today).

Migrant butterflies that have reached Hampshire in the past few days include a Clouded Yellow seen by Patrick Fleet egg-laying on Magdalen Hill Down east of Winchester yesterday (June 10) and a continuing stream of Painted Lady sightings everywhere. Today I saw at least half a dozen Red Admirals scattered along my route to south Hayling this afternoon, suggesting the arrival of a new wave of migrants. Other than those the only butterflies I noticed were a couple of Small Whites, one Common Blue that happened to be sitting out the wind sleeping in the

flowerhead of this year's first Greater Knapweed, and one possible Meadow Brown on Sinah Common. +++

MON 10 JUNE

Best news of the day comes from Brian Fellows at Brook Meadow in Emsworth where he saw three very fresh looking Small Tortoiseshell butterflies which I take to be newly emerged summer brood insects, albeit a couple of weeks early than normal due to earlier than usual emergence from hibernation of the previous generation. With them Brian saw the first Large Skipper for that site, but these are now well established.

John Goodspeed was checking the flowers on Portsdown above the M27 at Portchester today and came on a beetle in the grass which he had not seen previously (and I have never seen as far as I know), and John was able to introduce me to the species by sending a couple of close-up pictures which show the pale brown elytra, the long but fairly broad body shape, and the long antennae which, with the unusual hairiness of the elytra (wing cases) make it almost certain that this was the species which John thought it must be - Dacillus cervinus - as illustrated on page 268 of my Collins Guide to Insects (Chinery) and the description there tells me that this must be a male because it has greyish hair rather than the yellowish brown hair of a female. This beetle is probably not a gardener's or botanist's friend as it is related to the Click Beetles (whose larvae are the dreaded wireworms) and it has wireworm-like larvae which eat the roots of plants. As far as I can tell from Chinery's description (in his Field Guide to Insects) of the Cebrionidae family to which this beetle belongs they are not able to perform the amazing 'flea jumps' of true Click Beetles (Elateridae) of which we saw a demonstration at Selborne Common recently when Richard Hallett found a true Click Beetle (see May 19 notes).

News reaching me today from Andrew Brookes confirms the emergence of Meadow Browns last Saturday (when they were seen at Hook near Warsash) with a sighting of two near the Huntbourne Woods west of Denmead on the same day. In the same woods Andrew also saw six Large Skipper, six Brimstone and a single Grizzled Skipper

OTHER WILDLIFE:

TUE 11 JUNE

Barry Collins has in the past complained about the abundance of local cats which come to his moth trap and catch the best specimens before he has had a chance to see what they were, but they must be well fed cats which go home and curl up before midnight. I say this because Barry looked out of his window at around 2am this morning and watched four young Fox cubs playing in his garden without a care in the world, and they were still around an hour later. I have always understood that Foxes are not put off by the presence of dogs but give a garden with cats in it a wide berth - maybe that only applies to adult foxes, and maybe the reverse operates - while cats will soon see off a dog that strays into their territory maybe they ignore playful puppies? Any comment?

MON 10 JUNE

Following the question about the lifespan of Toads last Friday I had another request for information today from someone who has rescued a Slow-worm and wants to know how to feed it, giving me an ideal opportunity to tell the questioner how valuable these legless Lizards are in our gardens since their favourite delicacy is a slug. They will eat other small creatures (but not apparently ants) though I am left wondering if they contribute to keeping down the woodlouse population. Their usefulness to gardeners gives that tribe further reason to wish that cats were not such popular pets, as cats kill many Slow-worms just for sport (playing with them and puncturing their bodies with their claws, but not eating them). Apparently Adders will swallow Slow-worms, and as I have seen twice this year in my own garden Magpies are adept at catching them but at least they kill and eat their prey quickly. When they are young they may be eaten by Frogs and Toads, and at any age they are also food for Hedgehogs, Rats and Kestrel, but Grass Snakes are not mentioned among their many enemies (though I suspect Grass Snakes will eat them).

WEEK 23 JUNE 3 – 9

BIRDS:

SUN 09 JUNE

Having put my computer out of action by spilling a glass of wine into the keyboard last night, and the shops not being open to get a new one until 10am, I walked down to the Langstone South Moors first thing, passing below noises that must have come from a juvenile Green Woodpecker out on its own. On the South Moors one Egret flew over and landed at the Tamarisk Pool (tide was high and wind was fresh out in the harbour). On Budds Farm Pools the Swan pair were resting on the stony promontory and may well have had their cygnets hidden under their wings but I could not see them. Six Shelduck were again present with signs of nesting as were the usual small number of Mallard and Tufted Duck. Swallows and House Martins were skimming the water. +++

Coming back through Langstone Village the local Swan pair had their three small cygnets on the small amount of shore left by the tide outside the Royal Oak pub, unperturbed by a mass of people launching rowing boats all around them and giving no hint of their amazing powers of deception in hiding their nest and then young for over five weeks of incubation and a month of early life (the brood was first seen on May 28 on the sea). In the Wade Court trees I could glimpse the white of at least two Egrets perched in the trees.

SAT 08 JUNE

Here in Hampshire Will Walmsley was at Farlington Marshes and saw an albino Common Gull - presumably the bird seen on and off in the harbour (and also at the mouth of the River Adur?) since the beginning of the year if not before. Less exciting was a single Greylag Goose...

At the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site for this month's WeBS count this morning I found 124 Canada Geese and no obvious goslings. The increase in the number of adults from 33 last month is what I would expect (last year we went from 37 in May to 173 in June), but in both those months last year we had 21 goslings and today I could see none though I suspect they were hiding somewhere despite my extensive tour of the whole lake and most of the grounds - knowing them they may well have been inside the buildings raiding the cafeteria! Today there was one adult still sitting on a nest at the extreme east end by the pump house which sends excess water out into the harbour but maybe the foxes have done a good job in keeping down the ever-growing numbers of these imported geese as they seem to have done with the Swans. Kevin Stouse tells me that last week the resident pair had 5 cygnets - today the only pair of Swans were on the lake on their own and the nest to the east of the cafeteria had been abandoned with no sign of the bird sitting on it last month. +++

There was little else to report from the site in the way of birds though Blackcap, Chiffchaff, Reed, Sedge and Cetti's Warbler were all heard as were Whitethroats (but of course none of the Skylarks and Meadow Pipits of past summers). The Coot had one youngster to show from some 7 pairs and several pairs of Little Grebe were seen and heard and of the 11 Tufted Duck seen I think only two were females so there could be up to nine other female sitting somewhere. Another definite breeding failure was the Kestrel pair - I hear at second hand via Kevin Stouse that they nested (as last year) on the grille at the top of one of the main rainwater downpipes on the building and, as last year, the nest was drowned when it rained hard. Best of the smaller birds was a pair of Reed Bunting on the lake islands where the male was singing and the female sounding very anxious and perching close to me as I passed her probable nest site. +++

Among other news from Kevin Stouse is an intriguing reference to his having seen a pair of Swans with three cygnets on the harbour just off the seawall at Langstone Pond on Tuesday. The message was delayed but I think this must refer to Tuesday May 28 and presume that the Langstone Pond swans still had three cygnets on that day whereas when I went to this spot on May 20, hoping to see the pair with 5 cygnets as reported by Heather Mills who saw them on May 18, I saw two Swans with no cygnets. It looks as if this Langstone Pond Swan pair are once more doing the 'grand illusion' act that they first showed last year when, long after I had given up all hope of seeing any breeding success, they came floating in from the sea with a family behind them.

FRI 07 JUNE

Top news for today comes from Jason Crook at Farlington Marshes where his patience, after spotting what he thought was a Red Necked Phalarope in the harbour in the afternoon and waiting for the evening tide to force it from hiding in the channels between mud-banks, was rewarded with the sight and sound of the bird in its summer female finery flying in to the Deeps after other watchers had gone home. I hope the male, which this female will have abandoned in the arctic after she had laid her eggs, is as patient as Jason and brings off a brood of young for our future pleasure. I see that this bird is a year earlier than expected - there have been females at Farlington in June of 1983 and 1993 so we were not due to see the next until 2003. Perhaps she will stay longer than her predecessors - in 1983 there were two sightings on June 1 and 6, but in 1993 the bird was only seen on one day - June 13. There have of course been several sightings in other years but these have all been later in the year, mainly September and October, when the bird has lost its most colourful plumage and has to be separated from Grey Phalarope by the sharpness of its bill and thinness of neck, etc.

It seems that summer sightings of Red Kite along the south coast are rapidly becoming commonplace, and I do not share the idea (expressed by some observers in their comments) that this is a single bird competing for its "I've been everywhere" car sticker. To disprove the single bird theory Mike Wall today had two circling together low over the Hannington area west of Basingstoke. Yesterday (June 6) Les Stride had one flying north west over West Wellow, west of Romsey near the M27, and on June 5 one was over the Itchen Valley country park just north of Southampton in the morning while John Clark (Hampshire Bird Recorder) was told of 7 seen in the area north of Portsdown Hill that day. On June 4 one was in the Avon valley over Downton, south of Salisbury, and another was far to the east over the A267 just south of Tunbridge Wells in Kent (though the bird was in East Sussex).

The only other sighting in the news for today is of four Bar-headed Geese seen on the mud of Fishbourne Channel near Chichester by Simon Cox, who admits to not being a regular bird watcher and asks for help with identifying four birds seen during an evening walk. He describes them as similar in size to Canada Geese but with light grey bodies, yellow to orange bills and legs, and {{ with black and white distinctive markings around the neck and head. The markings were almost stripes running vertically up the neck and covering the eyes, the top of the head appeared white. }} He also says that they showed no concern about his presence only 15 yards from them. If anyone has other ideas let me know but this seems to be an excellent description of Bar-heads and I only wish others wanting help with identification were as precise and comprehensive with the relevant detail.

THU 06 JUNE

Two more unexpected shore birds for June were Little Stints seen at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter. Two Avocets there were business as usual (where were the other two is the question) and my interest is held more by the late staying Black-tailed Godwit of which there were 63 at the Haven today. +++

Last but not least of the unusual birds for June seen today was an Osprey over the lake at Stratfield Saye on the northern border of Hampshire with Berkshire - this was seen by John Clark and unlike several recent reports of Osprey John does not say that this one was flying south. One new report of Osprey going south east over Farlington Marshes (on June 4) comes from Jason Crook.

Coming back to the bread and butter of our regular breeding birds Brian Fellows has the first report of a family of young Whitethroats just out of the nest, making a noteworthy addition to the wildlife of Brook Meadow at Emsworth.

I was out this morning on the fields of Warblington Farm between Havant and Emsworth making the seventh of the ten visits required each spring for the Common Bird Census, and with Tony Gutteridge taking a well earned break in Cornwall I had the pleasure of visiting all twenty fields on my own but with little reward in the way of birds (plenty of flowers and a vixen still feeding four cubs seen - so not boring!). The surprising feature of this visit was the sighting of at least four Egrets overflying the fields, apparently coming from inland back to the harbour as the tide started to fall. Until April we expected to see up to 15 Egrets feeding in the fields around the cattle but they then (as usual) abandoned the fields. Interesting to me was my first sight of

Rooks feeding on the fields - we nearly always have a non-breeding flock of perhaps 30 Crows on the fields and shoreline, and usually have Rooks nesting in at least one tree on the farm but this year they have abandoned those nests, and others over the main road into Emsworth, though still nesting nearby in Emsworth. Now those Rooks are no longer tied to their nests they and their young were in one of the fields (but only 20 or so of them where there have in the past been nearer 100 including the young). Once again no Skylarks to report but I'm pretty sure I was very close to a Lesser Whitethroat nest to judge by the strong scolding I got from both birds (none of the Common Whitethroat churring - much more like 'tucc-ing' Blackcaps). One other minor item for rejoicing was Goldcrest song from a conifer in the cemetery - my first sign of these birds this year after seeing their nest in the churchyard pulled to pieces by Magpies last year.

Following reports that Nightingales have ceased singing in many places, then the news yesterday of one in full song at Portchester Castle, Ken Hearne tells me that he was at Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve today and heard four of them still singing - one showing well perched on the branch of a dead tree. Ken wonders if these are late arrivals trying to get their share of the action.

Another bird seen/heard in good numbers for this time of year was Firecrest. News of them comes from Tony Wilson who heard at least 8 singing in the West Dean Woods north of Chichester on Tuesday (June 4) and comments that these woods are the best site for Firecrest in the whole of Sussex. Tony also tells me that his recent sighting of an Egyptian Goose at Burton Mill Pond (reported by me on June 3), which caused him to wonder if the bird was breeding locally, led him to refer to the species as breeding in Sussex for the first time last year (2001) where in fact the first breeding was in 2000.

WED 05 JUNE

At Budds Farm pools this morning I found the Swan pair off their nest with 4 new cygnets on the water but, despite the presence of 5 adult Shelduck they have no young to show as yet though Bob Chapman's news from Farlington Marshes (on the HWT website today) includes a Shelduck with 17 youngsters (two broods already combined) and a pair of Swans that has 6 young. one of them a 'Polish bird' (bill, feet and feathers all white from the start instead of the normal cygnet brown). Co-incidentally the Budds Farm Swans had one of these Polish cygnets last year and I'm pretty sure it survived to adult life. Other news from Bob adds Wigeon to the current show of duck species at Farlington (see Jason Crook's news on Monday June 3) - it seems an adult female Wigeon is sometimes seen at Farlington this summer. +++

Brent Geese are not mentioned by Bob Chapman though I expect there are two or three in Langstone Harbour this summer (the last I heard of were two at the Farlington Deeps on May 16 - the singleton that was off the South Moors in April had drifted east into Chichester Harbour by May 4 when it was off Langstone village, and further east by May 18 to be off Nore Barn at the west end of the Emsworth shore by May 18).

The latest news of summering Brent comes from Brian Fellows who had three in Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour today - there were five there on Apr 29 but the other two may now be off Thorney Island where Trevor Carpenter saw two yesterday - and from Peter Raby who saw two in Portsmouth Harbour off Portchester Castle today (these are probably the two that were in that harbour on Apr 13 and recorded in the WeBS count - 1 off Gosport and 1 off Frater Lake). More unexpected was a single Pale-bellied Brent still in Pagham Harbour on Monday June 3 (Mike Collins had an ordinary Brent, very tame, off Church Norton on May 8, so there may be more Brent in Pagham Harbour). For many years Langstone and Chichester Harbours have always had a few summering Brent, but it is I think unusual to have them in Portsmouth and Pagham harbours, making me wonder if there are still any lurking in the east and north Solent where odd late birds have been reported this year at Normandy, Hook and off Titchfield Haven.

Other miscellaneous info in the messages from which I have extracted the above items starts with Bob Chapman's comment that the recent gales have presented a bit of a problem for the reed dwellers with nests and young - I imagine there have been some seasick Bearded Tits at Farlington, if nothing worse, though it may be that the Reed Warblers have not yet started nesting seriously (I would welcome correction to my belief that they wait until the new green

reeds have grown tall enough to conceal their nests, and maybe only use new reeds to support their nests, whereas we have already heard that some Bearded Tits have already fledged a first brood). +++

At Fishbourne, making his second and last visit to Fishbourne for the BTO Breeding Bird survey, Brian Fellows found the Swan flock now numbers 76 and there are 38 Shelduck there. He did see 6 Egrets but did not see a single Yellowhammer in the 1 km square (another local extinction? there are none on the Warblington Farm nowadays and Brian found none in his Southleigh Forest edge square last Sunday). The Apuldram sewage works had around 100 each of Swifts and Swallows over it, reminding me that the Budds Farm pools had around 20 House Martins over it this morning in addition to Swifts and Swallows - I assume the Martins are local breeding birds collecting food for their young, but they could be non-breeders. +++

At Portchester Castle, in addition to the Brent, Peter Raby saw a Med Gull and seven Egrets but more interestingly he heard a Nightingale in full song - probably a failed breeder from elsewhere trying desperately to make good, but possibly a very late arriving migrant (like the Stone Curlew that only made it to the Isle of Wight last Saturday!)

TUE 04 JUNE

Still in Sussex Trevor Carpenter walked around Thorney Island today and, in addition to the two summer Brent already mentioned, saw two Turtle Doves, two Cuckoos and 34 Curlew - Barry Collins had 42 Curlew here last Saturday but I am not sure if they are birds that have already given up thoughts of nesting and returned to the coast, or if they are non-breeders that have never left the harbour. +++

Recent news from Hampshire includes two more Red Kite sightings with one going south over Titchfield Haven on Saturday June 1 and another over Beaulieu Road area of the New Forest on Friday (May 31) in addition to the one over Romsey which I mentioned last Sunday (June 2). The Titchfield Haven sighting comes from their official website page on which I see that two Fulmar flew past the reserve on June 1 when 4 Avocet and 80+ Black-tailed Godwit were seen on the scrapes. On May 31 three Roseate Terns were flying about in the reserve, three Avocet were present, the usual Barn Owl was hunting over the reserve in mid-morning and two Bar-tailed Godwits were seen on the shore.

MON 03 JUNE

This morning Ian Thirlwell was surprised to find a drake Pintail on the Portsmouth Milton Lakes (south east corner of Langstone Harbour) and this prompted Jason Crook to tell us that this is not the only unexpected duck in the area. Today at Farlington Marshes he also saw what was almost certainly the same Pintail, a drake Garganey (there for the second day running), four Gadwall and four Teal, though some Shoveler that have been present until recently have now left and it would seem that no lazy Wigeon have stayed on for the summer this year. Maybe Pintail are extending their breeding range towards Hampshire as a pair were seen at Pagham on June 1 by Lee Marshall when he was after the Savi's Warbler, and Will Walmsley saw one there yesterday when on the same mission (the only indication of possible breeding in the county was a pair seen at Farlington through May and June of 1983). For those who are interested the SOS website reports that the Savi's Warbler is still in the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour, though Lee Marshall says it is elusive and that you are most likely to hear it at dawn or dusk.

Here in Hampshire, also yesterday, Alistair Martin tells me that a Turtle Dove was back in the trees by the Hayling Coastal Path just south of the Oysterbeds, and that he visited the Marlpit Lane Nightingale site just east of the Ems valley. He does not mention any Nightingales but he did see a raptor with jesses (almost certainly the bird which Mike Collins saw there on May 3) and when he rang the Sussex Falconry Centre to report its presence he was told it was a Harris Hawk and that there had been attempts to re-capture it without success - there are so many rabbits in this area it is never hungry enough to have any interest in a lure. +++

Another long term escapee was an Egyptian Goose seen by Tony Wilson in the Burton Mill Pond area west of Pulborough (also yesterday, June 2). Tony says that this species bred in Sussex for the first time last year (at Shipley near Horsham), and he wonders if this bird might be breeding? There was a single Egyptian Goose on the Chichester lakes last January, so I suppose this might be the same lonely wanderer as Tony does not mention the second bird

necessary for breeding success. +++

PLANTS:

SUN 09 JUNE

At Langstone South Moors new fencing was erected over a year ago, at the start of the Foot and Mouth outbreak, and still prevents people from wandering onto the moors among the cattle (a good thing, preserving the SSSI from dog walkers), but also preventing the cattle from grazing the public path alongside the Langbrook stream where Knotted Hedge Parsley has grown for years on the steep bank which rises above the path to keep out the tide flooding upstream. I had feared that this unusual plant would be crowded out by the ungrazed vegetation, but this morning I found it flourishing in a new spot at the foot of the new fence, at the edge of the area the cattle can graze by sticking their head through the wire. The plants here were few but healthy and flowering (big enough plants to see the the flowers without a lens!) +++

Out on the old IBM playing fields the newly discovered Bee Orchid colony has increased to 35 plants, and the only new flowerings today were Fool's Parsley in Havant and Tufted Vetch on the south facing A27 bank over the Langbrook stream.

SAT 08 JUNE

At the Portsmouth IBM site this morning I not only found the expected mass of Common Spotted and Pyramidal orchids (probably at least 1000 of each) and some stunning Bee Orchids (much fewer in number but high in quality - one cluster of a dozen grouped close in one of the carpark bay divider flowerbeds were all 50 to 60cm tall with many perfect flowers, none yet withered), but several brand new species. The first of these was Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus nissolia*), showing its blood red blooms to good advantage under cloudy skies (I must have passed six different colonies of this plant around the site) and another was the Yellow-wort that will soon be abundant on chalky soil. Another yellow flower was Yellow Loosestrife, a big patch of which was starting to flower by the lake (and other patches of the commoner Dotted Loosestrife were in fuller flower). Also just starting to flower was this year's crop of Melilot (I haven't yet checked a flower sample to see if it was Tall or Ribbed). Before I left I checked that the yellow pea *Lathyrus aphaca* was still flowering in the carparks (it first came out last month), and this month I found the first of the large flowered sub-species of Common Vetch in flower here. Two more newcomers, perhaps not entirely wild flowers, were Sulphur Cinquefoil (self established in several places, and as wild as is the Salsify that was also flowering but probably originated from vegetables that fell off the back of a lorry on the nearby road, or from the allotments that were here pre-1970), and the definitely planted by IBM Tulip trees now flowering by the main reception lake. New to me, although seen by John Goodspeed some time back, was a good display of the small mauve flowers of Common Broomrape (at least 50 plants in perhaps ten colonies), and another not new plant present here in large quantities awaiting destruction by the long delayed development of the east end of the site was Corky-fruited Water Dropwort. Another not new flower, nationally rare though present here in huge waist high swathes, is Pale Flax, with Hedgerow Cranesbill giving another colourful display. To end this recital of beautiful wild plants I saw one huge plant of Greater Mullein that must surely be in flower early next week...

A phone call from Alistair Martin this evening told me of an orchid find in the Stansted Groves area which he is convinced is Heath Spotted Orchid, though knowing the variability of Common Spotted orchids and the preference of Heath Spotted for acid heathland I am reserving judgement until I have seen the plants. Their regular appearance in the Hookheath nature reserve north of Portsdown, hardly acid heath, lends credence to Alistair's claim but I will reserve judgement until I have seen the plants.

The Havant Wildlife Group walked in the Staunton Country park, north of Havant, this morning and saw both Heath and Marsh Bedstraw newly in flower. Among other plants were Common Spotted orchids in their hundreds, lots of Corky-fruited Water Dropwort and Perforate St John's Wort which has just started to open its flowers.

FRI 07 JUNE

At Titchfield Haven the first White Water-lilies were seen in flower today by Richard Carpenter in the Warblington area between Havant and Emsworth I saw an equally dramatic statement of

summer in the shape of two flowers open of Musk Mallow (I often think of this as Motorway Mallow as it is so often seen on road verges, as it was in this case). I went on to Emsworth to have a look at another road verge site, the south of the bridge carrying the A27 over the path leading to Westbourne along the west side of the River Ems. Here huge Oriental Poppies and Rose Campion (*Lychnis coronaria* which will soon colour the Gunner Point area of South Hayling) were in flower - presumably plants descended from wild flower seed scattered when the road was built. I did not pursue this path further north but crossed the river at Lumley Mill and went up the east side using Mill Lane. Coming to the south side of the A27 again where the canalised Mill Stream comes under the A27 I found the expected cluster of Dames Violet right above the grille through which the stream emerges, and at the top of this stream just south of Westbourne Church, the expected plants of Skullcap were in flower (as predicted by Richard Carpenters recent find of the, at Titchfield Haven on May 31).

THU 06 JUNE

Once again Richard Carpenter today found at Titchfield Haven the first flowering of a plant that will soon abound everywhere - Wild Carrot - and found Hedge Bindweed in flower. Large Bindweed has been out for a week or more but today I completed the trio of these common weeds with the much prettier Field Bindweed at Warblington. Best plants of this visit to Warblington Farm were in the marshy SSSI field east of the cemetery - in the boggiest bits the tiny pink flowers of Bog Pimpernel were a delight and along the even wetter bits where the incoming salt tide mixes with the fresh spring water of the stream there was a better than usual display of the uncommon Brookweed (*Samolus valerandi*). In this same field I found the Southern Marsh orchids to which I referred yesterday in connection with those at Langstone but most of my other finds on the farm were less interesting - Small Nettle and Common Orache in flower plus Redshank and Crested Dogs-tail grass. One more colourful find was my first Perforate St Johns Wort. The Greater Horsetail which abounds on this farm has now reached its full size and could not be mistaken for another species, but it did remind me that when I was on the Langstone South Moor's yesterday I noticed spore bearing cones on some smaller Horsetails, also bearing whorls of leaves, which were not the common Field Horsetail as that has its cones on separate leafless stems much earlier in the year, and I have now checked that these are Marsh Horsetails.

WED 05 JUNE

Before the rain started I walked down to the Langstone South Moors and found a healthy display of at least 1700 Southern Marsh orchids, some with flowers not yet open so there may well be more to appear before the Havant Wildlife Group make their annual count on June 15. The display looks good but I recall counts of over 5000 flowering spikes here before the Autoliv factory covered part of the site, and even on sites not affected by obvious development today's enjoyment of these plants must be seen in the light of a pattern of general decline. At Warblington Farm the SSSI used to give counts of 800 to 1000 plants - now there are 71 - and by the eastern stream on the farm, which still looks like one of the glorious wildflower meadows of my childhoods, I can only find 13 marsh orchids where I have found 100. I suspect that the decline in numbers of this species is more to do with changing weather patterns than with direct human destructiveness (but maybe the weather is also influenced by our bad habits). +++

On the ex-IBM playing fields next door to the South Moors the single Bee Orchid which I found on my last visit had increased to 14 flowering plants - these do seem to be having a genuinely good year with John Goodspeed reporting 60 of them around the old A3 road at the top of Portsdown and with the group found on the A27 sliproad at Warblington by Tony Gutteridge on May 27 having increased now to a total of at least 119. A slightly worrying sight on these old playing fields was the appearance of a ditch, around 4 feet deep and 6 feet across, around the old tennis courts - it looks as if this area is to be included in the new factory development although it is well south of the footpath which I thought marked the southern boundary of the development. By going to look at the ditch I found a cluster of the Slender Thistle plants which were so abundant on the IBM clubhouse site which is to be built on and from which the thistles have been removed. One other new plant flowering on the South Moors proper was Marsh Arrowgrass. +++

Earlier in my walk, still in Havant, I was pleased to find Small-flowered Cranesbill flowering by the

roadside in Juniper Square, though it's only other Havant site known to me has this year fallen victim to the building of the new Burger King drive through food bar. One flower on Bristly Oxtongue marked the start of this plant's appearance on the summer stage, and both Greater Birds Foot Trefoil and Hoary Willowherb were also found. Not new, but noticeable at the moment, is a lot of Annual Pearlwort on old walls, and in the same category is the Rusty Back Fern on the wall of the West Mill in Langstone Mill Lane - I first noticed one plant here three or four years ago, now there are around 22 plants for a fern that I have not found anywhere else in the Havant area.

TUE 04 JUNE

Brian Fellows found Branched Bur-reed flowering in the River Ems.

Yesterday Heather Mills was at Noar Hill where the rare Dragon's Tooth was in flower along with the tiny Musk orchids. She walked from the main road at Selborne across the fields north of Noar Hill and in them found a mass of lovely Orange Hawkweed which is often grown as a garden plant and which goes by the name of Fox and Cubs - not sure why. On Sunday Heather noticed a couple of Bee orchids growing in a rather unlikely place - the shingle on the small roundabout island in the busy road at Rowlands Castle.

MON 03 JUNE

On Portsdown, John Goodspeed tells us, more than 60 Bee Orchids can now be seen near where the old A3 road reaches the hill top at the George pub and not far from there you might find the much rarer Bastard Toadflax which John saw more than a week ago but which I do not seem to have mentioned. Going west along the hill and down towards Portchester the variant Bee Orchids of the belgarum type can also be seen and more of the normal type are in the roadside grass just west of the roundabout under the southern end of the A3M. Over in Sussex Tony Wilson remarked on 8 of these orchids flowering at Washington near the junction of the A283 and the A24 just north of Worthing, but I am sure there are hundreds more to be found in West Sussex.

Less exciting to the human eye, but with a scent that is I think very attractive to insects, is the blossom which Richard Carpenter now reports seeing on Privet. He does not mention if he saw the broad-leaved garden Privet which is now widespread in the countryside, or the narrow-leaved Wild Privet, but I do not think the insects make any differentiation between the two.

INSECTS:

SAT 08 JUNE

The first two Marbled Whites of the year (as far as I know so far!) were flying over grassland around the IBM Lake at Portsmouth this morning in sunless but warm air after rain, when I was making my monthly bird count. A few Common Blues and one Large White were the only other butterflies I saw but there were several examples of a small yellow/ochre day flying moth which may have been Yellow Shell. I also saw just one Bush Cricket nymph which I thought might have been a baby Great Green Bush Cricket on account of its all over bright green colour with no markings but I see that their nymphs should have a brown dorsal stripe. In any case the small size indicated it was probably a Conehead.

Another butterfly that will soon be commonplace made its appearance for this year today in the shape of Meadow Browns seen by Dave Tolcher at Hook Park near Warsash. While there Dave noticed four Painted Ladies heading determinedly north in the space of half an hour, and at Lower Froyle between Alton and Farnham in east Hampshire Sue Clarke saw 7 Painted Ladies on the move - presumably part of a major new influx, as may be a Humming-bird Hawkmoth seen in Essex today.

A good many dragonflies are now on the wing but Mark Litjens added another to the year list with Keeled Skimmer seen today at Crickford Bridge, in the New Forest west of Beaulieu, and last Wednesday (June 5) Dave Tolcher probably had another newcomer in the form of a Hawker species which he thinks was Common or Southern but did not get a close look to decide which. This was at Warsash and down here near the coast Southern Hawkets are generally more common than the Common Hawker, but Common are usually out first with the Southern not due until mid-June.

The moth equivalent of the Meadow Brown (i.e. numerous day flying insects of grassland) are the Burnet Moths and today Tony Wilson saw the first of these (Six-spt Burnets) at Benfield Hill north of Hove where he also had a late Orange Tip (as did the Havant Wildlife Group in the Staunton Country Park north of Havant this morning).

TUE 04 JUNE

In Emsworth Brian Fellows was pleased to have puzzled out the difference between Azure and Common Blue Damselflies, and decided that the blue damsels which lurk in the vegetation along the edge of the River Ems at Brook Meadow must be Azure damsels.

News from Andrew Howard at Petworth and from Titchfield Haven give us new 'first finders' for both Banded Demoiselle (Andrew on June 1) and Broad-bodied Chaser (seen at the Haven on May 31). On June 1 Andrew had six dragonfly species round his garden pond, including a female Broad-bodied Chaser one day after the first at the Haven.

MON 03 JUNE

Yesterday Chris Cockburn, the RSPB warden for Langstone Harbour, saw a single Clouded Yellow fly over his reserve islands. This news was passed on by Jason Crook who, on May 31, had a close look at a Red-veined Darter resting on the harbour shore at Broadmarsh - an excellent first for Hampshire this year. Another good dragonfly sighting, though no rarity, was made by Richard Carpenter yesterday by the Meon south of Titchfield when he saw a couple of Banded Demoiselles, matching the first date for these set by Lawrence Holloway (see yesterday's notes)

Here in Havant Barry Collins had the first Straw Dot last night (another of these was taken in Buckinghamshire on the same night) and Barry also had an Eyed Hawkmoth (Graham Roberts had one of these on May 6 but I have not heard of others in the intervening month) and Barry was third with Light Brocade (after Simon Woolley at Winchester on May 31 and Philip Hack in Southampton on June 1). Barry also tells me that on May 10 he took a Lime Hawkmoth which was the second for the year in my records after one recorded by Lee Marshall on April 20 +++

In some years Stag Beetles are seen as early as April but this year the first that I have heard of this year was seen on May 29 by Alistair Martin's wife Jeni on West Lane, Hayling, apparently taking an interest in a dropped banana sandwich but really waiting to be run over by a car.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 07 JUNE

An interesting question in today's incoming messages asked how long a Toad can be expected to live. It came from someone who 14 years ago moved into a small terraced house in Brighton and found around 30 Toads living in the small (presumably walled) garden from which they have been unable or unwilling to move and have therefore never spawned or headed to a spawning pond. Their proud guardian has given some away to homes with ponds (her garden has no such luxury) but still has two Toads alive after at least 14 years. I know nothing of such matters but turned to my Readers Digest book of British Animals which says that they normally do not exceed ten years in the wild (road casualties must dominate their life expectancy statistics) but can live for 20 years in captivity. +++

For a better educated opinion on such matters I would think the best people to contact would be the Sussex Amphibian and Reptile Group (SARG) for which Graham Roberts recently gave me a contact named Mark Elliott who is an ecologist with the Environment Agency Sussex Area Office in Worthing. Work tel. 01903 703850.

THU 06 JUNE

Today on Warblington Farm I watched a Vixen standing patiently near her earth while four small cubs suckled from her. I was probably not much more than 100 yards away in full view but it was the best part of a minute before they all took fright and shot down the earth. That was my fox cub sighting for this year, and recently Kevin Stouse had his in the meadow south of Wade Court at Langstone where I frequently see adult foxes - Kevin saw just one adult with one cub crossing the field in full view. +++

TUE 04 JUNE

During a walk around Thorney Island today Trevor Carpenter saw one Hare on the land and six Common Seals in Chichester Harbour offshore.

WEEK 22 MAY 27 - JUNE 2

BIRDS:

SUN 02 JUNE

At least eleven Little Egrets are still using the Wade Court trees at Langstone as a night roost - that is the number which flew in between 9 and 9:30pm this evening while I was watching. With the tide still falling then and the weather good there may have been more Egret still out fishing when I left the site. A Lesser Whitethroat sang briefly near the pond where a couple of Reed Warblers (but no Cetti's) were heard, and I saw a pair of Tufted Duck on the pond.

A Savi's Warbler has been reeling in the area of the Pagham Harbour North Walls since May 29 and was still there today. Another summer sound heard in Sussex was the call of a Quail in the Lewes area (I cannot recall any having been previously reported anywhere in Hampshire or Sussex this year). Unlike Quail, Red Kite are hardly rarities nowadays and Lawrence Holloway saw two fly south east over Burton Mill Pond near Pulborough today, while Mike Rafter had a single over Pauncefoot Hill, just west of Romsey.

Maybe a new influx of Reed Warblers has just arrived in England as one spent the whole of today in Lawrence Holloway's garden in the Bognor area where it has not been seen or heard before, and here in Emsworth Brian Fellows comments on two singing by the Emsworth ponds today. Two Cormorant were fishing in the Slipper Mill Pond (I think this is unusual for June) and at least one family of Coot chicks was on the water. Brian also spent time this morning carrying out his second BTO Breeding Bird Survey in a square lying south of Stansted Forest and including good hedgerows but he could not detect any of the Yellowhammer and Linnet that should be present.

SAT 01 JUNE

News from Derek Mills' Isle of Wight website is more exciting than usual with a Red-backed Shrike having put in a brief appearance on Brading marshes and a Stone Curlew touching down in the St Lawrence area of the coast between St Catherine's Point and Ventnor (presumably having only just flown the channel and being in need of a rest) - both seen today. Within the past week several other good birds have been seen on the island - a male Hen Harrier and a female Marsh Harrier over land. and Manx Shearwaters and Storm Petrels off the south coast while Roseate Terns have been seen in the Hurst narrows from Fort Victoria (coastal viewpoint west of Yarmouth).

From the SOS website I see that a White Stork is in the Pulborough Brooks area, arriving yesterday and still around today. Also in that inland area several Med Gulls were seen today as was a Serin over Selsey and a Honey Buzzard over the Cuckmere Haven area near Beachy Head. Yesterday a Great White Egret was said to be in the Pulborough area while an Osprey flew south over Worthing (given up already? - possibly one of the Loch Garten birds from Scotland that had their eggs stolen despite the best efforts of the RSPB to protect them). Also yesterday three of the Storm Petrels that have been seen in the channel recently were still lingering off Selsey Bill despite the fine weather and east wind - will they become regulars like the Little Gulls?

Trevor Carpenter stopped off at Misingford Bridge over the Meon (just north of Wickham) today and saw a family group of Grey Wagtails, and on the Itchen at Winchester Judith Chawner saw a second family of Gadwall with nine new ducklings (see May 29 for a note of a first family seen on the River Test). In the Kingley Vale area north of Chichester the Havant Wildlife Group came on a pair of Treecreeper (without visible young) and heard Bullfinch but could not detect the Turtle Dove they expected.

Barry Collins was on Thorney Island today, seeing 7 Egrets, 42 curlew and 2 Whimbrel, and yesterday when he found 10 Sanderling and 4 Turnstone still present in the Pilsley area with 15 Great Crested Grebe offshore. Among today's birds overhead were one Med Gull and an immature Peregrine.

Yesterday evening Lee Marshall was in the West Walk woods area and heard three separate Nightjar at Lodge Hill and believes there are at least two more occupied territories in the area near the Hundred Ares carpark. Before dusk he enjoyed the songs of Yellowhammer, Willow

Warbler, Garden Warbler and Song Thrush.

FRI 31 MAY

70 Black-tailed Godwit were still at Titchfield Haven today, with 2 Bar-tails on the beach nearby, according to Richard Carpenter who also reports the presence of one Roseate Tern, a Kingfisher (unusual on the reserve in summer), and a Spotted Flycatcher by the canal. This Flycatcher could well be intending to stay in the vicinity, as could another which Richard saw in the Brownwich area, so they may not be extinct as breeding birds in southeast Hampshire.

Last Tuesday evening (May 28) Jeremy Cullen saw a low flying Red Kite in the Candover valley, not far to the north east of Winchester, and today at midday Bob Douglas saw one (maybe the same?) near the M3 at Winchester (junction 9 at Winnall).

Trevor Carpenter was at Hoe Cross, just west of Hambledon, this morning looking for Corn Buntings (of which he found 6) and had a bonus when two Hobbies appeared overhead to give a display of aerobatics which was probably a territorial border dispute and which ended with both birds heading off in opposite directions. A Buzzard was also seen here, and another (or maybe the same) soared over Long Road at Soberton, about a mile to the north west of Hoe Cross, where one more Corn Bunting was heard.

I was out early on this lovely morning to complete my BTO Breeding Bird Survey at Harting Down, in a patch just south of the South Downs Way. On top of the down several Skylarks were singing as they once did almost everywhere, and Meadow Pipits proclaimed their territories on the steep slopes of the northern scarp. Starting my survey in Bramshott Bottom I was greeted by the first of at least three Turtle Dove (one of them making a display flight as well as giving its purring song), and I soon heard strong Mistle Thrush song which I was not expecting at this time of year. Willow Warbler are numerous here as are Blackcap but I only heard two Chiffchaff and only one Common Whitethroat and one Yellow Hammer. Several Blackbirds and Song Thrushes, and many Robins, sang strongly but Woodpigeon were probably the dominant bird. Tits were notably sparse, just a couple of Blue and one Great Tit, though I did get both Marsh and Long-tailed on the list. Goldcrest song was welcome, and I had one Lesser Whitethroat while the Cuckoo that was prominent on my first visit was only seen in passing outside the square.

THU 30 MAY

The SOS website reports a Serin at Selsey today and a Spoonbill at Sidlesham Ferry, while 5 more Storm Petrels flew past the Bill. Writing a couple of days ago Andrew House said {{ Over the last week or so, over a dozen Storm Petrels have passed Selsey Bill, as well as 50+ Manx Shearwaters. Today, I saw 2 heading West between 9 and 10 am, close enough to see the white rump, and one on Saturday even closer. There has been little other passage, a few Fulmars, Gannets and Common Scoter, and 2 or 3 Arctic Skuas most mornings. (Also one or two Poms, though I haven't seen them!) }} From Russell Wynn I hear that at least one of the Petrels was recorded in Hampshire at Hurst towards the end of May. +++

Yesterday (May 29) at Bexhill on the East Sussex coast three Manx Shearwater, a Bonxie and a Hobby were logged by watchers at Galley Hill.

Closer to Havant John Chapman went to Marlpit Lane (off the old Havant to Chichester inland road) but heard no Nightingales. He did, however, enjoy a Hobby which flew low over his head, and saw a Buzzard (a bird that used to be unusual over the coastal plain). On this same evening Brian Fellows was in Havant Thicket and there he did find what he was expecting - three Nightjar, one Woodcock and two Tawny Owls. Earlier in the day Brian had found family parties of both Blue and Great Tits in the trees around Brook Meadow at Emsworth where three (possibly four) families of Whitethroat may appear in due course (so far there are only the singing males to go by).

A little further from Havant, in West Dean Woods on the evening of May 28, Mike Mullen found a Spotted Flycatcher which by this date is probably resident rather than passing, and if so may be the nearest resident to Havant. Another good resident (?) was a Firecrest (heard only) and in the same area a family of young Goldcrest were being fed and another family of Marsh Tits were out getting their own food.

Russell Wynn has just put out his summary of his own birding during the past month and I see that on May 21 four Barnacle Geese flew south east over Lymington - maybe they were part of the

large Isle of Wight contingent from the Ryde area (which never seem to leave the island) but if not they could have been part of the missing group from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth. I see that May 21 was the day on which Brian Fellows found another 2 of the Baffins Barnacles had vanished but prior to that 5 disappeared on April 2 and it might have been four of these 5 that Russell saw (though I am sure there are many other potential sources of these feral geese).

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A couple of other items that caught my eye in Russell's list were the presence of a female Montagu's Harrier over the Lymington marshes on May 21 only, and confirmation that a group of 23 Eider were present offshore throughout the month (and probably for the coming summer, but that's my guess)

WED 29 MAY

Tony Wootton from Emsworth saw a Bar-headed Goose in the wet meadow where the Ham Brook reaches the harbour at Nutbourne Bay this morning and told Brian Fellows about it, perhaps wondering if it had come from Baffins Pond. My suggestion would be that it had come from the Trout Farm on the north side of the railway, just 1km up the Ham Brook, but I have not walked the path which goes north from Nutbourne to Priors Leaze Lane for several years and have no idea what the wildfowl collection on these pools may now contain so if anyone can tell us what other escapees we may expect I for one would be interested. Could it be that the Emsworth Black Swan has gone into retirement there?

A pair of Gadwall with 5 ducklings, and a female Tufted Duck with just three, were seen on the River Test today by Ash Warne who has just returned to Hampshire after living abroad and was thus very surprised by the changed status of Gadwall in the county which has taken place relatively recently. Back in the 1960s Gadwall were rarities that, like Smew, were only seen in hard winter weather, but by 1983 at least one pair raised young in the county and the latest data in the Bird Report for 2000 indicates that at least 22 pairs were breeding though these were mainly found on the Avon and Itchen with only one recorded brood on the Test at Wherwell. I was not as surprised as Ash that Gadwall were breeding but I was surprised at the relatively early date - I have no idea when Gadwall nest but I regularly see broods of black Tufted Ducklings and have come to expect these late in the summer when, in football parlance, 'they think it's all over' (but that is just from limited personal experience)

Last year Lee Marshall headed the league of Hampshire Garden bird listers with a total of 79 species all seen from the balcony of his flat overlooking the Alver Valley at Gosport but he did not reach this total until December and in July he had only got to 63, so he is proud to announce that this year he has already reached the 79 mark and is hoping to get quite a few more (will he make the 100?). Number 79 on his list, seen last Saturday, was surprisingly Mediterranean Gull (I would have thought he would have had this much earlier), but to show the quality of what is on the list there was nothing new in the Raven, Hobby, Buzzard, Swifts and House Martins that went over on Monday this week. Interestingly I heard Med Gull over my garden here in Havant this week - a moth or so ago they were almost a daily occurrence here but perhaps they are too busy with nesting now to go around flaunting their plumage and calls in the hope that some bird lister still needs them (it's nice to feel wanted, even if you are just another bird).

TUE 28 MAY

Despite the weather this morning Brian Fellows made his usual trip to Portsmouth and found the Eastney Lake female swan (whose mate was killed by dogs last week - see entry for May 25) still sitting on her nest. Brian comments that she was {{ surrounded by a number of pots and small buckets, presumably containing food and water provided by concerned local residents. }} At Baffins Pond he found that all the Barnacle Geese had left (anyone seen them?) while a flotilla of 16 Canada Geese on the water were newcomers, in addition to 16 others that have been resident for some time - these new birds are presumably the forerunners of may which will come to be fed by Portsmouth City during their summer moult.

We haven't heard much of the many Red Kites which seemed to be roaming all over Hampshire earlier in the spring but there was one this evening in the Candover valley which runs south from the Basingstoke area to the Itchen near Alresford. Jeremy Cullen, driving home from work, was delighted to see {{ a red kite flying low in the Candover Valley - only about 20-30 feet above the ground in a field adjacent to the road. It was only some 40-50 feet from me so the

markings were very clear, as was the deep V in the tail.}} His only regret was that there was nowhere where he could safely stop to watch it.

Further down the Itchen at Bishopstoke Colin Bates today had a less dramatic but equally satisfying bird observation when he found eggshells on the ground outside his house below an artificial nest which has been occupied by House Martins. I see that the incubation period for House Martins is only two weeks so hopefully all is well (without seeing the young being fed one cannot be sure that eggshells mark the end of a successful incubation, though eggs in a concrete type artificial nest under the eaves should be safe from predators). Colin is particularly keen to know if Martins which have to spend time building or repairing their own nests are later in hatching than those that have a maintenance free home provided for them - any comments?

After enjoying the wonderful flora of the Beachlands SSSI on south Hayling this afternoon I was too late to catch the first session of this week's Little Tern watch at the Oysterbeds but I happened to pass there as Chris Cockburn (the harbour RSPB warden) was about to leave. While locking the gate after taking out his vehicle Chris told me that the week end high tide (forecast as 4.7 metres at 00:20 on Monday morning) had in fact reached 5.1 metres due to atmospheric low pressure - the result was that of the 46 Little Tern nests which had been counted last Friday none survived (all flooded out). I do not know how many eggs had been laid (they would presumably have been washed away or rendered sterile by the cold water), and I'm pretty sure the Terns will have little difficulty in re-instating the minimal scrapes that they use as nests, but I wonder what psychological damage is done to a bird's confidence if it is floated off its nest by a rising tide in the middle of the night. I suspect they will not have been put off and will try again in the hopes of surviving the forecast 4.5 metre tide on the three nights of June 21-23 (when the midsummer sun will still be lighting the scene at 21:42 on the first of these nights). One other effect of the tide has been to float away most of the Anderson air-raised shelters kindly provided for the birds (rumour tells me that while they are used by the bigger tern species the Little Terns - already in decline because they are 'birds of little brain' in relation to tide heights - generally ignore the facility provided by these predator shelters)

Just one seawatch sighting for today - at Hill Head Trevor Carpenter saw 24 Common Scoter heading east. On the SOS website I see that 4 Black-tailed Godwit were still at Pulbrough Brooks last Sunday (May 26) and an Avocet was still to be seen at Sidlesham Ferry.

MON 27 MAY

Much of current bird news concerns the vital business of young successfully leaving their nests and today I hear that two more broods of cygnets have 'hit the water'. At Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter tells me that six cygnets have just appeared with their parents, and from the IBM Lake at Portsmouth Kevin Stouse tells me that the pair which have been nesting at the west end of the lake had at least 3 cygnets visible through pouring rain last Friday (could be more). At Broadlands on the River Test at Romsey David Thelwell today saw a female Mandarin with 13 ducklings and also watched two Hobbies hawking Mayflies (which he says have been abundant this year). +++

From Portsdown John Goodspeed sends news of more Blue Tits leaving a nest box in his garden but adds a query concerning the fact that some of the young chose not to emerge and are still being fed in the nest - John asks if this is unusual. I would myself have thought that those young which fail to make the jump into the outside world within a reasonable time (perhaps three or four hours?) would be abandoned by their parents who would be keen to get their troop of youngsters on the move (both in search of food and to avoid being a 'sitting target' for predators), but if the remaining young call loudly enough for food there is a good chance that other adults will feed them (I have heard of parent birds collecting food for their own young and then giving it to chicks that are not their own because they cannot resist the impulse to feed anything that has a big open mouth and calls loudly enough, even young of a different species). Anyone got more factual evidence? +++

Still on the subject of nests Brian Fellows tells me that he was called into his neighbour's garden in Emsworth this morning to see a Robin sitting in a very exposed nest in which 5 young have just hatched. Having got this far the parent was not deterred by Brian's close presence and sat patiently on the nest while he took her photograph.

Robins are nice enough to have in one's garden but I can understand David Parker's jubilation when he found a Turtle Dove feeding on the ground below the bird table in his Forestside garden last Saturday, and then saw it again on Sunday. He knew that a pair were resident somewhere in the neighbourhood and hopes they are now nesting nearby and will continue to rely on his garden for food. I have heard that the preferred diet of Turtle Doves is Fumitory seed but I don't know if that speciality is listed by the commercial suppliers - if not and anyone wants to grow their own I have a good supply of young plants in a flowerbed that I recently dug over in my front garden! It sounds as if Turtle Doves are having a fairly good year with more reports of them than usual - three more were heard by Brian Fellows on the edge of West Dean Woods today when he went to visit the Colworth Down site where a Grasshopper Warbler was heard recently (see May 21 when I reported Dave Green's visit to the area in which he heard 5 Turtle Dove there)

Tony Gutteridge spent this morning recording the birds on the whole 70 hectare Warblington Farm CBC plot (in anticipation of my doing the same next week when he is on holiday!) and was heartened by the presence of a late Wheatear and by the unexpected visit of a Shelduck to the small watercress bed pool (in 1977 the plot was credited with 5 potentially breeding pairs but by 1997 that had dropped to 1 pair, and since then we have hardly seen any Shelduck other than on the harbour shore). Any encouragement derived from these two birds was more than wiped out by the lowest ever count of Skylarks - just one bird heard where there were 33 pairs in 1977 and still 9 in 1999 (and this was on a beautiful sunny morning with little wind to deter them from singing). I cannot pretend to know exactly why they have declined but two obvious factors on this farm are that the grazing meadows are encouraged to grow tall early and then cut for silage in mid-May, while the arable fields which the larks seem to prefer have unpredictable timing of their vegetation - this year the three fields which encouraged most larks to take up territory at the start of the season were then rough set-aside, and only within the past month they were sprayed with weed-killer, ploughed and planted with sweetcorn which is now growing but providing no cover for ground nests. Another disheartening fact this year is the total absence of Yellowhammer after starting with 19 pairs in 1977.

This week's RSPB 'Wake up to Birds' local event at the Hayling Oysterbeds will run from tomorrow (May 28) to Saturday (June 1) but the times at which wardens will be present to talk to visitors about the nature reserve (and show you the nesting Little Terns) have been slightly extended from those I published last Tuesday but I have no updated that entry so see item 4 of the Bird News entry for May 21 for the latest details.

Having commented yesterday on Steve Keen's close encounter with a 'tame' Hawfinch in one part of the New Forest I was interested to read that Simon Harthill had had a similar close look at a Hawfinch in the Bolderwood area of the Forest, also yesterday. In that same general area Simon came on 2 Wood Warblers and 4 Firecrest. +++

Despite the thick regrowth of trees on Lodge hill in the West Walk woods near the Meon Valley John Shillitoe still managed to hear a Nightjar (probably two) there last night, with at least one Woodcock going over. Another Nightjar was churring near the Hundred Acres carpark for those woods, and in Havant Thicket (also last night) David Parker heard only one Nightjar but did see two Woodcock. Hopefully when those warm, windless, summer nights occur there will be more Nightjar at both sites. Here in Havant Kevin Stouse had the pleasure of a Hobby over his garden on the eastern fringe of Havant, close to the open fields of the Emsworth gap.

On April 26 Mark Langford, the HWT warden for the Winnall Moors reserve in Winchester, told us that a Swan had decided to build a nest in the single path around the reserve, and I have been wondering what effect that might have on both the Swan and visitors to the reserve, but when Tom Grose visited the place yesterday he seems to have not noticed the Swan - perhaps the nest was what I call a 'play nest' built by a young bird who has not had any lessons in the art of making a home and raising young (if so the nest may have been abandoned and removed in the intervening month). Tom did see a pair of Canada Geese but does not mention a nest, and his news is of song from Cetti's, Sedge and Reed Warbler, and of two pairs of Little Grebe plus a single Jay (unusual there?) and of a male Pied Wagtail carrying food to nearby young while 30+ Swifts wheeled overhead.

PLANTS:

SUN 02 JUNE

My small contribution to the new flowerings list was to find flowers just opening on Greater Willowherb here in Havant. The only other item for today's news comes from Lawrence Holloway who comments on a colony of Southern Marsh orchids in the area of Burton Mill Pond, west of Pulborough, where he was enjoying many dragonflies today.

SAT 01 JUNE

The Havant Wildlife Group walked through the woods near the West Stoke carpark before climbing Kingley Vale this morning and noted 73 flowering plants excluding grasses. The only orchids seen were Common Spotted but there were other good downland flowers such as Rock Rose, Horseshoe and Kidney Vetch. Musk Thistle and the tiny flax which is mostly known as Fairy Flax (Stace uses that English name), but which appears in some books under a straight translation of its Latin name (*Linum catharticum* to Purging Flax). In the woods Three-veined Sandwort and Lesser Stitchwort were seen and somewhere (probably not far from human habitation, as is it's wont) they found Greater Celandine.

FRI 31 MAY

Walking the Harting Down area this morning I was quite surprised to see the first brown tubular flowers on Deadly Nightshade - both the bushes and the flowers will probably grow bigger before they are full size. Not far from them, and again on patches of regenerating chalk after scrub removal, I found both Hounds Tongue and Common Gromwell in flower though neither of these are newcomers. In Havant yesterday, in a pavement crack at the foot of the outer wall of the Waitrose store (where Rue-leaved Saxifrage popped up recently - that is all over now) was a tiny plant about 5cm high with a few leaves and tiny white flowers that had all the jizz of Black Nightshade, although I would not expect to find that plant until mid-July. I presume it was just a desperate attempt to survive by a seed that had fallen in 'stony ground' but if anyone can suggest that the plant was something more unusual I will have a closer look at it.

Both Skullcap and Stinking Iris were in flower at Titchfield Haven today, seen by Richard Carpenter. The Iris still had its persistent open pods of red seed which are a much easier way of identifying it than are its inconspicuous brown flowers. The lovely sky blue Skullcap flowers will presumably soon be appearing in the stonework alongside the River Ems at Westbourne and Lumley

WED 29 MAY

Jeremy Cullen tells me that the first Great Butterfly orchids were starting to flower when he was at Farley Mount (west of Winchester) on Sunday May 26. Also still flowering here were half a dozen or more Fly orchids seen in the open behind a gate with a No Parking notice. As it was raining at the time I guess Jeremy did not spend long here, but his sighting reminds me of my own surprise (I think at this site) when, after suddenly spotting a few Fly orchids in the open I began to see more and more of them running back into thick Hazel growth where I did not expect to see them. +++

Jeremy had his own surprise find on the same day when he went to visit the Tesco store at Winnal, Winchester. I have not been here but it seems that there is a 100 yard long 'Beech avenue' of some 40 trees here, looking very out of context among the recent building development and busy traffic, and under these trees a dozen White Helleborine were flowering. I have no idea if the Helleborine have been seen here in previous years but it sounds to me as if this is another case of these orchids suddenly appearing there in the same way that they did on the IBM site at Portsmouth (see May 11) and perhaps in Inholmes Wood near Stoughton (see May 20) - I wonder if anyone will be able to work out why this year has been so good for this orchid?

TUE 28 MAY

My Tuesday cycle-circuit of Hayling, which has been rained off for the past couple of weeks, was completed today in good but windy weather and gave me a list of eleven new plants for my personal tick list, nine of them not previously reported by others. The first two ticks were not very exciting - Large Bindweed and Opium Poppy - but next on my list were the Childing Pink plants on Sinah Common. They had been seen by Ros Norton yesterday but that did not reduce my pleasure at seeing some 32 plants already standing tall, three of them with tiny

flowers already open. Nearby Hop Trefoil was in full flower, and by the track along the east side of the Kench the big bush of Bladder Senna was already liberally covered with yellow flowers. South of the Kench, in the golf course, I was surprised to find much Bell Heather already in flower and on gorse bushes alongside the heather a mass of Dodder (not yet flowering) caught my eye. I had already seen a huge mass of Dodder at the south east corner of the mini-golf course (north of the Inn on the Beach) where it serves as a beacon to show you where to look for the Pale Toadflax that is as yet showing no sign of flowering. +++

Coming to Gunner Point I found a good display of Hare's Tail grass in the entrance to the largest of the sand dune pits (on your right as you enter the pit past a couple of posts to stop vehicles). I then headed for the pillbox near the golf course fence before turning east on the path that passes the pill box and which takes you close to the Nottingham Catchfly site just before coming to the cluster of small Holm Oaks that act as a marker for the main Green Winged Orchid site (no sign of the orchids now). The Catchfly was in flower when my eye eventually picked it out (very difficult to see the plants) and both Bird's Foot and Subterranean Clover were in the short grass nearby but the eye-catching plant here was the lovely blue Sheep's Bit. After this I head back towards the shingle through a great mass of developing Viper's Bugloss (some in flower, the majority still uncurling their spikes with no hint of the colour to come from their grey-haired spikes). On the shingle I found a few plants of Little Robin in flower among the more numerous plants of Round-leaved Cranesbill which could be confused with the Little Robin by those who do not look for the latter's bright yellow anthers and red-tinged stems and leaves. Also on the shingle, where the Sea Kale is now mainly gone to seed, I saw just one yellow flower on a Horned Poppy, and the leaves of Sea Holly. Talking about these finds with Ros Norton after getting home Ros told me she had also found Spring Vetch still flowering yesterday.

MON 27 MAY

Childing Pink and Little Robin had both started to flower on the Hayling Beachlands SSSI when Ros Norton had a look around today in anticipation of leading the evening walk this coming Wednesday. Slender Thistle was also flowering on the north side of Sinah Lake (where the walk starts on Wednesday) and the usual wide variety of plants can be expected by the group who join Ros to go round the outside of the golf course (including Eastern Rocket by the Ferry, lots of Round Leaved Cranesbill and the colours of Tree Lupin and Vipers Bugloss at Gunner Point). Two other plants that could be out already are Sheep's Bit and the less easy to find Nottingham Catchfly. +++

I was in the south Hayling shopping centre this morning and a walk around the vicinity of the Hollow Lane/Elm Grove carpark gave me the first yellow flowers on Meadow Vetchling, a good display of Self-heal in full flower, and one plant of Prickly Lettuce that had two of its tiny yellow flowers open. Calling in at the Oysterbeds on the way back to Havant I found three or four plants of Slender Thistle topped by their smallish pale rose pink flowers (look in the ditch immediately on your right as you turn from the approach road into the Coastal Path and shore carpark).

This week's RSPB 'Wake up to Birds' local event at the Hayling Oysterbeds will run from tomorrow (May 28) to Saturday (June 1) but the times at which wardens will be present to talk to visitors about the nature reserve (and show you the nesting Little Terns) have been slightly extended from those I published last Tuesday so I have now updated that entry (see item 4 of the Bird News entry for May 21 for the latest details.). Jo Hampton (the warden employed by Havant Borough for this their first local nature reserve) will be there to tell you about the plants, insects, etc which make this such an interesting site.

A very good show of Bee Orchids greeted Tony Gutteridge when at Warblington Farm this morning. Because the A27 Havant to Chichester section was built after the Warblington bird census was established in 1977 we still monitor the birds on land which was part of the farmland then but is now slip roads, roundabouts etc and these lovely orchids are alongside the sliproad on which you leaves the A27 when coming west from Chichester. They have only appeared in the past few years and this year they are joined by Common Spotted Orchids for the first time. If you want to see roadside Bee Orchids look in the big grass triangle immediately west of the Havant Road roundabout that lies under the southern end of the A3M.

Over the weekend Richard Carpenter found one of my favourite flowers (not only for itself but also for its association with old-fashioned meadows full of other goodies) - this was Meadow Thistle flowering somewhere near the Botley Woods. On the same outing Richard came on Common Cow-wheat, Rockrose, Hedge Woundwort and Common Figwort all in flower. Those were seen on Saturday May 25, and on Sunday Brian Fellows added a less exciting plant to the flowering list with Fools Watercress in Brook Meadow at Emsworth.

INSECTS:

SUN 02 JUNE

Visiting both Burton Mill Pond and Coates Common (both between Pulborough and Midhurst near the Rother valley), Lawrence Holloway today recorded thirteen species of dragonfly and other insects such as Scorpion Fly, Hornet and Field Cricket and some excellent photos of them appear on the diary pages of his website. Two new species of dragonfly for the year were Scarce Chaser and Banded Demoiselle (he has good photos of both plus a pair of mating Variable dragonflies showing the all black ninth segment.. Still at Burton pond Red-eyed Damsels were resting on Lily leaves and at Coates Common the Downy Emerald was seen (Mark Litjens had the very first of these in Botley Woods yesterday).

At Coates Common Lawrence says {{ The heathland was alive with the strident calls of FIELD CRICKETS. I tried hard to see one, but was defeated. }} Back at Burton pond he had found more than one Hornet and then taken a first close picture of a Scorpion Fly. Among the butterflies seen was a Green-veined White, its wings not yet fully expanded after emerging from pupation, but I think it is too early for this to be the first of the summer brood.

SAT 01 JUNE

Barry Collins had a Cream-spot Tiger Moth on Thorney on May 25 and today he saw a second there as he walked round the island. Of butterflies he only had a single Wall Brown but Small Heath (22 of them) and Common Blue (23) were flourishing. Also seen were 1 Small Copper, 5 Speckled Wood and a number of Small White

Today's top butterfly was the Glanville Fritillary, seen by both Dave Pearson and Mark Litjens at the Hordle undercliff site near New Milton on the south west Hampshire shore. Mark saw five of the Fritillaries and a Painted Lady, Dave saw only one, plus Painted Lady, Small Tortoiseshell and Common Blue, but he also saw a moth which he hesitantly suggests was a Jersey Tiger. I do not know how well he saw it (it could I suppose have been a distantly seen Cream-spot Tiger) but if anyone is aware of Jersey Tiger being a reasonable thing to see at Hordle at this date I am sure Dave would like to hear from them (via my address if you do not have his).

Dave's other butterflies of the day were 10 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (and 2 Small Pearly-bordered) seen in the New Forest. Mark, however, went on to see 16 butterfly species at Martin Down (most prolific among them were 32 Small Heath and 24 Common Blue) and to find his first Marsh Fritillary at Bentley Wood where this species is difficult to find this year (Peter Eeles had one there yesterday) but Mark easily found 30 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries (and heard that 60+ had been seen). Normal Pearl-bordered are by now few in number at least at Bentley Wood. Mark finally went to the Whiteley Pastures/Botley Woods area where Common Blue butterflies were plentiful but the main interest was in dragonflies with 12 Downy Emerald seen (first for the year), along with 2 Four-spotted Chasers, 3 Emperors, 9 Broad-bodied Chasers and 31 Beautiful Demoiselles.

Still on the subject of dragonflies Philip Hack, at Nursling near Southampton, was lucky enough to find two damselflies inside his kitchen window. He says {{ Although I haven't much experience in identifying Damselflies I believe that they were White-legged Damselflies (probably both males in view of their bright blue/green thorax and blue abdomen). Apart from two small ponds in each of my neighbours gardens the nearest water is at the Lower Test Marshes and the River Test at Lee near Broadlands. }} I have even less knowledge of dragonflies but am a bit dubious about them being White-legged - in Dan Powell's book he writes of them as being pale in colour - and I think an expert would need more detail of the colour and pattern of markings to suggest an identification but if there is anyone out there prepared to offer an opinion I am sure Philip would appreciate their help.

Philip Hack is much more certain of identities when it comes to moths and has eight new species for the year to contribute. At his trap this evening he took Light Brocade, Broken-barred Carpet, Ingrailed Clay and Foglove Pug while last night (May 31) he recorded Pale Oak Beauty, Mottled Beauty and Beautiful Golden Y. Back on May 18 he had Small Phoenix to complete this list.

More new moths were recorded this evening by Rob Edmunds at his trap in Fleet. His list has Brown House Moth, *Epinotia bilunana*, Small Dusty Wave, Green Pug, Poplar Grey and a duplicate of Broken-barred Carpet. To complete a total of sixteen new species for the year in the current news Lee Marshall yesterday had Green Carpet, Common Wave and the pyralid *Scoparia pyralella* (with a Beckham like tuft of hair on each wing). Lee had his moth trap on at Rowner in the evening and added six species to his personal list but all of them are already on the composite year list.

Going back to butterflies I see that Piers Vigus was also at Martin Down today (in the Bokerley Ditch area), and found the first two Adonis Blues that I have heard of and a roost of more than 20 Small Blues. Piers then went on to Hambleton Hill, north west of Blandford in Dorset, where many Adonis Blue were on the wing and the caterpillars of Small Tortoiseshell could be found.

More Large Skippers were seen today by Trevor Carpenter at Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley, Sue Clark at Bentley Station Meadow south of Farnham, and (yesterday) by Barry Collins on Thorney Island. Also yesterday Lee Marshall had to rescue some of his neighbours for feared certain death when a harmless Wasp Beetle turned up in their house. It would normally be found on tree-trunks or wooden fences having emerged from its wood-eating childhood - maybe this one survived the furniture making process and came from some newly purchased wooden furniture?

Finally an interesting item in the account of visit to Kingley Vale by the Havant Wildlife Group today is a mention of a Burnet Moth having been seen - if it was one it was probably a Six-spot but it is still rather early to see one I think so I will ask for further proof of identity as it might have been a distantly seen Cinnabar moth in flight. **Yes it was a Cinnabar – photo proof.

FRI 31 MAY

Today's big news in the butterfly world was the appearance of the first Large Skipper, seen by Andrew Brookes in the Huntbourn Woods west of Denmead. In the same woods there were still half a dozen Brimstone, though I see from the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website that Brimstone caterpillars were already being found on Alder Buckthorn in Pamber Forest by Peter Eeles at the beginning of this week to show that the overwintering generation of these butterflies has served its purpose. Andrew also found three Grizzled Skipper in the Huntbourn Woods, though he could find no sign of them in what used to be a good colony in the Hook Heath area by the river Wallington to the north of Portsdown. (though that site did have more than 20 Common Blue today). On a matter of place names I see that on my map Huntbourne Farm has an 'e' at the end of Huntbourne, but Huntbourn Wood does not - is this a misprint on the map?

Yet another Painted Lady was seen today by Trevor Carpenter in the Hoe Cross area just west of Hambleton.

THU 30 MAY

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth today Brian Fellows was lucky to see a very late Small Tortoiseshell, though maybe it has led a pointless life as, so far, I have not heard of any caterpillars being found in the nettles on the meadow. Another butterfly which has brightened the spring for most of us is the Orange Tip but few of us will see it again until next year - one of the last to see it this year was Peter Eeles who saw two in Pamber Forest last Monday (May 27). +++

Back in Brook Meadow Brian Fellows was puzzled by a red and black insect which he thought was a beetle, but the one that seemed to match it among the beetle pictures was one that would be out of its element where Brian found it. Not having seen it I cannot do more than make a wild guess but I think what he saw was not a beetle but the very common Froghopper *Cercopis vulnerata*.

Graham Dennis, HWT warden for Pamber Forest (near Tadley, north of Basingstoke), today tells

us that a 'glade count' gave a total of 17 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries there this week and that the first Dingy Skipper to be seen there since 1995 was found this week.

Looking at the Migrant Moth website latest reports I see that Jonathan Stokes was back at his Portchester home (where I once took a photo of a Great Green Bushcricket sitting on top of his head and still occasionally use the slide) and found a Bordered Straw moth there today, while over in Chichester Sarah Patton found a Rusty-dot Pearl in her moth trap today and a White-point yesterday (all three being firsts for our local area). +++

Finally for today, the Hants Butterfly website tells us that Tim Norris was on Odiham Common a week ago (May 25) where he not only found 6 Forester moths and 5 Mother Shipton but also saw Burnet moth caterpillars preparing to pupate so it will not be long before we see them on the wing joining the Cinnabars which are currently common.

WED 29 MAY

With a rubbish tip to the south, and on the western edge of very dense housing, Grange Copse in the Alver Valley at Gosport does not immediately appear to be a good wildlife site, but the following list of things found there by Lee Marshall today (all of which would probably have been unseen or ignored by the average person walking through the wood) just go to show how much life and interest there is to be found all around us if we take time to look with understanding of the habitat and season. +++

Galls on plant leaves are ignored as blemishes by the public and even to most naturalists they are just another of those unsolved mysteries that they cannot be bothered to unravel, yet they are indisputable evidence of the presence of particular species of insect and their specialised life-styles. Ash leaves with reddened, curled up edges, told Lee that a tiny creature called *Psyllopsis fraxini* was present, and reading about it I see that the adult insect (although in a group of insects called Jumping Plant Lice) is a tiny golden, wasp-like flying insect just over 2mm long (unlikely to be seen by you or I when on the wing!). It lays eggs in the buds of the Ash before the leaves or flowers appear, and as the leaves open the tiny 'nymphs' hatch and start to nibble the leaves, causing them to swell, curl and turn red. The nymphs go through five stages (instars), hidden within the swollen leaf edges, before reaching maturity and you can watch their progress by opening the leaf galls on successive dates. If you find woolly things looking like scale insects you are looking at the young, if you find tiny brown insects you are looking at an adult which stays in the gall for some time before it takes wing to mate (? maybe not) and lay eggs - these adults suck honeydew from the leaves and their droppings are of a very sticky nature but luckily they are encased in a sort of thin eggshell as they are extruded from the insect to prevent the insect from getting stuck in its own muck. The lesson that I learn from this is that galls are not necessarily caused by the adult when laying its eggs - in this case the egg-laying has no effect on the tree, and it is the young insects which cause the galls to develop in the leaves (which were not present when the eggs were laid). +++

Another, rarer, insect causing galls is the tiny wasp *Lipsothenus latreilli* and Lee found evidence of this in round, red, pea sized galls on the underside of Ground Ivy leaves. If you look this up in Chinery's 'picture book' of insects (page 226) you will also find *Phanacis hyochoeridis* next to it and it is worth remembering this one if you go to see the Childing Pink plants on Hayling Beachlands because (at least in the past two years) there have been some extraordinarily 'mutant' plants of Catsear in the vicinity, having broad flattened stems with many flower heads, and these are the work of this second gall wasp. +++

A third insect found by Lee with its young living in plants was the Celery Fly (*Euleia heraclei*) which lives in our seaside speciality plant Alexanders as a leaf miner. You can see this one on page 208 of Chinery with a picture of the brown patches on the leaves caused by the mining operations. +++

A more normal larva found on nettles in the wood was a Comma butterfly caterpillar, and in the same nettles Lee found a tiny moth which some people call the Nettle Tap but I can only find it listed under the name of *Anthophila fabriciana*. A much more recognisable moth for the amateur was the Longhorn moth *Nemophera degeerella*, the males of which will soon be found in large clusters hovering round chosen bushes in woodland in the hope of finding a female. You may have already seen the other common Longhorn moth (*Adela reamurella*) which first appeared on April 27 and which has a green metallic tinge to its wings. This find by Lee

Marshall seems to be the first of the second common species, which always appears about a month later and which is a brown colour with a distinctive yellow band across its closed wings.

+++

Slightly larger insects found in this wood start with the Ichneumon Wasp with a broad yellow band around the front of its abdomen, by name *Amblyteles armatorius*. A bright green beetle shaped like a Ladybird was probably *Cassida rubiginosa*, a relative of the Green Tortoise Beetle, and a bright black and red, long shaped, Soldier Beetle was presumably *Cantharis rustica*. Among the Ladybirds were the Seven and the Fourteen-spot - the latter being one of the yellow and black species. +++

Finally came a couple of female spiders already carrying eggsacs - the common and I think attractive long legged, greyish brown, *Pisura mirabilis* which walks through damp low vegetation carrying a cotton-wool ball of eggs underneath her body (hence the need for long legs!), and one of the black *Pardosa* Wolf Spiders which run about on the leaf litter of a woodland floor hunting their prey on foot - in this case the female has a smaller eggsac attached to her backside where it will not impede her movement when hunting.

Returning to 'proper moths' Lee Marshall's trap at Gosport collected two new species on May 27. One which most of us would recognize is the Large Yellow Underwing, and at this early date I guess it was a migrant rather than a home bred insect. With it was the first Yellow Belle. While adding these to my table of first sightings (accessed online via the Insect New page) I have also given effect to a long list of additions sent to me by Sarah Patton so I hope the table is now more accurate.

MON 27 MAY

At Brownwich Pond, just west of Titchfield Haven, more than 50 Azure Damselflies were seen today by Richard Carpenter with a dozen or so Blue-tailed and just three of the Red-eyed Damsels which have only just appeared on the scene. I think I am not alone (among people with a general interest in dragonflies who are not dedicated enthusiasts) in having difficulty distinguishng Common Blue from Azure Damselflies, so I used this mention of plentiful Azure damsels to re-check one rule of thumb for separating them - i.e. the Common Blues like to spend their time skimming the surface of open water away from the waterside vegetation whereas the Azures prefer to stay within the vegetation. Are there other simple tips to help us amateurs? +++

Elsewhere in the nearby Chilling area Richard found a Pebble Hook-tip moth, two Red Admirals, a Peacock and a Holly Blue (the latter being of interest to me as the recent weather seems to have put paid to the spring butterflies which have frequented my garden) Further sightings by Richard over the weekend included the hoverfly *Leucozona lucorum* at Titchfield Haven on Sunday and the first Emperor dragonfly seen on Saturday May 25 at Whiteley Pastures/Botley Woods. with ten Beautiful Demoiselles and singles of Grizzled and Dingy Skippers +++

In Emsworth Sunday brought the first Common Blue into Brook Meadow for Brian Fellows and those who joined him in a nature walk through the meadow.

This week's RSPB 'Wake up to Birds' local event at the Hayling Oysterbeds will run from tomorrow (May 28) to Saturday (June 1) but the times at which wardens will be present to talk to visitors about the nature reserve (and show you the nesting Little Terns) have been slightly extended from those I published last Tuesday so I have now updated that entry (see item 4 of the Bird News entry for May 21 for the latest details.). Jo Hampton (the warden employed by Havant Borough for this their first local nature reserve) will be there to tell you about the plants, insects, etc which make this such an interesting site. +++

Briefly visiting the Oysterbeds myself this morning I saw yet another Painted Lady, and a phone call this evening from Jim Berry told me of another seen in the Rowlands Castle area.

Steve Keen was at a central New Forest site yesterday where more than 12 Pearl-bordered and 2 Small Pearl-bordered Fritillaries were present, but so far I have not heard of any Pearl-bordered Fritillaries in Stansted Forest this year. I read in the newly arrived Butterfly Conservation newsletter that excessive grazing by deer in coppiced woodland (which inhibits the regrowth of the coppiced stools, and is thus disliked by both foresters and many conservationists) is a major factor in maintaining the open woodland floor that is necessary to the fritillaries and is thus encouraged by supporters of the butterfly. Clearly the deer can be

beneficial if other management is not available, but, thinking of the many Twayblade orchids and other plants which I have found nibbled or trampled by deer, I would prefer to use traditional rotational coppicing and re-growth without any help from the deer.

I have updated my table of first sightings to include some new reports, but a long (and very welcome) list of additions and corrections that have just come in from Sarah Patton will not be processed in time for today's update, though I will delete one item which Sarah tells me was a case of mistaken identity (the Striped Lychnis lookalike which appeared in her trap on April 14).

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 02 JUNE

Today's local good news is that Brian Fellows saw a Hare in the Holme Farm fields along the southern edge of Stansted Forest today (I think it was last year that a pair were seen with a leveret on these fields). More good news from Barry Collins is that the small group of Common Seals in Chichester Harbour is still present - he saw eight together yesterday.

FRI 31 MAY

A sighting of six Hares in the large open fields on high ground at Hoe Cross, west of Hambledon, was good news today, and for Trevor Carpenter, who saw them, it was especially exciting as two of the animals did not notice him and came running to within a metre of where he was standing motionless.

Another unexpected sighting by watchers in the Knightsbank Hide at Titchfield Haven today was of a Badger ambling by in broad daylight. While both this and the Hare sighting were a delight to the watchers I suspect that the animals concerned were not so pleased, having been disturbed from their normal daytime resting places, probably by some human activity (though they could just be feeling hungry).

THU 30 MAY

Brian Fellows tells me that there are plenty of small trout to be seen in the River Ems at Brook Meadow at the moment, some of them up to a foot long (30 cm). These are bigger than the tiny fish I usually see but I read that those Trout which spend their life in fresh water can grow to 99cm while those that venture out to sea can be 140 cm long.

MON 27 MAY

Each year a few favoured people come across young fox cubs which have not yet learnt the fear of man or motor car and allow you to watch them for as long as they want to stay near to you. This morning Brian Fellows, in the West Dean Woods, was one of the lucky ones, coming on three Fox cubs which showed no concern at his presence. Last night David Parker had a similar close view of a Badger crossing the road ahead of him as he drove from Forestside towards Rowlands Castle, but I think that in the case of Badgers our occasional sightings of them are not so much question of the Badger's not fearing us but their refusal to allow our activities to interfere with their established habits and 'rights of way'.

This week's RSPB 'Wake up to Birds' local event at the Hayling Oysterbeds will run from tomorrow (May 28) to Saturday (June 1) but the times at which wardens will be present to talk to visitors about the nature reserve (and show you the nesting Little Terns) have been slightly extended from those I published last Tuesday so I have now updated that entry (see item 4 of the Bird News entry for May 21 for the latest details.). Jo Hampton (the warden employed by Havant Borough for this their first local nature reserve) will be there to tell you about the plants, insects, etc which make this such an interesting site.

WEEK 21 MAY 20 – 26 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SAT 25 MAY

Little Egret at Aldsworth Pond: A somewhat unusual sighting today was made by Barry Collins in fields near Aldsworth Pond where he found a single Little Egret - these damp fields regularly attract Herons and I have in the past seen Black-tailed Godwit on them, so the only unusual thing about the Egret's presence was that I have not seen or heard of them here before (a new addition to the Stansted area?). Still on the subject of Egrets I happened to pass the Wade

Court roost site at Langstone in the evening and saw at least three birds in the trees but did not stay to see if more came in.

Mute Swan killed by dog: On Wednesday (May 22) I reported Brian Fellows' opinion that the Swans nesting at Eastney Lake in Portsmouth would soon hatch young (as they did last year) but today's issue of the Portsmouth NEWS carries a story of how the male Swan has been killed by two dogs while the owner of the dogs (after being asked to put them on a lead) looked on and said she didn't like Swans. The female and the nest survived that attack, but have they (or any cygnets that may hatch) got a chance with these dogs still on the loose?

FRI 24 MAY

Black-tailed Godwits at Titchfield Haven: I am not sure how unusual it is to have 120 or more Black-tailed Godwit still present at Titchfield Haven at the end of May but a report of this number seen there today by Richard Carpenter led me to look at other recent reports which give me the impression that around 200 of these birds are still in our area. Within the past week I have heard of 140 at Titchfield Haven, 22 in Yarmouth estuary on the Isle of Wight and 32 at Sidlesham Ferry (and no doubt there are others lurking unreported in Langstone, Chichester, Portsmouth and Pagham harbours). It will be interesting to see how many are still here in June... Another species currently present along the Hampshire coast in larger than usual numbers is Avocet with a total of 8 birds 'hanging about' - memories of one pair that did breed successfully in Chichester Harbour in the early 1990s suggest thoughts ...

Wren nesting: More common breeding species are still hard at work all round us. Today Brian Fellows was watching a Wren nest building in his garden and wondering how long they can keep up their enthusiasm for hard work, causing me to get out my 'Boys Book of Birds Nests' which says that they have at least two broods in the April to July period and adds that the males have the energy not only to build several extra 'cock nests' that are never used but also to mate with two or three different females during the season. +++

Tit families: My recent comments on the apparent lateness of Blue and Great Tit families this year has caused Eric Davis to tell me of slightly earlier dates recorded at Fishbourne (Chichester) - there Great Tits were out on May 15 and Blue Tits on May 17, but I expect that there were a few much earlier dates which I have not heard of.

A walk from central Havant to the South Moors and home via Bedhampton today gave me few birds but the wind did not prevent a Sparrowhawk from collecting one prey item which it was carrying over the Langbrook stream when my attention was drawn to it by a noisy Mistle Thrush. Further down the stream was a family of Magpies and earlier I had heard and seen my first family of Blue Tits crossing a road. Kestrel and Green Woodpecker were seen at the South Moors, and at the Budds Farm Pools the Swan was still sitting (the one and only Swan on the harbour by Broadmarsh slipway must have been her mate) and there were still just two Shelduck with around 20 Tufted Duck and a single Dabchick (plus a few Mallard and Coot on the water and both Swifts and Swallows overhead).

WED 22 MAY

Nightingales not singing: Last night's evening expedition, led by Kevin Stouse, to hear the Nightingales at Marlpit Lane (just east of the Ems valley) was the first in many years during which no song was heard (though a single 'jug, jug' indicated that the birds were there, but they did not approve of the weather conditions!). One of my principles is that no outing is without it's reward, and Kevin's was the sound of Corn Bunting song from fields by the River Ems as he drove up to the start of the walk at Racton. If you do want to hear Nightingale song then the Swanwick Nature reserve by the river Hamble is a good place to go - the HWT website reports five regularly singing there, and they are probably easier to access than the slightly greater number in the Botley Woods.

Eastney Lake Mute Swan: Finally for today I must apologize to the Swans now nesting in Eastney Lake near the Langstone Harbour entrance - Brian Fellows tells me I underestimated their age and experience when I suggested that they were only playing at the nesting game. It seems that they actually raised four young at this nest site last year and so have every chance of producing young again this year.

TUE 21 MAY

The first Tit fledgling of the year that I have heard of (other than the Long-tailed Tit families which

several people have seen) was a lone juvenile Great Tit seen today by Brian Fellows at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth, but that piece of news (and the sight of two families of Coot chicks on the water) was the only good news from this site where even the pair of Canada Geese that have been sitting have abandoned the nest with no goslings to show for their trouble. The Swan pair did not bother to make a nest this year and today the gang of feral geese has lost more of its members (the 10 Barnacle Geese present early this year are now down to 3 in number and the hybrid Bar-Head has vanished). Just one Snow Goose and the (?flightless) Embden Goose are left with the 3 Barnacles, but I suppose there is some good news in the fact that there are only 16 Canada Geese present (where in past years there has been a summer moult flock of ten times that number present in July - still time for them to fly in). The pond also had 26 Tufted Duck and 56 Mallard today. +++

Budds Farm Ponds: Later Brian went to the Budds Farm pools and found the regular Swan still sitting (this one did produce an initial brood of 8 cygnets last year and may be expected to show this year's result any time now). 22 Tufted Duck were present but Brian could only see two individual Shelduck sun-bathing (out of the potential three pairs that may nest here) - however this sight could mean that two females are sitting while their males laze in the sun.

Peregrines on Chichester Cathedral: Another news snippet today is that the Peregrines that regularly roosted on Chichester Cathedral earlier in the year are still being seen there (the SOS website reports a sighting there today). Now that the Brighton pair have let him down I wonder if we will soon see TV pictures of Graham Roberts high on the Cathedral spire fixing another nest box?

Terns at Hayling Oysterbeds: Tom Grose has made a couple of visits to the Hayling Oysterbeds recently and both he and John Godspeed have noticed the two Common Terns which I remarked on last week but no one has seen anything to indicate that they are paired, let alone that they are thinking of nesting here. The most interesting observation made by Tom was noted last week on May 16 when he reckoned that there were more than 130 Little Tern present, and a majority of them joined forces to repel a Little Egret which tried to land on the nest island. Otherwise there was much unco-ordinated activity among the birds with mass take-offs for no apparent reason, and many individual birds bringing small fish as offerings to their mates at their chosen nest sites. +++

On May 16 two pairs of Ringed Plover and two pairs of Shelduck were present with a similar number of Oystercatchers, and during the high tide 20 Dunlin roosted on the nest island. When Tom came back on Sunday three Egrets were present and one pair of Ringed Plover were seen mating. +++

Visit Hayling Oysterbeds: If you are not familiar with the Hayling Oysterbeds you might find it worth while to visit during next week when the warden (Jo Hampton) and the Langstone Harbour RSPB warden (Chris Cockburn) will be present for a couple of hours around a low tide time each day starting on Tuesday May 28. This event is part of a nationwide RSPB promotional week under the title 'Wake up to birds' and the dates and times when you can expect to have expert help in seeing the birds and learning about this local nature reserve are as follows:- Tuesday 28, 5-6pm; Wednesday 29, 6-7pm; Thursday 30, 9-10am; Friday 31, 10-11am; Saturday 1 June, 10am-2pm

Farlington Marshes: Yesterday (May 20) John Goodspeed visited Farlington Marshes where, among other birds, he noted a Common Sandpiper, three Black-tailed Godwit, a group of seven Grey Plover and a Gadwall. The presence of the Gadwall no doubt represents the very much increased presence of this species here in Hampshire, where it has changed status from that of an uncommon winter visitor to a resident breeding bird (first breeding in 1983) within 50 years. Farlington is one of the last places which it has chosen to visit, and this may be the first record of one here in the breeding season. Grey Plover are not so uncommon in the summer - at least 50 of them can be expected in the Langstone Harbour WeBS counts even in June, but I think it is unusual for any of those that stay the summer to reach breeding plumage so the one in full summer dress among these seven was probably a late passage bird. +++

Pagham Harbour: Following on from the presence of Black-tailed Godwit at Farlington I see from the SOS website that 32 more of them were at the Sidlesham Ferry pool yesterday with 2 Avocet (I am beginning to get the impression with numerous reports of two Avocet here and

two there all along the coast that maybe some of these are thinking of saving themselves a flight to the crowded breeding sites on the Norfolk coast and trying their luck here). Six Egrets still in Pagham Harbour are probably non-breeding birds but they too could be staying because they have mates nesting in the vicinity - in both cases these thoughts are pure speculation, but maybe before too many years have passed Avocet and Godwit, as well as the Egrets, will become established breeders along the south coast

West Dean Woods: The SOS website reports that last Sunday (May 19) Dave Green took a walk in the West Dean Woods and heard a Grasshopper Warbler, five Turtle Doves and a Nightjar which was feeding over a field of Broad Beans somewhere near Colworth Farm (presumably Dave approached the woods from West Dean village rather than by the Stapleash farm route with which I am familiar). Possibly on the same fields Dave saw just one Lapwing and somewhere along his dusk route he encountered two Little Owls, two Tawnies and a Barn Owl. Sounds like a route worth taking...

TUE 20 MAY

Moorhen nest in tree: In John's own garden in the Hundred Acres area east of Wickham a couple of heavy thuds marked the end of a dispute between two Moorhens well off the ground in a tree. It seems it is not uncommon for them to perch in trees or bushes - sometimes in search of insect food? sometimes to escape from foxes on the ground? (and last Saturday Heather Mills saw that a pair had made a nest in a tree above Langstone Pond - almost certainly to escape foxes) - but their long toes are not designed for secure perching, hence the thuds when both birds fell off after getting excited.

Mute Swan summer flocks: Last Friday when carrying out the Warblington CBC visit I noticed a line of seven Swans making their way slowly west from the Emsworth Channel towards Langstone Harbour, but at Broadmarsh this afternoon there was no sign of a summer flock starting to build up there. Nevertheless Brian Fellows has noticed that Swan numbers at Emsworth are declining - where there were around 100 a month ago there are now only 69, and that is 13 less than were present yesterday. +++

Mute Swan pairs lose cygnets: At Langstone Pond this afternoon I was hoping to see the Swan pair with the five cygnets seen by Heather Mills last Saturday but I found the two Swans on the sea close to the seawall of the pond without a single cygnet so I presume they have all been lost in just two days. The Emsworth Peter Pond Swan pair lost their single cygnet last Thursday and at the time it seemed that foxes were the most likely agent in removing the four other eggs that had disappeared from the nest before this solitary cygnet was hatched. Brian Fellows has now heard that what actually happened was that a very high tide rose high enough to cause the eggs to float out of the nest (presumably the mother Swan was trying to stay on the nest and thus managed to keep one egg but could not save the rest).

PLANTS:

SUN 26 MAY

John Goodspeed today tells me that the first Pyramidal Orchids are now starting to flower at Fort Purbrook on Portsdown and that at least 200 Common Spotted Orchids are now out at the same site. Here in Havant the only newcomer to the scene is Remote Sedge, now flowering by the Hayling Billy track behind my house

FRI 24 MAY

A three hour morning walk in the southwest parts of Havant today gave me my first count of over 100 flowering plants (I counted 136 species). My object was to have a look at the Southern Marsh orchids on the South Moors where I counted (co-incidentally!) 136 flowering spikes, and, on the adjacent ex-IBM playing fields, saw my first Bee Orchid in full flower. +++

Other notable firsts seen this morning were Buttonweed, Hedge Woundwort, Black Knapweed, Strawberry Clover, Creeping Thistle, Water Forget-me-not (*M. scorpioides*) and Creeping Yellow Cress. I also had my first Marsh Thistle flower but was beaten with this by Richard Carpenter (see yesterday's notes). Although not wild, but planted at the stream edge of gardens, there was a good show of Monkey Flowers (*Mimulus*) to remind me that the wild versions should now be out. +++

If anyone is not familiar with the only Hampshire site for Buttonweed (*Cotula coronopifolia*) it is no

longer to be seen at the Tipner site given in the Hants flora but has (since publication of the flora) established itself on the banks of the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton where I first found it in July 1997 and today hundreds of the tiny plants were in flower. To find it wear waterproof boots and follow the Wayfarers Walk path to where it crosses the outflow sluice of the Bedhampton Water Works taking water into the nearby Hermitage stream at SU 706062. Here you climb a sort of stile into the streamside field and make your way along the outside of the bridge over the sluice, then walk to the downstream end of this small patch of grass and go down to the stream edge (beware of hidden water and mud at high tide!) You may find some of the plants on your side of the stream though the majority are on the far side a little further downstream but the bright yellow 'buttons' of the flowers can easily be seen from where you are if the water is too high to cross. They grow on the bare shingle which is kept clear by the stream washing over the shingle when in winter flow, but it is normally dry in the summer. (I am told this plant, like the Brookweed which will soon be flowering along the same stream, only grows where fresh and salt water meet and mix).

THU 23 MAY

The Field Cow-wheat on the M27 bank above Portchester is once again starting to flower despite being spurned by the botanists as an illegal immigrant - today I saw at least 30 flowering plants there long before I read on the HWT website that it was 'doing nicely' on the Isle of Wight at St Lawrence Bank near Whitwell, Ventnor (this first note of it there is also dated for today). At the same Portsdown site the Small Yellow Foxgloves are not yet flowering but do have (still drooping) spikes of buds. +++

At this same Skew Road site I found my first Agrimony, Bladder Champion and Rough Hawkbit. Earlier, in the grounds of the Queen Alexandra hospital at the foot of Portsdown in Cosham, I found lots of Field Pennycress and Smooth Hawkbit on disturbed ground.

Walking the canal path at Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter found three new plant species in flower - Marsh Thistle, Lesser Stitchwort and Meadow Sweet. Writing this after my own find of Marsh Thistle on May 24 I am not surprised at the flowering of that or of the Lesser Stitchwort but the Meadow Sweet is, I think, a good and very early find (on May 24 I found my very first flower heads on this plant, and from past experience know that they can remain as hard buds for several weeks before opening into the lovely feathery flowers)

WED 22 MAY

Water Figwort was starting to flower by the River Ems when Brian Fellows was in Brook Meadow today, reminding me that Common Figwort had flowers open when we were on Selborne Common last Sunday (May 19) and that I have never mentioned the Grey Sedge which has been flowering in my driveway and elsewhere for a couple of weeks or more. To make up for my forgetfulness about my own record I think I can promise that Smooth Hawksbeard will be flowering in my garden any day now, and I am pleased to announce a new addition to the weeds on my lawn (a couple of plants of Cuckoo Flower - *Cardamine pratense* which has so many English names - has appeared for the first time in the 37 years we have been here. I think this must disprove the rumour that this plant never produces fertile seed.

TUE 21 MAY

An easing of the wind and rain as I was returning from South Hayling today tempted me to stop off at the Oysterbeds and have a look for the Dames' Violet plants which John Goodspeed found here recently. If you want to see them go to the north end of the earth mound east of the lagoon and head back for the Coastal Path along the north side of the clump of trees (i.e. a little south of the broad approach road to the lagoon). You should have no difficulty at the moment in spotting a cluster of a dozen or more of the plants standing tall and topped by bright white flowers which you pass soon after reaching the bottom of the slope down from the earth mound. Towards the south end of this earth mound, at the edge of the thick vegetation on its east side, the Milk Thistles are already pushing up flowering stems but in the overflow carpark behind the Esso Garage there are no flowers yet to be seen on the flourishing Goats' Rue plants. In view of the rain and poor light this evening did not search for the Common Broomrape plants which John also found.

Richard Carpenter was in the Kilmeston area near the A272 east of Winchester and found both

Pignut and Field Pansy flowers plus a stand of 100+ White Helleborines. Richard was also in the Upper Swanmore area near Bishops Waltham today and could, I guess, have seen more Helleborines had he gone a little north west into Galley Down wood between Dundry and the main road going north from Bishops Waltham

MON 20 MAY

Sweet Briar was starting to flower today by the Hermitage stream in the Broadmarsh area of Havant and on the rough ground of the abandoned playing fields Marsh Foxtail grass was flowering in patches that have held winter puddles. Brian Fellows also noted this grass at Emsworth and found Guelder Rose flowering close to Brook Meadow today.

On Old Winchester Hill Horseshoe Vetch was found in flower by Richard Carpenter today - a plant always worth a mention though it was first seen last week (May 8) on Portdown by the Wednesday evening walk party led by John Goodspeed. Yesterday Richard did have an excellent first with Wild Service trees flowering near Durley Mill, where Foxgloves were also out.

Over the weekend Jill Westarp and family made the annual count of the Green Winged orchids on their lawn at Redlands House in north Emsworth where some of you may have seen the orchids when the garden was open on the early May Bank Holiday. Last year there were just under 2000, this year more than 2250 (despite trampling by visitors!). Also during the week end they discovered a colony of White Helleborines flowering in Inholmes Wood by the path leading east from Stoughton village along the south end of the wood. I can't recall seeing them there myself and they may be new on the scene though I doubt it - the open beech wood habitat on chalk is just what they like.

INSECTS:

SAT 25 MAY

The first Emperor dragonfly was seen today by Richard Carpenter in the Whiteley Pastures site on the south of Botley Woods, and at Brick-Kiln Pond (visible from the road heading north through Stansted Forest, and part of the Pond Copse private nature reserve maintained within the Stansted estate) Barry Collins saw at least 20 Red-eyed Damselflies, another first for the year, along with Azure damsels and a Hairy Dragonfly.

The first Cream Spot Tiger moth was another first to Barry Collins' credit today - this was seen in the Thorney Island area.

FRI 24 MAY

Three more Painted Ladies were reported today - Lee Marshall had one at Gosport and Barry Collins had two on Thorney/Pilsy islands. Much more numerous were the Beautiful Demoiselles seen by Derek Mills on Bentley Station Meadow (at the edge of the Alice Holt Forest south of Farnham) - it seems they were all females and a good way from running water where they will lay their eggs so I guess they were still enjoying their traditional chance to fly around and explore the world before getting down to the serious business of breeding. +++

WED 22 MAY

No more Clouded Yellows so far but Painted Ladies are clearly now widespread in Hampshire. Today Trevor Carpenter had one in the northern part of Fareham and Brian Fellows was delighted to add one to the Brook Meadow list at Emsworth (where he also saw two fresh Red Admirals). Mark Litjens has sent me the following note, written recently by Nick Bowles and posted on the UK-LEPS newsgroup which is of general interest on the subject of Painted Ladies. It reads {{ At the weekend a friend in southern France told me to watch out for Painted Lady arriving in the UK as they had been streaming through the Pyrenees all weekend on a real northward mission. With this week's weather predicted very wet and extremely windy I didn't really expect them to make it - but various reports of small numbers suggests that they have. Similarly, the numbers of Red Admiral have risen sharply since Friday 17th and this could well be due to fresh arrivals. So keep looking for rarer migrants among them (and pray Friday's predicted gales don't destroy any chance of them persisting). }}

TUE 21 MAY

A Clouded Yellow was the first butterfly to greet Mark Litjens at Farley Mount, just west of

Winchester, at lunchtime today. He tells me that many Clouded Yellows are now being seen regularly at Portland Bill in Dorset but, other than the single sighting on May 1 at Ventnor in the Isle of Wight, I have heard of none previously anywhere near Hampshire. Mark adds {{ I must say this wasn't the usual ochre colour but a lighter yellow and seemed in pristine condition. }}

MON 20 MAY

Recent appearances of fresh Red Admirals are now being supplemented by appearances of Painted Ladies and migrant moths. Andrew Brookes saw Painted Ladies at Huntbourne Wood (west of Denmead) on Saturday May 18 and at Portchester Castle on Sunday, and today I was told of one in the Meon Valley seen by Gwynne Johnson and then saw one myself at Broadmarsh here in Havant. +++

Other recent butterfly sightings include four Small Blues in the chalkpits just below the M27 by Hill Road in Portchester, seen by Andrew Brookes yesterday - with them were both male and female Common Blues. Common Blues were also seen today on Old Winchester Hill by Richard Carpenter and during the past week Brian Fellows has had a Small Tortoiseshell at Brook Meadow in Emsworth. Along with these plenty more Red Admirals have been seen at many places.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 24 MAY

I have been promising to comment on the Round-mouthed Snails which we found at Noar Hill last Sunday, but have forgotten to include them in the Sunday, Monday and Wednesday updates - let's try to put that right now. I am not 'snail hunter' by nature but am ready to be intrigued by any unusual creature that I find, and this Round-mouthed Snail not only looks elegant (its name is *Pomatias elegans* - suggesting an 'elegant apple') but is uncommon and has some unusual habits. +++

At first sight the shell resembles a marine periwinkle more than a land snail and has a maximum size of 15mm tall and 10mm across, and this resemblance to a marine mollusc is borne out by the fact that it is one of only two British land snails which retain gills and extract oxygen from water where all the other land snails have learnt to breathe using primitive lungs. This need to retain moisture inside the shell as its oxygen source leads to two of its visible features - the first is that when it does not need to extend its body outside the shell in search of food it retracts it into the shell and firmly seals the opening with a thick 'bath plug' (a hard callous on the sole of its 'foot' which is the last part to be drawn into the shell and seals the gap). The second feature is that this snail burrows into the soil to keep cool during the day, so it is not often seen until it is dead and rain washes the empty shell out of the soil (look for it in woodland and scrub in chalky places). +++

I have now come across it in four places - Stansted Forest, Shutts Copse near the A272, a Green Lane east of East Meon and now at Noar Hill where I think the two examples that I found had wandered off the loose soil onto the thick matted grass around an ant heap and were unable to burrow when the day became warm. If you find one its size, shape and very 'round' mouth make identification easy.

WED 22 MAY

Clare Bishop of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust came over Emsworth today to join Brian Fellows and Frances Brettell in a hunt for evidence of Water Voles at the Brook Meadow site. Brian does not mention any sightings but says that plenty of evidence (larders, latrines and freshly dug tunnels) was found for the continuing presence of probably more than one pair. Clare also spotted evidence for a new species to go on the site list - one dropping left by a Water Shrew. These smartly dressed, fierce and poisonous hunters are difficult for us humans to see without setting traps but I gather that they are in fact pretty common throughout the British Isles.

Surprisingly they are almost as likely to be found on dry hillsides as they are in valley wetlands. Much rarer, it seems, than the Water Shrew nowadays is the Hare - though when it is present it does make itself slightly more visible to our eyes if you are prepared to scan the slight humps in the centre of open fields or walk off the main paths in woodland close to the fields where the Hares also lie up. I have noticed fewer reports this year than last and have myself only had one brief glimpse of one this year (in Stansted Forest). Today one more sighting went on record

when Richard Carpenter saw his first in the Kilmeston area near the A272 south of Alresford.

WEEK 20 MAY 13 – 19 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 19 MAY

Today's exciting birds were in Surrey and Sussex. Surrey had a **Great Reed Warbler at Frensham Little Pond** which was reported to John Clark yesterday by a Shawn Peters (not sure if Shawn is the real spelling or the phonetic for something like Siobhan), and seen well today by Graham Osborne (and probably 1000 other birders).

Less easy to see were a **Little Bittern at the Arundel WWT reserve** and a Bee-eater seen by the Belle Tout lighthouse near Beachy Head, then heading south out to sea.

A walk over Selborne Common and a visit to Noar Hill today gave me **my first Garden Warbler song** from the hedgerow of the Hangar's Way track into Noar Hill, and then the sight of a Kestrel not only struggling to hold its hovering position in the strong wind but also 'bombing' a Buzzard which flew below it. Little else of bird interest (I only heard one Common Whitethroat and no Turtle Dove) though it was pleasant to hear Skylark and Yellowhammer song from fields with no background traffic noise.

SAT 18 MAY

The **Havant Wildlife Group walked the Chichester Harbour** shore from Langstone village to the west end of the Emsworth shoreline today, finding 5 cygnets with the two Swans on Langstone Pond (I still have no clue where the nest was this year or last). The Cetti's Warbler still sings loudly around the pond among the Reed Warblers, and Heather Mills says the Reed Bunting was also singing. Interestingly a Moorhen had a nest in a bush well off the ground - I wonder if this was the pair which normally nest very close to the Mill (last year someone watched a fox eating their eggs out of the nest). One Kestrel of the pair which is nesting in Warblington Castle Tower was seen in trees near Pook Lane (but the Little Owls could not be seen) and at the other end of Warblington Farm a lone Brent Goose was close to the shore off Nore Barn (where Sparrowhawks almost certainly have a nest again this year as they have in the past though only the male has been seen heading that way recently). It looks as if this Brent is the one that was off Langstone South Moors, then off Langstone Mill, and is a different bird from the two seen at Farlington Deeps by Martin Gillingham last Thursday.

John Goodspeed was at the **Hayling Oysterbeds today and estimates that more than 100 Little Terns** are now present though he could only find 35 of them on the nest island (no mention of the Common Terns which were on the island when I last had a look).

Another message today, from John Chapman, tells of **hundreds of Swifts over the Chichester Gravel Pits** though they remain sparse at nest sites.

Yesterday (May 17) a single **Hoopoe flew tantalizingly past the Arundel WWT reserve visitor centre** and vanished

On **Thorney Island** Barry Collins had two more obvious visitors on the Deeps - **two Bar-headed Geese** (I think these may be the ones that visited Aldsworth Pond earlier this year and may come from the Trout Farm by the Ham Brook just north of the railway between Nutbourne and Hambrook village)

On Thursday (May 16) Barry Collins walked all round Thorney Island and found **three pairs of Turtle Dove** among the land birds and a single Bonxie cruising about offshore. Other birds which he mentions include 2 female Wheatear (getting a bit late for them?), a single adult Med Gull, five Egrets and thirteen Whimbrel.

FRI 17 MAY

A strong east wind was not ideal for seeing birds during this morning's visit to the Warblington Farm for the Common Bird Census but one thing was obvious and that was the **first wave of species with young out of the nest**. I know that odd pairs of Blackbird and Collared Dove (probably other birds) started to fly before March was out, and that young Blackbirds and Song Thrushes have been reported, but now the Starlings have led the way for a general fledging and I came on family groups of Greenfinch, Chaffinch and Magpies plus a single juvenile Robin. Offshore ten or more of the Little Terns had come round from the Oysterbeds to fish in Sweare Deep off the Northney marina (a favourite spot for them) and at the water's edge a

party of nine small, pale plumaged waders were I think Knot - not small or active enough to be Dunlin and the muddy shore is unlikely to attract Sanderling. They had the portly gait of Knot if not the red summer plumage.

Following on from my comments above on newly fledged bird families four messages today remind me of **other species now to be seen with young**. Yesterday (May 16) David Parker watched a family of Dunnocks in his Forestside garden as he ate his breakfast and on Wednesday evening (May 15) Martin Gillingham remarks on a Long-tailed Tit family at Farlington Marshes. The Dunnock family is the first I have heard of but the Long-tailed Tits are the third. So far as I know no Blue or Great Tits have flown, but among bigger birds Tony Gutteridge had young Rooks on the Warblington fields this morning (David Parker had seen them leave their Forestside nests by May 7)

Ian Calderwood tells us the **first juvenile Herons** have flown from nests at the Gosport heronry (Elson Wood in the MoD Defence Armaments site where Egrets are about to leave their nests). +++

The fourth message commenting on young birds today is more interesting and comes from Derek Mills in Farnham, where it seems **a small colony of Bullfinch** enjoy the hospitality of his nyger seed feeder and are now bringing their young along with them. Derek says {{ In my garden in south Farnham today I saw a family of bullfinches with at least two youngsters - they looked as if they had fledged for at least 2-3 days as their plumage was immaculate. Their begging calls are more strident, less melodic, than the adult calls. One less common adult call seems to consist of two notes uttered simultaneously, rather like two notes blown on a reed instrument; this is uttered even more quietly than their normal call. Several adults spend most of their day on my one large feeder taking black sunflower seed, often two males at a time with a single female and sometimes even more adults. By this stage of the winter/spring they have become quite aggressive and see-off most other birds including the Greenfinches, all except the Nuthatches which themselves see-off everything else. }}

I continue to look, more in unfounded hope than expectation, for any sign that **Spotted Flycatchers** will return to local gardens here in south east Hampshire and news on the SOS website that seven had been seen together at Church Norton last Wednesday was encouraging, but no doubt they have now flown on northward and dispersed.

Many of you will have just received your copy of **BTO News** but for those who are not BTO members I think it worth relating a fascinating story printed in it. Briefly, when **Pied Flycatchers** first appeared unexpectedly in Okehampton, Devon, in 1970 they were encouraged with nest boxes, and over the years this worked, but inevitably up to three quarters of the boxes were used by tits. Then it was found that some boxes were being used twice in one year, first by a tit family and, when they had flown, by a pair of Flycatchers, and the people who put up the boxes were pleased by the multiple occupancy. At the end of 1978, when cleaning out the boxes at the end of the year, a much more surprising discovery was made - **two of the boxes were occupied by Dormice** in an area where no one had seen Dormice before and which appeared to have no habitat for them. This was worrying news for those to whom conservation was seen in terms of birds alone - Dormice may be cuddly but they love to eat birds eggs. To cut a long story short the site now boasts over 200 nest boxes and around 50 of them can be expected to hold Flycatchers and 60 of them Dormice. Although the Dormice have now overtaken the Flycatchers in the number of boxes used it looks as if a sort of balance had been achieved and the Dormice are not destroying the Flycatcher population any more than the Tits and Nuthatches are ousting the Flycatchers. In this balance of nature, with the different species using the boxes at different times of the year (Dormice do not nest until the Flycatchers have flown) several of the boxes have had three different occupants in one year.

THU 16 MAY

The most exciting bird today was an **adult Pectoral Sandpiper at Farlington Marshes** - no doubt the pagers and birdlines have been buzzing with news but all I know is that Simon Woolley and Richard Bonser both saw the bird this afternoon. Another good bird today was a female Monaghan's Harrier seen over Rye Harbour.

I was not surprised to hear that a **Nightjar was churring in Havant Thicket** on this very warm evening when Barry Collins went there at dusk. With it in the woodland he found five roding

Woodcock, though I suspect they will have been active long before today.

Walking home with shopping from Waitrose in the evening I paused to rest the bags and **counted 13 Swifts over the main nest site in Manor Close here in Havant**. Earlier in the afternoon I came on another six Swifts taking a great interest in the eaves of houses near Havant Day Hospital on the west side of town but I have not yet watched the third area which they have used in the past (at the south end of South Street). Numbers are also increasing in Emsworth where Brian Fellows saw 8 together this morning.

The first Swifts to appear in both Havant and Emsworth did so last Tuesday, but David Parker tells me that they were very active over Chichester on Monday (May 13), perhaps because the city centre is so close to the gravel pit lakes that will no doubt have attracted the newly arrived migrants to feed up before starting house hunting.

Lapwing in Stansted Forest: Brian Fellows was in the area south of Stansted house today and reminds me that earlier in the year we had hopes that Lapwing would nest there. On Feb 28 Martin Hampton noted a dozen Lapwing displaying over the ploughed fields of Stansted East Park and they also caught Tony Gutteridge's eye around that date. When I was there on April 5 I felt sure that at least one bird was sitting and saw three birds displaying over the field immediately south of Stansted House and another three over plough to the east of Sindles Farm. I wonder if anyone has news of their breeding success? All I know is that Brian saw one adult bird still in the area today. He also heard both Garden Warbler and Blackcap singing in their contrasting styles in 'The Groves', and on Aldsworth Pond found the resident Swan pair with a bird still sitting.

There has been little news this spring of the **famous pair of Peregrines** which normally nest on the Sussex Heights nestbox in Brighton and perform their family routine before hundreds of watchers using the installed webcam. I very much doubt that they were deterred by the installation of a second, external camera but news today on the SOS website makes me wonder if the female of the pair has died/been killed and her gallant tiercel mate has been patrolling the area and driving off any intruders that had their eyes on taking over this very desirable residence.

Peter Pond Mute Swan: Another item of bad news today is that the Emsworth Peter Pond swan pair seem to have lost their one and only cygnet (perhaps to the fox that may have taken the other eggs from the nest before they hatched??). +++

Martin Gillingham was at **Farlington Marshes** yesterday and saw a drake Garganey on the stream with a more expected Common Sandpiper at the water's edge. He also tells us that at least two Brent are summering in Langstone Harbour - he saw them at the Deeps as he was going round the seawall. From the SOS website I see that a single Spoonbill was over Pagham Harbour yesterday (May 14) and I suppose there is a chance that it could turn up in either Langstone harbour or at Titchfield Haven.

WED 15 MAY

The Emsworth Peter Pond Swans still hold the record for the first cygnet to hatch this year (on May 10, though with just one cygnet) but other pairs are now producing their young. On May 12 a pair near the Adur in the Henfield area had 4 cygnets (not known when they hatched) and on May 14 Ian Thirlwell found 6 cygnets with the senior pair of Swans at the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth. Today Barry Collins found that the **Little Deeps pair on Thorney Island** (traditionally the earliest to hatch in this area) have seven cygnets, so they at least hold the prize for largest family to date. +++

We may not all come on young Swans or Shelduck on our daily round but one tribe of youngsters that will soon be seen and heard everywhere are **this year's young Starlings**. The first that I have heard of were on Brian Fellows' garden lawn today, and baby Greenfinch were also out of the nest there.

A query on HOSLIST today asking if people are still seeing **Spotted Flycatchers** in 'normal' numbers sounds as if it may come from one of those people who (like myself in the past) have always found Spotted Flycatchers back in traditional spots around this time of year and are suddenly surprised one year when no birds turn up - in past years with the birds present there seemed to be no problem, but when the birds fail to show there is a strong feeling of loss which will only be partly relieved by the sight of Flycatchers returning south in the autumn from

northern parts where they still nest. I have now seen my spring Flycatcher and do not expect to see another until perhaps late July, and today John Shillitoe had 'his Flycatcher' sighting on the hills north of Clanfield (on the ridge which runs west to Old Winchester Hill). I can see no obvious reason for the absence of the birds in south east Hampshire - there are surely sufficient insects to support a family and plenty of nesting places? Maybe, as I think I saw suggested recently in connection with the northward movement of the southern frontier of the Lapwing breeding area, there is some hidden factor connected with global warming - in the same way that plant growth and insect emergence can be correlated to average temperature maybe the birds re-act to something we cannot easily see (perhaps, with the thinning of the ozone layer, they cannot stand an increasing radiation level from the summer sun, and, like the miner's canaries, are telling us to beware of danger we cannot detect with our senses?) +++

In the afternoon I cycled round north Hayling, passing the **Oysterbeds** on my way home. At a guess around ten pairs of Little Tern have selected nest sites, and several times I saw birds fly in with fish offerings for their mates. The most interesting sight was of two Common Terns, showing no signs of being a pair, both resting on the nest island - will they nest here? On my ride I saw half a dozen House Martins back over the new housing on what was the Northney Holiday camp site where they have nested in previous years (but there is no access for casual visitors to this cul de sac estate to look for the nests)

TUE 14 MAY

A Bonxie spent half an hour at midday today in the mouth of Chichester Harbour where it was watched by Barry Collins near Pilsley Island seemingly having a rest from its long journey. Maybe this was an old bird that was feeling the strain of the long distance flight, and not typical of the species normal behaviour on migration, but it does remind me of a number of questions that I hope will be answered when the new Migration Atlas is published. We already have a fair idea of the start and end points of most migration routes, and where the flyways are, but I have always been interested in knowing the equivalent of the 'train timetable' of different species, i.e. where they stop off for rest, and the many factors which determine whether you will see them go past a certain point at a certain time of day - do they fly low or very high, do they follow a narrow path or move on a broad front, and at what time day do they take off and put down (early morning, evening, or any time). I realize that many factors are involved (wind and weather, presence of young in family parties, and the changing environment of the areas they pass over), but birders who watch any given place regularly over many years seem to know exactly when to expect migrants to arrive and leave their site, plus the compass bearing the birds follow and the time of day they move, and I hope that some of this knowledge will be in the book, and not just data based on ringing recoveries which inevitably tell only a small part of the story.

MON 13 MAY

Here in Havant the low cloud and rain brought the **first House Martins** and more Swifts down to feed on low flying insects. Despite the rain five House Martins zoomed low over the treetops along the old railway line at the bottom of my garden as the hoped for local resident birds will soon be doing all day long - these were the first I have seen this year and were probably not intending to stay in the area but just pausing for much needed food which (had the weather been better) they might well have found at a higher altitude and so never been seen by me. One Swift which went over my house in the afternoon, heading east, was probably also down low to find food below the thick clouds, but three which I saw at 8pm seemed to be taking an interest in potential nest sites, circling over the area rather than heading straight past it, though they did not stay for more than a few minutes.

Just after seeing these Swifts I listened to a **Radio 4 programme on bird migration** which included news of research being done in Sweden that seems to show that small migrants not only use up all their fat reserves during long distance flights but go further, absorbing proteins from their own guts and internal organs to keep them going. From what I could make out this knowledge has been gained by putting birds into a wind tunnel to keep them flying until they drop dead, then examining their corpses (is this really fair treatment of innocent fellow inhabitants of our planet? all done just in aid of accumulating more scientific data and perhaps promotion for the scientist who kills the birds?)

Following Steve Keen's concern over the **damage a Peacock can do in a garden** (see yesterday's notes) David Parker adds another cogent reason to keep them out of gardens. David lives on the edge of Stansted Forest and a single Peacock, no doubt from the Stansted House flock, has inflicted itself on his property. This bird not only wrecks the vegetable bed but at this time of year prevents the household from sleeping later than 4am when its raucous, supposedly amorous, calls prohibit sleep. All suggestions for evicting the bird will be welcome, but short of shooting it all else has so far failed. This reminds me of one November bonfire party which I attended in the walled garden of Idsworth House where several peacocks could be seen sleeping on top of the garden wall in the firelight, undisturbed by all the noise and activity until one of them was actually hit by a low flying rocket. The birds did then retreat but I never heard whether they came back, which I suspect they did.

Finally for today **Theo Roberts, living at the southern foot of Portsdown, tells me he has a pair of Chiffchaff nesting** in his garden and taught me that, unlike Willow Warblers which always nest on the ground, Chiffchaffs usually choose a low bush site. This pair seem to have made a wise choice by nesting in a Butcher's Broom bush, the prickles and dense stems of which should dissuade passing foxes or stoats from attacking the nest.

PLANTS:

SUN 19 MAY

A visit to Noar Hill today with members of Havant Orchestral Society gave me my first Bird's Nest Orchids (a couple found by Tony Gutteridge on Selborne Common before we got to Noar Hill) and **my lifetime first view of Early Gentians in flower on the banks of the reserve chalkpits** - yes, four flowering plants, and Sue Clarke (voluntary warden, who showed them to us), said that she had seen a total of nine plants so there are likely to be more flowers before long). +++

My vague memories of what I have been told in the past suggest that Noar Hill is one of only a handful of sites in southern England where this plant can be found, though on the Isle of Wight it is I believe almost common, so when I got home I checked on its status and the first thing I found was that, as well as this Early Gentian (*Gentianella anglica*) there is another plant with a similar name - Spring Gentian (*Gentiana verna*) - which is equally rare but is found on limestone in northern England and western Ireland only. I then saw that *Gentianella anglica* has two subspecies - ours being *G.a. anglica* and the other *G.a. cornubiensis* (but forget about the latter as it is only found in north Cornwall and Devon and may well be just a hybrid between the Early and Autumn Gentians) +++

Having got the confusions out of the way I checked the Hants Flora and saw that our plant has in the past been found on a number of sites and the first record of it in 1929 was on Horndean Down, close to Havant. Even nearer to us was a find in 1975 made by Michael Bryant in the Paulsgrove chalkpit on Portsdown. It has also been recorded at Cheesefoot Head near Winchester, Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley and Chilbolton by the river Test. The most interesting site, where it may well still be found in large numbers, is on the heathland of the north west New Forest near Godshill (SU 2015) in what appears to be totally the wrong habitat yet Paul Bowman reckoned there were 2800 plants there as recently as 1994. The reason for this find lies in the second world war when this part of the New Forest was used as a practice bombing range by the RAF - to give the planes targets masses of chalk was imported to create white circles in the heathland and it is on this chalk that the plants flourish.

Today also gave me my first sight of Foxgloves in flower - here in Havant and near the roadside on the way to Noar Hill. In a rape field near Charity Farm, as we were leaving Noar Hill, a single flower of Musk Thistle caught my eye as I was looking at something else with my binoculars. I hope to see this flower again soon in a place where I can get close and enjoy the lovely scent!

SAT 18 MAY

John Goodspeed found **Dames Violet flowering at the Hayling Oysterbeds** today (I don't recall it being found there before) and that probably means that the plants will also be out in the established colony where the canalised section of the River Ems emerges on the south side of the A27 (where Mill Lane turns away from the stream to the new bridge over the road). More suited to the Oysterbeds habitat were the first Common Broomrape spikes of the year (and

perhaps that means that the bigger, yellow spikes of Knapweed Broomrape will be out on Portsdown?).

Just one new flowering Havant today - Biting Stonecrop atop an old wall. I also had a second hand view of my first Spindle flowers among a collection of wildflowers Gwynne Johnson had brought from her garden as a talking point for a Wildlife Trust stand at a show in Havant Park

FRI 17 MAY

Today's botanic milestone was the first sight of a cluster of **Broad-leaved Willowherb** plants flowering on a sheltered south facing bank of the driveway of a house in Havant. Also seen while walking in the town were Annual Wallrocket and (on the New Lane allotments) tiny yellow flowers on a feathery plant of self sown Asparagus. Also flowering here were my first Sweet Peas. +++

Before walking in Havant I had been on the Warblington Farm fields where I at last saw **a single flower open on a single stem of Southern Marsh Orchid**. Other new plants for myself were lots of Lesser Spearwort and one area crowded with Subterranean Clover (which Martin Rand saw last Sunday in the New Forest). In wet ditches the Sweet Grass (*Glyceria plicata*) was stretching the arms of its long thin panicles (not yet quite flowering) and on dry ground I saw the first two spikes of the dreaded Black Grass in flower (these are one of the main reasons why farmers are in many places now turning their set aside fields into ghastly killing fields with 'Round-up' spray)

THU 16 MAY

Feverfew is one of those plant which can be seen flowering sporadically in the winter but a 'bus' which I saw growing in a pavement crack outside a Havant garden today was fresh and covered with flowers. Much more surprising, on a patch of close mown roadside grass was what must have been a single Corn Cockle flower, apparently growing straight from the ground though a close inspection showed the mown remains of leaves and stem.

WED 15 MAY

Brian Fellows now has at least **nine species of Sedge** that he has been able to identify flourishing in the Brook Meadow conservation area at Emsworth this year. Latest to go on the list is Spiked Sedge and the list for this year is Distant Sedge, Divided Sedge, False Fox Sedge, Lesser Pond Sedge, Greater Pond Sedge, Hairy Sedge, Pendulous Sedge, Spiked Sedge and Common Spike-rush. The fact that the pond edges of Peter Pond and the Slipper Mill Pond are not technically within Brook Meadow accounts for the absence of *Scirpus maritimus*, the Sea Club-rush, which is so common in most damp places near the sea. One particular specimen that has proved a problem in identification is now thought to be a extra large example of Distant Sedge.

Another news item today comes from Richard Hallett living in Denmead who tells me on a new to me **small site for Early Purple orchids** near the Wayfarers Walkpath heading north from Denmead where it passes Harts Copse (the first bit of woodland you come to on your left). In his garden, and in Creech Woods, the Common Spotted orchids are not yet in flower but will be very soon.

On North Common at Northney, Hayling Island, this afternoon I found plenty of White Campion which has been in flower in many places for some time. but with it was one clump of Red Campion which (although others have seen it) has so far this year escaped me - have others found it late in flowering? On North Common masses of both Goats Rue and Weld will soon be flowering, but not yet.

TUE 14 MAY

Bright sunshine, but a very strong south west wind, drew me to have a lookround the relatively sheltered **Sandy and Black Point area of Hayling** this evening. The Seaside Daisies (*Erigeron glaucus*) which flourish in the gardens facing the promenade and which escape with relish, where flowering well, and within the Sandy Point reserver Hound's Tongue was just coming into flower near the fence in the south east corner. On the shingle outside what was the hospital grounds the Sea Knotgrass is very well established to judge by its strong woody stems (looking like bundles of driftwood and only just detectable as being alive where a few fresh leaves are sprouting). Continuing north behind the lifeboat station I found Alkanet flowering on a new rubble heap before coming on a magnificent display of Hare's Tail grass all along both

sides of the causeway and round the southern banks of the sailing club site (I have never seen so much). Also along the west side of the causeway road there are flowers on Tree Mallow and masses of leaves (but no flowers) on what must be Rough Clover. Along the sandy southern edge of the club site the Tree Lupins are few but flowering and flourishing and I found one plant of Sea Rocket (*Cakile maritima*) and a few of Sticky Groundsel now in flower. Common Poppies, Red Hot Poker and Sea Mayweed were also flowering here.

When Brian Fellows was in the Eastney area of Portsmouth today he checked out the thin sandy soil around Fort Cumberland on the edge of the shingle beach where, among other goodies, he found the first glorious blue flowers on Viper's Bugloss and the less dramatic yellow flowers of Weld. +++

Inland, near the River Itchen between Shawford and Hockley south of Winchester, Martin Rand enjoyed Yellow Flag, Brooklime and Hairy Sedge in abundance, and was specially pleased to find Tufted Sedge in a map square for which there is no record in the Hants Flora.

MON 13 MAY

Today's rain (and forthcoming high temperatures) will probably bring an outburst of new flowers in the coming week but today all I could contribute was the first Purple Toadflax, covered in flowers, on a wall up my road at home in Havant

News from Brian Fellows for Saturday is that the Havant Wildlife Group in the Hollybank Woods found a poor showing of Early Purple orchids - the Longcopse site has in the past had some 800 flowering spikes but Brian's estimate for this year was only around 250. In his Brook Meadow site Brian now has Divided, False Fox, Distant and Hairy Sedges on show (Today's issue of the Portsmouth NEWS has an excellent photo of children enjoying themselves at yesterday's 'Fun Day' in the meadow which seems to have been a great success.)

INSECTS:

SUN 19 MAY

At Noar Hill today with a party of members of the Havant Orchestral Society we were greeted by a Small Copper and soon began to see Duke of Burgundy and Dingy Skipper in good numbers. Pausing for lunch soon after our arrival several male Common Blues flew around us and while exploring the reserve later we saw one Small Heath. Something which I learnt from Peter Craddock, who not only conducts the orchestras but is a keen butterfly enthusiast, is that a female Duke of Burgundy has six legs but the male appears to have only four (the front pair being atrophied). In two major families of butterflies (Satyridae - the Browns - and Nymphalidae - Peacock, Tortoiseshell, Comma, Admirals) all the insects appear to have only four legs, and I think the Duke of Burgundy (which is the only European member of its family) is the only British Butterfly to have this sexual distinction. The wind kept down the number of butterflies to be seen though we did have Holly Blue, Orange Tip, Speckled Wood and Whites. Other insects seen at Noar Hill were some bright green small beetles resting in yellow buttercup flowers (possibly *Cryptocaphalus hypochaeridis*?) and paler green tiny Weevils. A Bloody Nosed beetle was easy to name and so, I thought, was a small woodlouse like insect which rolled itself into a tight black ball. It probably was the Pill Woodlouse (*Armadillidium vulgare*) but I see there is also a Pill Millipede of almost the same size and I did not check the number of plates showing on the last segment (when rolled up this is the only way of distinguishing them, though when unrolled the difference in the number of legs is obvious). Earlier, in the beechwood on Selborne Common, Richard Hallett found an insect which looked very like one of the many fallen 'bud covers' of the beech leaves (long, thin and brown) but which, when he got it on his hand, showed by a dramatic leap and click that it was a Click Beetle (possibly *Athous haemorrhoidalis*) - I did not know that Click beetles are the adult form of Wireworms and are thus not to be encouraged by crop or plant growers.

SAT 18 MAY

Yesterday (May 17) a single Wall Brown was in the news as it was the first to be seen at Magdalen Hill Down reserve since 1992, but on the previous day (May 16) you would have been more likely to see one on Thorney Island where Barry Collins counted 54 of them in a walk round the island. His list also included 14 Small Heath and 13 Small Copper with 5 Common Blue and 4 Red Admirals. In total Barry had 12 species of butterfly on the island - the

others were Small, Green-Veined and Large White, Holly Blue, Speckled Wood, Orange Tip and Peacock.

FRI 17 MAY

Out on the fields of Warblington Farm this morning for the Common Bird Census I was very surprised to see **a fresh Red Admiral** flying strongly at 7:25am - later Tony Gutteridge told me he had seen several of them - all going to confirm that a fresh generation has just emerged from eggs laid by the insects we saw in March. This was one of seven butterfly species seen on the farm later in the morning but a small moth is the only insect perhaps worth a mention - this was the 'Mint Moth' (*Pyrausta aurata*) in a damp area where there is much Water Mint growing though not yet flowering. (I see that Brian Fletcher recorded one of these moths as early as April 19 but this is more the time to expect them. +++)

My claim that the Red Admirals we are now seeing are 'home grown' may well be disputed by Mark Litjens who saw two fly in off the sea at Titchfield Haven today. I won't argue my case too strongly but if there was a real migrant invasion I think we might have heard more from other parts of the south coast (at Titchfield they could have come from the Isle of Wight), but I suspect that the true answer is that some migrants are arriving to supplement those emerging here.

THU 16 MAY

The Hayling Oysterbeds is a good site for seeing common butterflies and I am not surprised to hear that Simon Woolley found a Small Copper there. Now that the rough field between the pools and the coastal path is being grazed, and the bare earth of the 'mound' from which you can watch the Little Terns is growing a range of natural plants we should see more butterflies (and there should be plenty of Sorrel for the Small Copper - though I can't recall seeing much on the mound as yet).

WED 15 MAY

The first report of **Hornets** for this year came from the New Forest (see entry for May 11), where they were seen on May 10.

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows noticed the first **Soldier Beetles** on parade and also noted a very fresh Red Admiral which, following on several similar reports in the past few days, makes me think that the many Red Admirals recorded in early spring have already been succeeded by their offspring. Normally this butterfly lays eggs in June (after migrants have arrived) but there is nothing to stop them doing so earlier in the year if they are already here. The adult butterfly emerges just about two months after the egg is laid (in this case in mid-March). Presumably this happens on the continent, giving rise to the early summer migrants that are normally the start of this butterfly's life cycle in this country.

Mike Duffy is a new contributor to the Butterfly Conservation website who was at Noar Hill last Saturday and Martin Down on Sunday. On May 11 at Noar Hill he found Duke of Burgundy in every pit he entered (more than 20 insects) and an even greater abundance of Dingy Skipper (30+) but only one Grizzled Skipper while the situation at Martin Down was reversed (many Grizzled, few Dingy). The special interest at Martin Down was in the form of 2 Small Blues but even better, at Noar Hill, were the first Mother Shipton of the year and what Mike is fairly confident was a Broad-bordered Bee Hawkmoth.

MON 13 MAY

A phone call from Theo Roberts told me that he had found the **first Common Blue of the year on his Portsdown** transect last Saturday (May 11), beating by one day Mark Litjens finds recorded below.

Mark Litjens list of butterfly sightings for yesterday give a good idea of what might be seen at two good Hampshire sites - Noar Hill and Whiteley Pastures/Botley Woods. At Noar Hill Mark saw 17 Duke of Burgundy, 16 Dingy Skipper, 3 Common Blue, 3 Small Heath, 3 Green Hairstreak and 1 Small Copper. Later, at Whiteley, he listed 36 Brimstone, 3 Grizzled and 3 Dingy Skipper, 2 Holly Blue and singles of Common Blue and Small Heath with one Broad-bodied Chaser and one Hairy Dragonfly at the same site (plus numerous damselflies)

On Saturday (May 11) Brian Fellows tells me that a single Small Copper was seen on Longcopse Hill in the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth (possibly a new species for these woods?) **Speckled Yellow moths are now widespread** and were also seen there.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 19 MAY

On our way from Selborne Common to Noar Hill this morning we were crossing a wheat field when a Roe doe was seen at the corner of the field hedgerow. As she saw us and ran for cover her young kid also made a leap into the growing wheat where it no doubt lay immobile until we had long passed and the mother returned.

WED 15 MAY

A message on HOSLIST today from Simon Ingram in Eastleigh should bring cheer to all naturalists and refute those who complain that the youth of today is lost in cyberspace with no contact with the real world of living things. Simon writes ... {{ For those who are interested in reptiles my son and his friend Dale who is our local "Steve Irwine" came back from the lakes on Sunday with a Grass Snake which they had spotted sunning itself on some corrugated metal sheets. I quickly ran my tape over the creature which measured 80cm in length did a "Gee what a beauty !!!" in an Australian accent, and sent the boys back to release the snake unharmed where they had caught it! +++

I didn't exactly approve of them catching the snake but as 8 and 9 year olds I had to admire the skill and bravery of the boys to attempt to catch such a large and normally very shy and alert creature and if a deep interest in nature develops from their experiences (which I think it will happen), it will only be a good thing!! +++

At least they are not sat in front of the telly on their Play Stations like my elder son , mind you he plays football so its not all bad !! }} I remember that last autumn Simon had to bring one of his boys to Farlington Marshes for an RSPB Young Explorer's Club outing, so I guess this shows that the seeds of a lifelong interest in wildlife have germinated in this lad. Good for him and good for the future of our world.

TUE 14 MAY

After walking round the Sandy Point reserve on Hayling today I was completing the circuit west along Sandy Point road when, immediately on the west side of the stream just within the reserve fence, I saw a huge and colourful Sulphur Polypore (Chicken of the Woods) fungus growing on a dead branch lying on the ground - well worth a look if you are in the area in the next few days.

WEEK 19 MAY 6 – 12 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 12 MAY

A Purple Heron has been seen today (with difficulty!) in ditches at the edge of a golf course at Cooden near Bexhill and two Great White Egrets flew east over Hastings this morning. These are the high spots of the Sussex news, but two more Pom Skuas with 3 Arctic Skuas and a Black Tern were also reported from Selsey Bill

News from the Isle of Wight tells of 2 Poms flying east past St Catherine's Point this morning, along with a Bonxie and one Arctic Skua. Three Red-throated and one Black-throated Diver went by and a couple of Kittiwake were seen (do these nest on the Isle of Wight cliffs, or are they maybe also heading east to Sussex?)

As I write this at dusk on Sunday evening I have made several checks for Swifts but the sky over their nest sites here remains silent We did have just one Swift overhead on Thursday evening (May 9) but no others, and the SOS website this evening only reports two small 'screaming' parties - one over Lewes yesterday and the other at Broadwater on Friday (May 10) (Broadwater could be the lake of that name near Eastbourne or the Broadwater Forest near Tunbridge Well - in either case far from Havant!)

A morning outing in the south west of Havant was mainly to check on the newly flowering plants, but happened to give me the best views of Black-necked Grebe which I have ever had. The two birds were on the surface, staying in the same spot for all the time I watched them (about

ten minutes), between 50 and 100 metres out from seawall from which I had my closest views (the very end of the seawall heading north west around the foot of Budds Mound towards the mouth of the Hermitage Stream, i.e. where steps take you down onto the shingle just east of Budds Farm outfall pipe). The golden ear tufts, rich brown body feathers around the flanks and tail, and the shining black of the closed wings and mantle, all indicated summer plumage but the lower part of the face and under the bill were very pale and there was a lot of pale plumage on the breast so they were not in full summer plumage (do first year birds never achieve the full summer dress?). A lone Great Crested Grebe close to them dived periodically but these two stayed on the surface very close to each other, drifting with the tide and wind and then paddling to regain the same spot - possibly the best place to take off for a quick flip over the fence into the Budds Farm pools? These birds were seen at around 11 am when the tide was nearly at the top, and I suppose there is a chance of seeing them again at a similar state of the tide.

When participating in a beach clean-up here in May last year I also saw two of these birds in roughly the same place and I see the Peter Raby and John Norton saw them yesterday ... +++

On the Budds Farm pools the Swan pair were still sitting and a lone Canada Goose also probably had a sitting mate. Six Shelduck were probably three pairs that have not yet started nesting, and the other birds on the water included around 25 Tufted Duck, a few Mallard and the usual Coot, Moorhen and Little Grebe. A couple of Swallows flew over and both Common and Lesser Whitethroat were singing, as were Skylark and Meadow Pipit. Back on the harbour shore, where I thought the summer flock of Swans might have started to build, there were only seven birds, but on the sewage outfall a single Little Egret was a bit of a surprise.

SAT 11 MAY

Will Walmsley was one of many visitors to Sidlesham Ferry Pool today who all saw a Wood Sandpiper there - among others in the supporting caste were up to 6 Common Sandpiper, 5 Black-tailed and 1 Bar-tailed Godwit. The SOS website reports a second Wood Sandpiper at Rye Harbour with 10 Knot, 4 Avocet and 2 Curlew Sandpiper - offshore 12 Brent flew east to show that their passage is not yet over. Elsewhere in Sussex a Long-tailed Skua flew past Bexhill and the Rustic Bunting could still be seen on Hove Golf Course (see yesterday's notes). At Pulborough Brooks, as well as 7 Nightingale and 5 Hobbies, there was good proof that wader passage is not confined to the coast - 5 Greenshank and 6 Ringed Plover were recorded there.

David Taylor emerged from Dorset for a visit to the New Forest today, and at one favoured spot in the Forest he saw six species of raptor - 1 Honey Buzzard, 1 Red Kite, 1 Peregrine, 2 Hobby, 1 Sparrowhawk and many Common Buzzards.

In Hampshire Mark Litjens was at Martin Down where a Raven flew over from the west, did a couple of victory rolls then returned the way it had come. 8 Garden Warbler, 2 Nightingale and 2 Turtle Doves were also on Mark's list at Martin, while another Turtle Dove was a bonus for Christoph Harwood as he walked over Park Hill and Rookham Down near East Meon today. On the coast Peter Raby and John Norton completed their 'bird race' with three drake Garganey and a Little Stint that is still to be seen at Normandy Marsh near Lymington (I am assuming the Stint is the same one that has been seen there off and on for some time),

Visiting the IBM North Harbour site for today's WeBS count the bad news was that 20 Canada Goose goslings had already appeared on the scene from 4 pairs of adults, with plenty of scope for more broods from the total of 33 adults (I may have missed some as there were 37 adults last month). The good (or at least surprising) news was that a second Swans nest had appeared with a sitting tenant - the first pair were at the west end of the lake with one bird on the nest and the other nearby, the new nest is in a small reedbed just east of the cafeteria (and potentially visible from it) on the west side of the 'twin peaks' promontory that separates the main lake from the smaller eastern section, and the mate of the sitting bird on this nest was nowhere to be seen. Of the 30 Mallard seen by me two females had broods of ducklings, one of five, the other eleven ducklings (this on the main reception lake). There was no sign of a Great Crested Grebe and I heard just two Little Grebes. Two male Tufted Duck might have had sitting females (not seen), and five pairs of Coot had only one brood of just two chicks. Interestingly the single adult Heron present was first seen at the west end of the main lake perched close to a Little Egret (never seen one here in May before - maybe both come from the

established Heronry/Egretry on the west shore of Portsmouth Harbour near Frater Lake). +++
I did not count the singing Reed Warblers (half a dozen?) but was pleased to hear two
SedgeWarblers, one on the islands and one on the motorway bank at the extreme east end of
the site, and I believe there were two singing Reed Buntings. Whitethroat, Lesser Whitethroat,
Cetti's Warbler and Chiff Chaff were all singing but I did not hear a Blackcap. The male Kestrel
flew over and the Green Woodpecker was heard but not one Skylark or Meadow Pipit. The
most interesting land bird sighting was of a family party of Long-tailed Tits.

Towards sunset I rode over Langstone Bridge to the Oysterbeds where I could only detect five
Little Tern but after a time I upped this to eleven. The sun then dropped below the horizon and
suddenly many more birds appeared from nowhere (they must have been lying up on the nest
island, unlike the first eleven birds that spent most of their time high in the air, occasionally
touching down on the island but seeming very nervous of the ground and almost immediately
taking off again. When I left, before it was quite dark, my guess was that there were around 40
Terns present. At least one pair of Ringed Plover and one pair of Oystercatcher seemed to be
thinking of nesting on the island. In the main lagoon I found three Shelduck, one Egret was
fishing in Stoke Bay, and no Canada Geese could be seen. On the way home both the
Langstone Pond Swans were on the sea by the Mill with no cygnets (just an evening break from
the nest?) and on the Wade Court trees I could see six Egrets but have no idea what the full
count of the roost was.

An amusing item that should have been included in yesterday's notes came from Steve Keen who
works as a professional gardener in the New Milton/Lymington area around his home at Sway.
In HOSLIST Steve (referring to a report of an escaped parrot in the Test Valley) wrote {{ I can
go one better than the parrot sighting earlier this week (having seen five species of parrot
excluding Ring-necked Parakeet at large in Britain they're almost predicatable!). Went round
one of the gardens I work in yesterday to be confronted by the ridiculous sight of a peacock (full
male, tail and all), dust-bathing in the veggie patch!! It looked most indignant, but I managed to
chivvy it a few hundred yards off to stop it eating all the broccoli before the owners come back
of their hols. I haven't heard peacock in Sway for a couple of years so where it came from is
anyone's guess! }}

Sussex news for yesterday (May 10) is topped by a male summer plumaged Kentish Plover on
the beach at Newhaven - this is the second bird of this species that I have heard of this spring,
the first being seen very briefly in Pagham Harbour on Apr 27. Inland a single Pied Flycatcher
was at Pulborough Brooks and at Rye Harbour wader passage seemed to be hotting up with a
day list of 30 + Knot, 24+ Grey Plover, 20+ Sanderling, 19 Black and a single Bar-tailed Godwit,
4 Greenshank and over 100 Whimbrel. Also on that daylist was a Marsh Harrier, 2 Arctic
Skuas, 2 Little Gulls and 1 Black Tern plus 19 Kittiwake and a record breaking count of 150
Arctic Terns (previous day maximum was only 14). +++

Going back to May 9 a report from Steep Down (west of the River Adur and north of Lancing)
listed 5 Corn Bunting and 3 Grey Plover but no sound of the Quail that were there last summer.
Among a long list of late news on the Sussex website I picked out just two more items - both
for May 4 when the Egyptian Goose was still at Ivy Lake, Chichester, and a single Pied
Flycatcher with 2 Yellow Wagtail were at Pulborough Brooks.

FRI 10 MAY

Today's top news story comes from Brian Fellows who saw the first cygnet peeping out from its
mother's wing at the Peter Pond nest in Emsworth today. Hopefully there is more than one
cygnet now hatched and I wait for more news (or for other claims to the prize for first cygnet of
the year). Other news from Emsworth is that there are still 70 non-breeding Swans there, and
the Black Swan is still missing - with no other sightings since it was last seen on March 4 this
year I think it may have joined the dead parrots union (or did someone take it secretly to meet
the lonely female Black Swan at Romsey which has also failed to get a mention in this year's
news?)

Bob Chapman's status report for Farlington Marshes on the HWT website describes the past
week as {{ A rather quiet week with very few migrants, no doubt due to the poor weather for
birds moving. }} Nevertheless he goes on to tell us that the first family of Bearded Tits have
now fledged (and should presumably be more easily detectable by ear as the young call for

food and the family keep in contact with each other as they move through the reeds). Less easy to spot out on the main marsh are two new broods of Lapwing chicks. +++

From Titchfield Haven Peter Raby tells us what he saw in his early morning visit, starting with a to me surprising count of 113 Black-tailed Godwit still by the river. A drake Mandarin was also present as was a single Greenshank.. Later in the morning Richard Carpenter added to Peter's list with a Grasshopper Warbler heard from the Canal Path, and in the reserve he upped Peter's counts to 120+ Black-tailed Godwit and 2 drake Mandarin though he did not encounter the Greenshank nor a Green Sandpiper reported by other visitors. Later, off Hill Head, Richard saw a single Kittiwake go east (a singleton also passed here yesterday - seen by Richard Bonser just before 6am)

Giles Darvill took a long circular walk today in the area of the New Forest between Nomansland and Fritham. Out on the open plain north of Fritham he heard and saw a Wood Warbler in unusual habitat - instead of the expected open glade with beech trees in mature woodland the bird was in a small scrubby copse not more than an acre in extent near Howen Bottom where the stream that feeds Eyeworth Pond flows south west from the Cadnam to Godshill road. +++

While on the subject of habitat Alison Cross today requested help with a college project in which she has to comment on the way Woodlarks have adapted to heathland, and John Eyre has helped her out by saying the her tutor is asking the wrong question. John says {{ I would argue that it's not heathland specifically but rather the soil conditions and resulting vegetation types that are attractive to Woodlark. The necessary conditions are dry, well-drained, friable soil with open areas/sparse vegetation for feeding and usually, but not always, some thicker cover, usually on the edge of an open area, for nesting. They also require song perches of some sort which can be anything from a low tree stump to a high electricity pylon. Heathland often provides these requirements because the soil is poor and the vegetation is sparse, but Woodlarks also nest in forestry clearings, tree nurseries and other agricultural areas. They certainly don't need heather or gorse or other typical heathland vegetation types }} +++

From Winchester Simon Woolley today reports the return of at least one Spotted Flycatcher to central Winchester - the bird, with a Tree-creeper - was seen by Simon's wife but the presence of the two birds (if in the same place) suggests the sort of habitat that both birds like (maybe a Cathedral Close garden or a quiet part of the Itchen path) and so I think there is a fair chance they will stay there for Simon's personal perusal. No doubt the return of the Flycatcher will indicate to local residents in Winchester that all's well in the Flycatcher world, but I note that in the Meon valley yesterday Will Walmsley was getting worried about his expected garden resident Flycatcher which had failed to turn up well after its expected arrival date. I hope one does arrive there but I fear this is another indication of the 'extinction line' for breeding Flycatchers continuing to move north from the Hampshire coast.

Today's 'twitcher special' has been a Rustic Bunting on the West Hove Golf Course - an area of downland north of the A27 with the Monarch's Way path passing close to where the bird was seen, first at the muddy edge of a pond, then feeding along the edge of a cornfield.

Three irresistible attractions for your diary have come to my attention tonight. The first two are both part of a spring festival organised by Havant Borough under the title 'Nine Days in May' - this coming Sunday (May 12) the Brook Meadow conservation group are having a 'Nature Hunt' in the meadow from 2 - 4pm (free fun for the family!). If you want to join in drive to the roundabout in the centre of Emsworth, turn north than turn right around the One Stop shop and get your instructions from someone at the south end of the Palmer's Road carpark (be dressed for walking through nettles). On the following Saturday (May 18 from 10:30 to 16:30) find your way to Dymoke Street in north Emsworth, abutting the south west corner of the Hollybank Woods (=Southleigh Forest), and join in some fun with the Friends of Hollybank Woods. +++

If you prefer to be entertained via the internet then click the link on my 'What's New' page links section to visit www.nettles.org.uk and learn about the national 'Be Kind to Nettles' week from May 20 - 26 (Chris Baines strikes again)

THU 09 MAY

This evening at dusk just one Swift circled over the area of Havant, close to my garden, where they have nested for many years (and always used to return on May 1). As far as I could see the bird made no attempt to descend to roof top level or to check out the new artificial nest

boxes installed since last year (and not even one bird could be seen on the next evening - May 10). Last Monday (May 6) Mike Collins saw and heard several Swifts that seemed to be checking out their nests over East Street in Chichester, but all other reports of Swifts so far have been of birds on migration or idling in flocks away from nest areas.

One of the Sussex Cranes (see yesterday's notes) today flew north over the A27 a few miles east of Lewes - maybe heading for the gardens of Glyndebourne to enjoy some opera? - but whether this is the bird seen over Pagham harbour yesterday, or the 'other one' of the two seen on Apr 27, or a new bird, is anyone's guess. +++

Other birds showing good taste as far as their choice of residence is concerned are a family of Grey Wagtails that can now be seen on the roof of Goodwood House near Chichester according to Mike Collins. Certainly a better choice than the Perfect Pizza bird in Fareham which Trevor Carpenter told us about on May 7, but I still have to learn whether this family are there for the artistic side of Lord March's activities or just in the hope of seeing some classic cars roar round the estate.

A message from Doug Muntz on HOSLIST today describes three encounters with raptors that will interest any birder who has not already read of them. Doug says {{ This evening whilst in my front garden, I heard a noise from under my neighbour's car, this was followed by a cloud of feathers. Thinking that one of the neighbourhood cats had got a bird, I went to the rescue and dived under the back of the car. Imagine my shock when, instead of finding a moggy, I found myself looking into the eyes & beak of a female Sparrowhawk trying to kill a Collared Dove for dinner. The hawk recovered from the shock quicker than me, and deciding it didn't like her uninvited guest, gave me a quick peck on the arm before flying away from under the car, leaving me with a very sad Dove. After checking it for injuries, I left it in a safe place to recover, I still feel guilty about robbing the hawk of its dinner though! +++

Also yesterday, whilst in the New Forest I saw a pair of Kestrels flying along, the female underneath the male suddenly turned upside down and grabbed the male's feet with her talons, causing both to plummet to the ground. They disentangled themselves before hitting the ground and then proceeded to repeat the performance twice more, I assume this was a mating display, as I've not seen this before. +++

On Tuesday, whilst birding in an adjacent County, I had just parked the car and got my scope out, when a large bird appeared behind me, I was amazed to see that it was a ringtail Montagu's Harrier, it passed slowly by no more than 20 yds. away, giving me my best views ever of this species. It flew around for a short while and came to rest in a small tree. A few minutes later it was joined by a Hobby, both occupying the same tree for about 5 minutes, neither seeming concerned about the other. }}

Another Hoslist message which caught my eye was one from John Clark asking for confirmation of the presence of a Nightingale in the Fort Road area of Alverstoke (this road runs along the southern fringe of Gosport, separating the built up area from the golf course and open grassland near Fort Gilkicker). I have no knowledge of the current bird but I do remember that, a good few years ago, I heard of a Nightingale singing here and went to investigate - sure enough the bird was singing loudly for all to hear and as I stood listening by the roadside a very noisy car drew up beside me and the driver leant out to ask if I knew of a Nightingale in the area, to which I shouted back - 'Yes, and if you turn your engine off you'll hear it too' +++

Another bird which caught my attention via email today was another single Yellow Wagtail flying up the Meon Valley near Wickham, passing over Will Walmsley's garden, but not stopping. I would think that Stockbridge Marsh by the Test must in the past have had breeding Yellow Wagtails, but a day list from that site recorded today by Mike Jones does not mention this vanishing species. Checking in Bird of Hampshire I see there was just a 'possible breeding' record for these birds here in the late 1980s during the tetrad atlas of the county.

The SOS website tells us that last night (May 8) the first Nightjar was heard churring at Coates Common (west of Pulborough), and also corrects the dates for the Marsh Sandpiper at Pulborough (it was there on May 3 to 4, not May 2 to 3 as previously reported). Down at Selsey Bill on May 8 seawatchers logged 3 Black Terns, 1 Garganey, 3 Arctic Terns, 1 Greenshank, 1 Ruff, 1 Fulmar, 19 Common Scoters, 86 Bar-tailed Godwits, 8 Grey Plovers, 26 Common Terns, 1

'auk species', 126 Sandwich Tern and 106 Gannet. The two Northern Divers are still present and single Turtle Dove and Yellow Wagtail flew in. +++

At Church Norton Mike Collins, also on May 8, found a very tame single Brent which he thinks was one of last year's youngsters. It proved it could fly so maybe it just lost contact with its family when they took off for Siberia and does not know about the migration routine. Back in Hampshire, off Titchfield Haven, Richard Bonser found a single male Merganser still hanging around (also left behind?) - this is probably the same bird that Trevor Carpenter also saw and which I reported in yesterday's notes.

WED 08 MAY

Simon Boswell and his father spent the whole day within the confines of the Keyhaven carpark seeing how many birds they could list in a 'one stop' bird race. Their total was 80 species, which I guess would be difficult to beat at any one viewpoint in Hampshire, but Simon was a little disappointed as he had done a similar whole day 'sitewatch' at this same place last October during which he listed 75 species, and he expected many more in May. One Black Tern was seen but the highspot of the day was definitely a Honey Buzzard which flew over heading north, mobbed by every local bird, at 13:50. This is almost certainly the first Honey Buzzard to reach Hampshire this year - Paul Beckett did have a 'possible but unlikely' sighting in the New Forest on Apr 13, and there may well have been other sightings which have not been published as the birds were in breeding territories, but the earliest ever recorded in the county was 21 April 1996 and one was seen on 27 April in 2000. In most years however the first report is not until well into May.

Jason Crook spent nearly four hours from first light seawatching from Sandy Point on Hayling Island and logged 2 Roseate, 1 Black, and 302 Common Terns (plus just 2 Greenshank in the way of waders, and not a single Skua). Trevor Carpenter was also out at Stokes Bay for one of these hours but he only saw 16 Common Tern and wonders how they got to Hayling without passing through the Solent (I think he needs to establish when Jason saw his birds - they could all have come through in one of the three hours when Trevor was not watching). As far as I am concerned it is just more evidence to support my theory that if you set a team of birders to walk a set route, starting them off at five minute intervals, each birder will come back with a different list of sightings (and that of course supports my theory that the birds are much better at spotting us than we are at spotting them). +++

Later in the day Jason was at Farlington Marshes and watched an Osprey spend an hour in Langstone Harbour catching and eating a fish before it flew on north - he also saw an Avocet in Farlington Marshes reserve. +++

In the afternoon Trevor Carpenter was back on seawatch at Hill Head and saw at least 7 (probably 10) Black Terns, and in doing so showed that they do not all stick to one route - at least two headed inland up the Meon Valley while others stuck to the easterly route along the coast. On this same subject I see that when Trevor was at Hill Head on May 6 one party of 10 Whimbrel went north inland while another 38 went east, and I have the impression that choice of route can be determined by many things (weather, wind, time of day, possibly the relative attractiveness - in the bird's eye - of the scenery along one of several possible routes, or memories of routes chosen in past years for reasons that do not apply this year). Today 48 Bar-tailed Godwit and 2 Whimbrel also chose the north-east route overland from Hill Head, though we know that hundreds more of these two species follow the coast along the whole length of Sussex. +++

Still in the Titchfield Haven area Peter Raby found 26 Black-tailed Godwit still present and noted 4 Sanderling and 2 Knot plus 44 Bar-tails and 3 Whimbrel (the same as Trevor's flock of 48 plus 2?). Other birds on Trevor's list were a late Merganser on the sea and a single Avocet coming into the reserve from the sea - maybe from Hook where Richard Carpenter saw only one Avocet where there have been two for some time - Richard also found 2 Gadwall still at Hook.

At least five of the ten Barnacle geese were still missing from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth yesterday, and today Mike Wall reports two Barnacles as newcomers to The Vyne floods north of Basingstoke - could they be from Baffins? On May 5 a single Barnacle flew over the Eastleigh Lakeside site and went on north west - maybe another dis-satisfied customer fleeing

Portsmouth? Of course the Baffins Barnacles have been missing since they were last seen together on Apr 2, and there are others in the county as witnessed by Mike Jones' sighting of one at Longstock on the River Test on Mar 27 when the Baffins flock was complete.

On Apr 27 there was an unconfirmed sighting of two Common Cranes in an area of East Sussex near the Pevensey levels (they were north of Bexhill), and today one flew north over Pagham Harbour, so maybe there are now three of these birds successfully avoiding birders in Sussex - watch this space! Also in the Pagham area a drake Garganey was on the pools at the Church Norton 'Severals' (who are these mysterious 'several people' who own the land jointly?) with a Hobby overhead. At the Ferry Pool 7 Bar-tailed Godwit were I think an unusual sighting (yet another personalised migration route?), and at Burton Mill Pond another single Spotted Flycatcher was seen.

On a personal note I was pleased to hear my first Turtle Dove today, purring from Hawthorns separating Marina Farm from the Little Deeps area of Thorney Island. Down at the Great Deeps west I noted 10 pairs of Shelduck but have no idea if any of them will breed. Back in Havant there has been neither sight nor sound of Swifts so far this year - very late at this breeding site even if there are plenty elsewhere in the count.

TUE 07 MAY

After heavy rain Brian Fellows checked out the Portsmouth sites as usual on a Tuesday but found nothing dramatic. At Milton Common 5 Wheatear were on the shore, 4 Swifts and 2 House Martins in the air, and 19 Sedge plus 5 Reed Warblers were around the lakes where one Swan is still sitting. At Baffins Pond the Swan pair still have not made a nest and luckily there is only one Canada Goose nest among 18 birds present. Only 46 Mallard and 24 Tufted Duck were seen.

I looked in at the Oysterbeds on my way home from Hayling around 7pm with the sun still high in the sky and guess there were 10 pairs of Little Tern on and around the nest island - I saw at least one fly in with a small fish, presumably as an offering to its mate. A few Turnstone were still present but the Canada Goose pair, which had been on the supposedly inaccessible bund wall running south from the northern sluice of the lagoon when I was last here, had been replaced by a couple of young humans displaying the same interest in each other's company as the geese had done. Up to three Egrets were in the area and at one stage two of them flew together as if taking a great interest in each other, but maybe one was just chasing another of a reserved fishing beat. Back at Langstone Pond a male Reed Bunting was singing strongly and 6 Egrets were on the Wade Court trees well before dusk. While on Hayling I found two Common Sandpiper feeding around the edges of the HWT reserve wetland within the Sinah Golf Course (across the road from the Kench).

Martin Baggs has a number of nest boxes sited on the Watergate estate north of Walderton in the Ems Valley and when checking them today found 8 eggs laid by a Nuthatch - six to eight eggs is the normal clutch size. Another individual bird to get into the news today is a Grey Wagtail seen in Fareham by Trevor Carpenter {{ calling frantically on the roof of Perfect Pizza, West St, Fareham at 1045 today. }} I have in the past noticed these birds trying to drum up trade for Waitrose in Havant by calling from the store roof but I did not know that these previously respectable birds had sunk so low in the commercial world (perhaps it's the decline of cigarette advertising - they would have been ideal for advertising those menthol filter cigarettes said to be 'cool as a mountain stream')

As wader passage increases the SOS website today records 144 Bar-tailed Godwit passing Seaford where 180 Common Scoter were also seen. Another 78 Bar-tails were at Rye Harbour where a Black Necked Grebe can still be seen on Scotney gravel pit with a single Pintail. Best birds in Sussex to my mind were six Hobbies (two groups of three) hawking insects over the Pevensey Levels and 14 Yellow Wagtail recorded in a Rye Harbour day list. This list has been published using the 'american/english world-formal names' advocated by some extra-terrestrial birding authority - it includes Eurasian Hobby, Eurasian Coot, Northern Lapwing, Eurasian Turtledove, Barn Swallow, Black-billed Magpie and Winter Wren. I recognize the need to be specific when referring to birds in an international context but surely that is why we have scientific (latin) names for the species. I suspect that the people who created this list have fallen prey to some american software salesman and are now slaves to

their computer, unable to write in English. Computers are there to do what you want, not to force you to do what someone else wants you to do, and writing your own programs to make them do what you want is now amazingly easy (much easier than trying to learn how to operate the complex software packages that put you in a straght jacket.

Sussex news for yesterday (May 6) includes a count of 30 Pom Skuas passing Newhaven (with 4 Arctic Skuas, 150 Sandwich Tern and 300 Bar-tailed Godwit). I assume that 19 Pom Skuas seen off Seaford were part of the 30 seen from Newhaven, but they could have been additional.

Jeremy Cullen visited Alresford Pond yesterday and enjoyed watching a mutual display by the pair of Great Crested Grebe, though he feared one was going to choke to death when it caught and eventually swallowed a Rudd with a girth greater than the bird's throat. He went on to have a good view of a Red Kite passing over Cheesefoot Head where sightings of Kites were almost daily in March (seen on Mar 6,7,9,13,18) but I have heard of none there since Mar 18 so I assume this was just another of the widely wandering non-breeders. Jeremy has recently made two more birding trips - on May 5 he went to Marlpit Lane, hearing and seeing one Nightingale and one Cuckoo, and on May 4 he went to the Isle of Wight and saw what must have been a Raven over Culver Down.

Other Hampshire news for yesterday comes from Barrie Roberts who came on 7 Turtle Doves in the Selborne Common area and a probable Willow Tit at Noar Hill. Today, Ian Watts reports three Hobbies catching insects over the Winchester sewage farm, while John Shillitoe had two Roseate Terns and 1 Arctic Skua off Titchfield Haven, and Richard Carpenter saw one Gadwall still in the reserve. At Eastleigh Lakeside Simon Ingram had a single Yellow Wagtail touch down briefly and a single Egret fishing again in Monks Brook.

Last Sunday (May 5) David Parker found young Rooks were leaving their nests in the Foreside rookery around his home, and had time to visit the Hayling Oysterbeds where he came on a Garden Warbler as well as the many Whitethroat and Whimbrel. With the tide out he could not detect a single Little Tern, nor could he find the hoped for Turtle Dove in the trees near the Stoke village stables (no one has seen one there yet to my knowledge) nor the Little Owls in the Aston Villa shore fields near Daw Lane (again it is some time since they showed, probably a good sign that they have young).

Also on Sunday the SOS website reports 300 Sandwich and 240 Common Terns with single Black and Arctic Terns at Rye Harbour. At a guess these were resting there (maybe intending to stay) rather than on passage. Back on May 1 there were 220 Common Scoter offshore at Rye and 285 Whimbrel settling to roost on land. +++

Also from the SOS website I see that there was a Marsh Sandpiper for at least two days at Pulborough Brooks (May 2 and 3) but it was on land newly acquired by the RSPB with as yet no public access. ***Date subsequently revised to May 3 and 4***

MON 06 MAY

Sea watchers at Southwick (Brighton) on the Sussex coast today counted 309 Bar-tailed Godwit flying east, the first major flock of the spring passage. Also seen at Southwick were 6 Pom Skuas, 3 Arctics and 2 unidentified Skuas, plus 2 unidentified Divers, some Sanderling and Guillemot. Surprisingly, fewer passage birds were seen at Selsey Bill, just 4 Poms and 3 Arctic Skuas with 150 Bar-tails though they did have 2 Great Northern Divers (I think these may still be resident here rather than passing). At Church Norton one Turtle Dove and one Whinchat were seen, and in Pagham Harbour there were still 6 Knot, 40 Grey Plover, 150 Dunlin and a single Bar-tailed Godwit. Lapwing chicks could be seen at the Ferry Pool where a Whinchat and Avocet were also seen. All this comes from the SOS website.

Steve Keen was at the Lymington Marshes today but only found 14 Bar-tailed and no Black-tailed Godwit (although there were 45 of them, and the hunting Barn Owl, still at Titchfield Haven when Trevor Carpenter had a look today - Trevor also had his first Skua of the year, one Arctic, and just two Bar-tailed Godwit, passing Hill Head). Steve saw 15 Eider offshore at Pennington, and there were 8 Little Egrets in the Lymington area with 3 Greenshank and 2 (summering?) Brent. +++

27 Common and 2 Lesser Whitethroat were also on Steve's list at the Lymington marshes, and when he got home to Sway he found one of each there - although they were probably both just passing Steve says that this is the first Lesser Whitethroat he has ever recorded in Sway

parish. This ties in with comments from many others and my own observation to indicate that not only are the Common Whitethroats once more abundant in every hedgerow but Lesser Whitethroat are also very much on the up this year.

Both Steve Keen and Will Walmsley were playing cricket today. Steve uses the excuse of a Whimbrel flying over the pitch to explain why he lost concentration on the ball and was out for a duck but Will has far more reason to complain - he not only missed the Roseate Terns at Titchfield Haven through staying at home for the game but suffered a broken finger during it! With the resilience of youth he brushed off this painful accident and went birding locally to discover a pair of Little Ringed Plover around a tiny pool in a disused rubbish tip in his village in the Meon Valley - I sincerely hope they stay until the finger has recovered. (I assume that the damaged finger was not the one he uses to focus his binoculars - that would have made it far worse). +++

It is almost a month since Robert Watson told us that on Apr 11 some 90 Pied Wagtail were still using a communal roost in Basingstoke, and I would have assumed that these had all dispersed by now to at least attempt breeding, but among Will Walmsley's other birds seen in the Meon Valley area today he lists a group of 30 Pied Wagtail. These were not at a roost site and may have just been a chance collection drawn together by a good feeding opportunity (lots of insects round fresh dung?) but they could also be an indication that at least some of these common birds have lost the will to survive (or the opportunity to find nest sites).

John Shillitoe saw two Roseate Terns at Titchfield Haven yesterday (May 5) and was the envy of those who are more regular birders here. Presumably they were just passing through, as was the single which Trevor Carpenter saw on the Hill Head beach on Apr 24. Richard Carpenter, who might well have been at the Haven, chose to do his birding in Botley Woods yesterday where his reward was the sight of 2 Turtle Doves. 4 Nightingales were still singing there, a Buzzard was overhead, and Richard also noted 2 Garden Warblers, 2 Cuckoos and 3 Bullfinch.

Mike Wall and his team were out on their 'Big Day' bird race yesterday and ended with a (to them) disappointing score of 120 (out of the hoped for 150 - more realistically they expected 130+) which they put down to non-co-operation by the New Forest birds union. They did notice an abundance of both Whitethroat species, and of Stock Doves, but could not find a single Hobby, Tree Pipit or Stone Curlew and wasted time searching for the Little Stint at Normandy (Lymington) which David Taylor had got on his list (on the previous day) but which seems to have then left. Among birds which they did tick were Garganey, Raven, Corn Bunting, Sanderling, Red-throated Diver, Common Scoter, Shag and Brent Goose. Their route included Martin Down, Blashford Lakes, Lymington marshes, the New Forest, Farlington Marshes and Cheesefoot Head before returning to Basingstoke

On Saturday (May 4) David Taylor and Roger Howell made their attempt at the 'Big Day' bird race without feeling bound to keep within their home county of Dorset (the birds don't recognize such concepts so why should birders?). Their route included Martin Down, the Avon valley, and Lymington marshes in Hampshire as well as the Poole and Portland Bill areas in Dorset and they ended with a score of 132 which they feel they could have bettered if they had had the benefit of a third pair of eyes and ears (a third person dropped out of the team at the last moment). Good birds which they did get were Little Gull, Black Redstart, Woodlark, Grey Partridge, Tree Pipit, Little Stint, Eider, Wood Sandpiper and two Barn Owls. Missing from their list were both Flycatchers, Yellow Wagtail, Corn Bunting and Jay.

On Saturday May 4) John Shillitoe was out on his regular Saturday cycle route (east side of the Meon Valley between Wickham, Hambledon and Soberton) and found at least 18 Corn Bunting feeding in stubble just south of the Hoe Cross crossroads, while Richard Carpenter was in the Curbridge area by the River Hamble just south of Botley. Egrets continue to be reported from inland sites this spring and Richard found three of them here, along with two Greenshank and two Whimbrel. The regular two Grey Wagtail were seen, and five Reed Warblers had recently arrived. He also saw 5 Stock Dove here and adds a note saying that he has found more of them than usual during the current spring, including birds at Titchfield and Brownwich on the

coast where they do not normally breed. Richard wonders if other birders have also noticed an increased presence of these birds in their home patches, and I feel sure Mike Wall would say yes - in his comments on his 'Big Day' he specially notes that {{ Stock Doves were everywhere }}.

PLANTS:

SUN 12 MAY

Rosemary Webb went to Chappett's Copse, near West Meon, today and found the Sword-leaved Helleborine flourishing. With them were the first Bird's Nest Orchids of the year plus a few more Fly Orchids to add to those on Portsdown (see Thursday's notes - May 9)

Yesterday I listed 77 flowering plants at the IBM North Harbour site, today my score was 78 in the south west quadrant of Havant, and among them were my first Hairy Tare (on the abandoned Broadmarsh playing fields), Hybrid Water Speedwell (in the Hermitage Stream where it passes the water works), Common Mallow (close to the Langbrook Stream/A27 underpass) and Slender Thistle (just within the Budds Farm fence opposite the end of Penner Road). This latter plant came as a surprise as I had just passed the old IBM Clubhouse site (on the east side of Southmoor Lane) where hundreds of these unusual thistles have flowered in the past few years, noticing that the site has been levelled for development with no sign of the thistles there, and within a few yards I saw half a dozen flowering plants on the opposite side of the road. One plant of Hedgerow Cranesbill still survives on the Budds Farm side of Southmoor Lanes and Common Ragwort is just about to start flowering there. In the Broadmarsh area I found both Salsify and Rough Chervil that were new to me yesterday, and elsewhere I saw a single plant of Common Vetch with all its flowers pure white - very pretty. A few more Dog Roses were out (no sign yet of the Sweet Brier at Broadmarsh) and I came on my first False Oat Grass in flower (Brian Fellows found this earlier in the week)

SAT 11 MAY

Nine new flowering plants for the year were added to my list during today's visit to the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth. Most surprising was the discovery of a thriving colony of White Helleborine orchids on the east bank of the north-south section of the canal system that has its southern end outside the Building D entrance. I have never seen them here before and do not believe they have ever been recorded on the site, but here were 14 or 15 plants all with a healthy set of flowers (one plant had ten flowers). One the islands four plants of Common Spotted orchids were already flowering, and flowering plants of Alkanet may have been new to the site. The plant that I was perhaps most pleased to see was the Yellow Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca*) which has become extinct at all the other local sites that I once knew for it - not to be confused with the still very common Meadow Vetchling whose yellow flowers will soon be seen. Both Goat's Beard (already seen by others) and it's blue flowered cousin Salsify were flowering, and the first Heath Speedwell and Cat's Ear were out in strength. The last of the new plants will soon be common, but I found only one example today - this was Rough Chervil which attracted me by not looking like the rest of the Cow Parsley and proved its identity when I felt its rough hairy stems. The ninth new species had several examples and will soon be seen with delight by everyone - this was Common Poppy. My total list of flowering plant species was 77

The Havant Wildlife Group today visited the Early Purple Orchid site in the south east corner of the Southleigh Foresr (north of Emsworth) today. They also came on Heath Speedwell for the first time and recorded at least a couple of other firsts - the Dense-headed Woodrush (*Luzula multiflora congesta*) and Three-veined Sandwort (*Moehringia trinerva*) in flower. A third species is as yet unidentified but was a sedge (maybe Green Ribbed?) It seems that the orchids were not as numerous as in some years but that site has plenty more to offer including white flowered Dog Violets that have persisted there for several years.

FRI 10 MAY

Following his surprisingly early find of the first Southern Marsh Orchid flower by the river Alver at Browndown on Apr 28 Richard Carpenter has now seen one or more starting to flower at Titchfield Haven today. Hardly matching this for interest, but perhaps a timely warning to gardeners that an enemy is on the march, was my find of a lone flowerhead opening on Ground

Elder in Havant today. Over in Emsworth Brian Fellows found a better class of plant - the first Tree Mallow flowers were open on plants lining the east side of the Slipper Mill Pond

THU 09 MAY

Fly Orchids were in flower in the Camp Down area at the north east end of Portsdown today when John Goodspeed was there - he could see at least 30 plants of which half had flowers, and was encouraged to see at least one new plant at some distance from the established colony. There is no public access to this site but there are plenty of other Fly orchid sites to search and report on.

Yesterday, also on Portsdown, John Goodspeed found Field Pennycress, Hairy Rockcress (*Arabis hirsuta*), Kidney Vetch, Horseshoe Vetch, Fairy Flax and Pale Flax all starting to flower. Not all were seen by those who joined the 'Wednesday evening walk' which he led but I gather the walk party saw much of interest and enjoyed their outing. More downland interest can be expected next Wednesday when Sundra Winterbotham leads a walk on Park Hill above East Meon (see Imminent Activities in my What's New page for details of all these walks)

WED 08 MAY

Brooklime had started to flower by the River Ems when Brian Fellows took a walk round Brook Meadow at Emsworth today. Brian also found the first Hairy Sedge there while over at Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter found the first Woody Nightshade (aka Bittersweet) starting to flower - reminding me that I had failed to note this plant after seeing it in the grounds of Havant Health Centre a week ago (May 1). Richard had recorded Goat's Beard at Titchfield yesterday and Brian found it today.

This afternoon I cycled to Thorney Island, finding the first flowers opening on the bed of Red Hot Poker which someone must have had reason, years ago, to plant by the trackside just north of the Little Deeps. A more genuine wild flower was the Hedgerow Cranesbill which must have been out for some time on the western wall of Emsworth marina, separating it from the harbour.

TUE 07 MAY

As stated above in Wednesday's notes Goat's Beard was first found in flower today at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter, while Brian Fellows recorded the first False Oat Grass on Milton Common at Portsmouth. Over in Sussex Tony Wilson found hundreds of Early Purple orchids still flowering in Belle Tout Wood above Birling Gap at Beachy Head - with them was just one Early Spider orchid still having flowers, and this reminded me that I recently heard a rumour that a strange variant of Early Spider orchid had been found this year 'somewhere in the south of England'. The finder does not wish to publish his finding until he has had it confirmed by an expert - so orchid fans may have something to look forward to next year.

My first visit to Gunner Point on Hayling for three weeks found the yellow flowers of the Tree Lupins well out and those of Yellow Rattle covering the grass on which the Green Veined Orchids were going over. Further east the Shepherd's Cress plants had all gone to seed and the Thrift was forming a pink carpet on sandy soil with Sea Kale showing white all over the shingle. The first Smith's Pepperwort was out on Sinah Common and one pale blue flower topped a stem of Pale Flax on the Saltmarsh Lane open space. On the Hayling Coastal Path I found both White Bryony flowers (already reported last Saturday) and the first two open flowers of Black Bryony. Not checked properly, but I feel sure I also saw Lesser Trefoil on Sinah Common (already found by Gwynne Johnson last Saturday)

MON 06 MAY

Richard Carpenter found the Sword-leaved Helleborine already in flower when he visited Chappetts Copse near West Meon today, and Martin Rand, having to visit Emsworth, had a look for the Hairy Garlic in the Nore Barn wood where he found it, almost certainly further east than I have been searching. I am encouraged by his confirmation of the original report which said that the plants stretch for up to 20 metres along the path once you have found the spot, as the plants which I have found with unopen flowers (which are almost certainly the Three Cornered Leek by their stems) form a much smaller cluster. Martin also suspects that he found another Allium species (*A. neapolitanum*) in this same wood, and wonders why it has so much Allium in it. I will try to find out the history of the place - all I know is that it was designated as 'Nore Barn Open Space' as a county Greenspace project perhaps ten years ago and (like so many local conservation projects) had its official backing from the County Council and no doubt

it's local team of conservation volunteers at that time, but where are they now? Another fit of enthusiasm was shown here when the Wildfowlers dug out a small pond in the damp ground beside the stream which you cross on a stone bridge just west of the last houses, but you now have to look hard to find it among the regrowth. Similar searching among natural growth will show you the remains of the flint stone 'Nore Barn' itself west of the stream on the field edge north of the main footpath.

Yesterday Martin Rand joined a Wildlife Trust party led by Alan Hold in the Pigbush/Bishops Dyke area of the New Forest during which Alan showed them the leaves of Wild Gladiolus clearly visible in a place where the bracken had been 'swiped' last year and has not yet regrown to cover the plants (as it will do by the time they flower). Better than this in my estimation (as I have never seen the plant concerned) was what Martin describes as {{ a smashing colony of Moonwort (*Botrychium lunaria*) on the bracken heath near Bishop's Dyke (SU 354043). In the same area and elsewhere nearby, Soft-leaved Sedge (*Carex montana*) was just coming into flower. Other sedge "personal firsts" for the year in wetter areas round Bishop's Dyke were Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) and Yellow Sedge (*Carex viridula*, probably ssp. *viridula* but a bit early to tell) }} Also in the same area Martin saw Marsh Clubmoss.

Martin Rand was also out on Saturday (May 4) in the Baddesley Common/Emer Bog area east of Romsey. He says ... {{ The regime of cutting back and pony grazing on the common seems to be benefiting the Pale Dog Violet (*Viola lactea*) - in a rough and ready estimate I reckoned 150+ flowering plants, and possibly an equal number not flowering / not yet flowering. These are mostly in a strip about 120 metres wide and 30 metres deep, as you enter the HWT reserve area from the north on the more western of the two public footpaths (SU 388215 - 389215). As they grow here (unusually) in close proximity to a few Heath Dog Violet (*Viola canina*), there is a good chance to compare the species. There are also plenty of Common Dog Violet (*Viola riviniana*), so fun can be had trying to spot hybrids on one kind or another. Something else that seems to be benefiting from grazing here is Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*) - in various parts of the grazed common there are sheets of it. All in all, the area is starting to look much more like a bit of New Forest. }} +++

Martin goes on to say about the HWT Emer Bog nature reserve that ... {{ Plants in flower now on the bog include White Sedge (*Carex curta*) and (just coming in) Bottle Sedge (*Carex rostrata*). Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*) is out here, but not as advanced as on the Forest. }}

A late piece of news from John Goodspeed relates to a visit he made to the Purbrook Heath area, at the north foot of Portsdown just west of the built up area of Havant borough, last Thursday (May 2). He penetrated into Aldermoor Coppice and, in a wet flush on the north of the Pur Brook stream, found a mass of Opposite Leaved Golden Saxifrage still making a good show.

INSECTS:

SAT 11 MAY

High-spot of today's news to my mind is the appearance of Small Blue butterflies on downland. Six of them were seen on Martin Down today by Mark Litjens, along with 35 Grizzled and 24 Dingy Skippers, 18 Small Copper, 14 Green Hairstreak, 10 Holly Blue and a single fresh Red Admiral. For dragonfly enthusiasts Richard Carpenter found the first Four Spotted Chasers (at least 15 of them) in the Bishop's Dyke/Pig Bush area of the New Forest (possibly around Rowbarrow Pond though no specific location is given on the Butterfly Conservation website), and at Titchfield Haven Mark Litjens noted 4 Hairy Dragonflies. If you are in to beetles then the find of the first yellow Ladybird (by Christoph Harwood in the East Meon area) may be of interest, while back on Thursday (May 9) Piers Vigus was in a New Forest inclosure near Lyndhurst and found {{ the Click Beetle *Elatер balteatus* under loose bark of an old Birch stump }}

I have already reported the first find of Pearl-bordered Fritillary (in Pignal Inclosure near Brockenhurst on May 4), and on May 9 (in the New Forest near Lyndhurst) Piers Vigus found 15 fresh males of this species. On returning to the same place yesterday (May 10) he found more had emerged including at least four females.

Moth trap reports for today (and yesterday) give a total of 12 new moth species for the year.

Starting with the reports from May 10 I see that Rob Edmunds in Fleet had Ash Pug, Grey Birch and May Highflier. In Gosport Lee Marshall had a Turnip Moth and Philip Hack at Southampton trapped The Snout. Also on May 10 Ian Thirwell, at Milton in Portsmouth, had two lesser known moths - *Cedestis subfascella* and *Coleophora lasella* - which brought his garden moth list to 646 species recorded over the past six years. Tonight's haul of moths was all taken by Philip Hack at Nursling in the Southampton area - he had a Peacock Moth, Scalloped Hazel, Scalloped Hook-tip, Small White Wave and the White-pinion Spotted.

Hornets were busy nest building in the New Forest yesterday - in woodland near Lyndhurst two Queen Hornets were busy crawling about in the leaf litter and were so pre-occupied with whatever they were doing that Piers Vigus could kneel down and watch them closely for several minutes. Nearby worker Hornets were stripping wood from stakes supporting young trees.

Going back to dragonflies there is an excellent picture on Lawrence Holloway's website of a Beautiful Demoiselle taken at Michelham Priory in East Sussex by one Adrian Holloway on May 8 - no more detail but presumably these insects are now to be seen elsewhere...

THU 09 MAY

This evening Lee Marshall's moth trap at Rowner (Gosport) added four new moths to the year list - Oak Hook-tip, Satin Wave, Marbled Brown and The Mullein (which, unlike its eye-catching caterpillars, is heavily disguised as a chip of dead wood).

Yesterday evening (May 8) a Coxcomb Prominent was a first for the year in Rob Edmunds trap at Fleet in north Hampshire where he also had a pretty Green Carpet (the first of these had been seen at Winchester by Brian Fletcher back on Apr 24) and 15 Cockchafers (their season is rapidly building up numbers of these less attractive insects). Lee Marshall's newcomers on May 8 were the first Brown House-moth (found indoors!) and a Wormwood Pug.

Although this is the time of year to expect the fairly common Setaceous Hebrew Character which I reported as one of Lee Marshall's finds last Tuesday evening (May 7) Lee now tells me that he had for some reason ticked the wrong name when listing his finds, so that species has yet to be discovered this year. Another correction to previous information is that when (in my notes for May 6) I listed Greater Swallow Prominent among Philip Hack's new moths found on May 4 I could not subsequently find this English name and I believe Philip was using the word Greater to distinguish the moth named as Swallow Prominent from the Lesser Swallow Prominent (I have asked Philip to confirm this but have not yet had a reply).

At Farlington Marshes the first Dark Bush Cricket nymphs are now being found according to Bob Chapman's latest status report for the reserve on the HWT website.

WED 08 MAY

Broad-bodied Chasers are usually the first large dragonflies to appear in the year but this time both Black-tailed Skimmer and Hairy Dragonfly have been recorded before the Chaser, of which the first single females were found in West Sussex by Tony Wilson today at both Burton Mill Pond and Ambersham. At Burton Pond Tony also found the first Variable Damselflies (around 50 of them) with a similar number of Large Red.

In Wendleholme wood by the River Hamble just up from Warsash Richard Carpenter noted a couple more Small Copper butterflies and two Cinnabar moths (which have been out since Apr 25, found then at Chichester by Sarah Patton).

TUE 07 MAY

Rob Edmunds' moth trap at Fleet this evening collected the first Bordered White moth along with three Cockchafers (not new) and a Muslin Moth (which Sarah Patton recorded at Chichester on Apr 21). At Rowner, Gosport, Lee Marshall's trap took the first Setaceous Hebrew Character (**this report was in error**), and Lee tells me that the Shaded Broad-bar and Brown Silver-line moths which I reported on May 3 as having been found in his trap were in fact observed in the Hundred Acres area of West Walk woods near Wickham in the Meon Valley (not day flying but seen at dusk while Lee was listening for Woodcock and Nightjar).

A hoverfly which is new to me was seen by Richard Carpenter today near the Meon Canal Path alongside Titchfield Haven. Its name is *Leucozona lucorum* and I could not find it in Michael Chinery's more popular insect book but there is a picture of it (Plate 32) in Chinery's earlier field

guide which has much more text and fewer pictures. I'm not sure if it has look-alikes but it's abdomen is a different and distinctive 'square ended' shape to that of the other common hoverflies.

Also today Tony Wilson easily broke the double figure barrier for butterfly species seen in one day with a list of 12 species that included Wall Brown at Shooter's Bottom in the Beachy Head area.

Yesterday evening (May 6) Lee Marshall had three new moths for the year in his Rowner trap - Peppered Moth, Grey Pine Carpet and Eudonia angustea, while over at Chichester Sarah Patton had the first of a species, Silver Y, that we should all see throughout the summer. On May 5 Lee had his first White-spotted Pug, but Sarah had already recorded that species on Apr 25. Very belated news from Sarah is that on Apr 14 she trapped a Blossom Underwing (not something expected by the Chichester bypass where she lives) and a Striped Lychnis (equally puzzling as that date was two months early for this moth). Also on Apr 14 she recorded The Spectacle, easily taking away Philip Hack's claim to have found the first of this species on May 3).

Perhaps more exciting to people like myself who are not expert in moth matters is the news that at least one Clouded Yellow butterfly was seen on the Isle of Wight on May 1 by Matthew Oates at Ventnor. A second report which did not give a location may or may not have been of the same insect. This news came via Derek Mills who published it on the Butterfly Conservation website

MON 06 MAY

New moths for the year found last night were White Ermine, in Lee Marshall's trap at Gosport, and Pale Tussock, found by Sarah Patton at Chichester. Sarah also had her first Eyed Hawk, but Graham Roberts had already claimed the first of these at Cosham on May 3. During the day yesterday Richard Carpenter was in Botley Woods, where he saw a Green Tiger Beetle and seven butterfly species including a colony of ten Grizzled Skippper.

On Saturday (May 4) Richard Carpenter had a pristine Hairy Dragonfly resting on honeysuckle in his Hill Head garden for 30 minutes, giving a magnificent photo opportunity - this may or may not have been the same insect that made its first appearance at the nearby Titchfield Haven on May 3.

In the evening of May 4 Philip Hack had three new moths in his garden at Nursling (Southampton) - they were Buff-tip, Great Prominent and Swallow Prominent. Over at Chichester Sarah Patton had the first Pale Prominent plus The Champion moth - she also had a Poplar Hawkmoth but the first of these had been found by Lawrence Holloway at Bognor on Apr 29. Rob Edmunds, in Fleet, had his first Flame Shoulder but had been pre-empted by Sarah Patton with one on Apr 25.

Going back to Thursday evening (May 2) Sarah Patton had the first Buff Ermine with a Lime Hawk which Lee Marshall had recorded on Apr 29.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 12 MAY

The Magpie which spends most of its time on my lawn found and devoured another adult Slow-worm this morning.

THU 09 MAY

Last week I read in the local NEWS that the Gosport Inshore Rescue lifeboat had been launched in response to reports that a deer had been seen entering the water from the Browndown area, apparently attempting to swim to the Isle of Wight. The lifeboat did not find the deer, which is thought to have changed its mind and turned back to shore on its own. This is not the first time I have heard of deer demonstrating their ability to swim so I did not mention this unconfirmed story at the time but today we have a first hand account from Trevor Carpenter of another such adventure at the mouth of the River Hamble. +++

Trevor says {{ I was at Warsash this morning when I saw a Roe buck. It was on the long shingle stretch which shows off Hook spit at low tide and starts from Hamble Point some way into

Southampton water. The deer was most of the way along and was looking worried as the tide had cut off the end. It then went into the water and swam towards Hook. Some of the time it showed the shallowness of the water as it was able to jump. On reaching the shore it jumped across the spit and into the reserve near the new scrape. I would think that the distance is about a half mile. If it came from Hamble I assume that it will have to get back there at some time. }}

WED 08 MAY

A single fat Muntjac was seen today by Mike Wall in Carpenter's Down wood abutting the northern edge of Basingstoke.

TUE 07 MAY

Grey Seals are much less common in the English Channel than Common Seals, so I normally assume that sightings of 'a seal' in this area refer to Common Seal (the one with the round faced, snub nosed, friendly face). Today however Tony Wilson did see a 'long faced' Grey Seal and confirms its identity when he says that, off Splash Point at Seaford this morning, he ... {{ watched a Grey Seal offshore for about an hour. Strangely, it would stick its head out of the water, tilt it back and stay in that position for up to 10 minutes. The flat crown to nose profile was obvious when it was in a more normal position. }} +++

To add to the excitement of a day out in East Sussex Tony also saw a pair of Hares chasing and then mating in the Horse Eye Level area near Pevensey. (I think everyone now accepts that when Hares are seen 'boxing' this is not a fight between males but a female telling a male to stop chasing her around).

WEEK 18 APR 29 - MAY 5

BIRDS:

SUN 05 MAY

A number of Hampshire birders have been out on the road today trying for the magic score of 150 species seen in Hampshire within a 24 hour period in the seasonal bird race. Nothing from them as yet and the only news that has come in has as its highlights a pair of Willow Tits displaying at Old Winchester Hill, seen by Mark Litjens, two Turtle Doves back at Stockbridge Down, seen by Ron Toft (who also had two Lesser Blackback gulls there), and a slightly less classy sighting of a single Barnacle Goose which flew over Eastleigh Lakeside but, to Simon Ingram's disappointment, did not land (no room for it among the fishermen!). A better bird at Lakeside was a Little Egret which sensibly chose to fish the Monk's Brook rather than the lakes that were so popular with the human anglers. Yesterday Richard Ford saw his first ever Egret at Woolmer Pond in east Hampshire. +++

Mark Litjens also visited Titchfield Haven today and notes the two Avocet still present as well as mentioning one Bar-tailed Godwit, but he does not mention any Black-tailed. Have they all left? (I doubt it).

SAT 04 MAY

A Wood Sandpiper was seen at Keyhaven today by Mark Litjens and so far as I know this is the first to be seen in Hampshire this year (they are uncommon on spring passage but one or two usually drop in during May). Just one has been recorded in Sussex this year, a single at Burton Mill Pond area near Pulborough on Apr 14. Somewhere in the New Forest Mike Rafter was lucky enough to see a first summer male Montagu's Harrier - being a young bird it was probably just wandering but Mike says that first year birds have been known to breed and so gives no location for it. Another very unexpected bird was seen by Trevor Carpenter when he was at Hook/Warsash today - this was a lone Coot on Southampton Water where it meets the Solent, and a good half mile from the shore - I doubt it was there by choice (perhaps sickly and drifting with the tide?), and this observation reminded me of Arthur Ransome's 'Swallows and Amazons' story entitled 'We didn't mean to go to sea' (though they got swept out in a fog, which I doubt was the Coot's excuse). Also in the Hook area Trevor watched 2 Avocet fly east with 50 Common and 11 Sandwich Tern fishing off shore. On the Gosport shore of the Solent at least 17 Sanderling were seen by Ian Calderwood with one Common Scoter on the water and one Yellow Wagtail flying in.

The Havant Wildlife Group walked the Nutbourne/Prinsted circuit this morning and I was surprised to hear that they came on a small flock of perhaps half a dozen Reed Buntings. Putting this with a message from Ian Thirlwell expressing his surprise at seeing a Reed Bunting at the Milton Lakes in Portsmouth (which he visits almost daily), and with other indications of arriving migrants, I wonder if there has been a small influx of these birds? (which I do not think of as migrants). Also at the Milton Lakes today was a Whinchat (which did not stay), showing that some migrants had chosen to land here, slightly increasing the likelihood that the Bunting was a migrant arrival.

Other interesting birds reported today were a Serin (heard by Will Walmsley while playing cricket for his school on the Wide Lane playing fields near Southampton airport), and four more Wood Warblers (two seen by Mark Litjens in Pignal Inclosure, a little north east of Brockenhurst, and two others seen elsewhere in the Forest by Mike Rafter, along with at least one inland Greenland Wheatear among a total of ten birds of unspecified race). Near Gosport some 50 Swifts were circling over Lee Marshall's home in the evening, and earlier in the day he had heard 4 Nightingales, a Marsh Tit and a Treecreeper all singing in the Botley Woods. Steve Mansfield was in the Alresford area and found a Common Sandpiper on the newly created pond which replaces old cressbeds at Bishops Sutton. On Alresford Pond itself he saw 4 Ruddy Duck (2 male, 2 female), with 10 Shelduck and two Great Crested Grebe. Encouragingly more than 50 House Martins were in the air, outnumbering 30+ Swifts and smaller numbers of Swallows and Sand Martins +++

While in the Alresford area Steve also came on a Turtle Dove as well as family parties of Mistle Thrush, Blackbird, and Long-tailed Tits.

An evening walk to Budds Farm and back by Wade Court found nothing special on the Budds Farm pools where one Swan is still sitting and at least three pairs of Shelduck seem settled on territory (I think I saw a seventh bird so there may be four pairs). A few Mallard, Coot and Moorhen, with at least 20 Tufted Duck made up the other wildfowl (no Dabchick seen or heard). Three or four Swallows were feeding over the pool and Whitethroat and Blackcap were singing, as were three, maybe four, Song Thrush in a small section of Southmoor Lane. One Skylark and one Meadow Pipit were singing over the South Moors and two each of Sandwich and Little Tern were over the water with Black Headed and Herring Gulls - several Whimbrel took off from the shore where one Little Egret continued fishing.. From Budds Mound it looked as if the majority of gulls are now on South Binness island and may even be nest building. From Langstone village shore I saw the lone summering Brent among the moored boats, and around Langstone Pond at least four Reed and one Cetti's Warbler were singing, while in the Wade Court trees I counted 15 Egrets settling down at dusk (there may well have been more hidden among the trees).

Yesterday afternoon Graham Roberts and Alan Perry were near the A285 at Barlavington, south of Petworth, where they saw a Black Stork high in the sky gliding west (following the valley of the river Rother as far as Petersfield in Hampshire??)

Also yesterday a wave of migrants reached the Sussex coast, among them at least one Spotted Flycatcher at Selsey and 3 more at Church Norton (adding credence to my sighting at Warblington - see yesterday's notes). One Pied Flycatcher also came in at Church Norton, along with 4 Whinchat and more than 5 Wood Warblers, and at Selsey there were 15 Willow Warblers, a Garden Warbler, two Redstarts and two more Whinchats. In the Sheepcote valley along the eastern fringe of Brighton 44 Wheatear were seen in a tight bunch (no comment on their size, but now is the time for Greenland Wheatear), and 4 more Whinchat were nearby. An Osprey was over Pagham Harbour and two Great Northern Divers off Selsey Bill. On May 2 two Bonxies flew past the Bill and four Hobbies flew in.

FRI 03 MAY

Mike Rafter saw an Osprey today close to the M27 at Ower, just west of Southampton. He does not say which way it was going but it could well have been following the river Test northward, or prospecting for a meal in the nearby Testwood Lakes. Later in the day, just before sunset, another Osprey flew east over Titchfield Haven, seen by John Norton. As well as this news HOSLIST today carries Russell Wynn's summary of his personal sightings during the past month, most of which have already been reported, but he starts with a mysterious reference to

two birds which he did not see and which I have not previously heard of. These were sightings of two Hoopoes and a Sooty Shearwater in the Lymington area 'sometime in April' (Russell gives no dates). +++

Another entry which attracted my attention in Russell's long list of personal sightings was for Yellow Wagtail - just 5 birds seen by him during the month reflects the paucity of these birds nowadays. Perhaps more will arrive now we are in May but today Lee Marshall could only find three in a day's birding - one flew in off the sea at Browndown in the morning and later there was one at Boarhunt (I suspect this was South Boarhunt near the Wallington River rather than North Boarhunt, though the damp fields there and in the adjacent area south of Newtown could well attract them). The third was heard only over the fields along Long Road at Soberton, probably flying up the Meon Valley and not staying there (unlike a single singing Corn Bunting, heard near the half way cottage). I seriously wonder if any Yellow Wagtail will breed in Hampshire this year - I know there will be some people who respond to that with the comment that there are still plenty of Yellow Wagtail where they are and they consequently still regard this species as 'common', but even if there are birds in their vicinity they may not breed (I think that happened at Farlington Marshes last summer, and the story may well be repeated elsewhere this year).

Both Lee Marshall and Richard Carpenter have sent me news from Titchfield Haven today, where a Bar-headed Goose was a more obvious if less exciting newcomer than four Hobbies, and the two Avocet and regular Barn Owl were still present. Lee saw more than 30 Black-tailed Godwit on the scrape, while Richard's observation of 15 Godwits flying north across the Solent to the Haven during the past week helps to confirm my feeling that the numbers of these birds seen here does not reflect a dwindling pool of birds that have been here for most of the winter, but a series of snapshots in a northward flow of birds from many wintering places to the south. Another interesting comment from Richard is that the Common Bird Census work at the Haven seems to show that fewer pairs of Bearded Tit are breeding there this year, though this does not yet mean a downward trend in numbers of this very volatile species.

Another item of interest from Lee Marshall is his report that neither Woodcock nor Nightjar were in evidence when he was in the West Walk area this evening. Although we associate both these birds with warm evenings in May (and later in the summer) failure to detect them at this early date does not necessarily mean that they are not present. I recall being surprised years ago when I heard Richard Williamson say that Woodcock normally begin roding in January, and this year we have heard from Richard Ford of Woodcock patrolling the air above Woolmer Pond (albeit silently) on March 1, while Paul Beckett heard half a dozen or more while he was in the New Forest on Mar 25/26. Nightjar are less easy to detect, and the earliest arrival officially recorded is 26 April in 1995, but I think they can be present in suitable habitat for several weeks before they start to churr (unlike the majority of migrants which are highly vocal immediately they arrive). Lee was listening for them in the Hundred Acres area, and when I was there recently I formed the impression that they were unlikely to be heard in the Lodge Hill area but might adopt sites close to the mountain bike track east of the road opposite the Hundred Acres carpark. Luckily these birds seem good at moving sites as one becomes overgrown with scrub and another area is cleared.

A short item from Giles Darvill also caught my eye. Giles was in the Beaulieu area of the New Forest and found a {{ pair of marsh tits feeding young in hole in old tree in old wet woodland }}. I have no reason to doubt the identity of these birds but there have been reports of Willow Tit from the Beaulieu Road station area this year, and I have always understood that (in contradiction to their name) Marsh Tits preferred drier areas and Willow Tits the wet places (probably because, as they excavate their nest holes, they are more likely to find softer deadwood in wetter places).

The high spot of a visit to Warblington Farm for the Common Bird Census this morning was a brief glimpse of a Spotted Flycatcher which flew onto a dead Elm giving me a clear view of its back, showing the light stripes on its closed wings, before it turned its head to show the distinctive profile of its bill and then leapt into the air in typical fashion. I did not see it catch anything, nor did it return to its perch. We do not see a Flycatcher on the farm every year, and when we do they are always transient - this may well be my only sight of one this year as they have

abandoned all the local gardens that had them in residence twenty or thirty years ago, but there is a good chance of seeing one or two on return passage. +++

Reed Warblers had returned to Warblington as expected - I found three of them spread out along the main stream between the watercress bed and the reed bed at the shore, and that reedbed attracted a Cuckoo, a Lesser and Common Whitethroat but I did not detect the Reed Bunting (I have only seen a male on previous visits - perhaps he has abandoned attempts to attract a mate). Several Swallows flew over the fields and Tony Gutteridge heard from the owner of the Pook Lane stables that six pairs had built nests in the stables this year, one more than in previous years, but the main farm barns seem to have one pair at most (and that not seen today). Two Swifts were seen over the farm by Tony, and I eventually saw my first when he pointed it out to me. Other birds worth a mention included a single Jay which landed in an ash tree, bashed something (I think a common Banded Snail) against a branch before swallowing it whole, and then flew off towards the shore. In the cress bed a smart adult Heron was unusual here, and over the eastern fields five Med Gulls circled, calling to identify themselves. All three fields which the Skylarks prefer have just been sown with Sweetcorn and are bare, flat earth, so the larks could be heard ranging over other fields. At a guess they will not find other suitable nest sites and will return to the bare fields where the Magpies will probably take their eggs as soon as they are laid (as they did last year).

An unexpected phone call today gave me some very unexpected news. The caller was a lady living in Southbourne, just east of Emsworth, and she told me that last Sunday evening (around 7pm on Apr 28) her husband called out 'There's an eagle on our neighbour's house'. Being more familiar with the true identities of birds than he is she took a close look and there, on the TV aerial of the other house, was a large raptor clinging on to the aerial in a very strong wind with the evening sun shining on it. It was large enough to qualify as an eagle, had a pale head and hooked beak, and its breast looked a rosy red in the sunlight but the rest of the unlit plumage was more brown, and it had a longish tail. Trying to get a better look through her binoculars she attracted the bird's attention and it took off, showing the characteristic split tail. I have no doubt it was a Red Kite but what it was doing there at that time of night I do not know (I did ask the lady if she had a dead sheep in her garden but the answer was no).

THU 02 MAY

Among today's news I see that Dave Pearson had a Turtle Dove at Winnall Moors in Winchester and that John Norton saw a flock of around 50 Swifts in the lower Meon Valley near Titchfield Haven, the biggest number seen together so far this year. Just over the Sussex border, near the Marlpit Lane Nightingale site to the east of Emsworth, Mike Collins was stopped on his homeward journey by the sight of a large raptor. Mike managed to pull up safely and to get a good view of the bird as it flew over the road close to him, trailing long jesses, but he was unable to identify it (other than that it was not 'one of ours'). Mike comments that someone must be looking for the bird, and I would suggest that if you do see an obvious escaped raptor in our area it might be worth calling the Sussex Falconry Centre (01243-512472) as they may well be aware of falconers who are on the look-out for missing birds and can put you in touch with them or pass on a message. +++

The reference to Marlpit Lane reminds me that the party who visited Kingley Vale with Cath Cooper last night called in at Marlpit Lane on their way home but could only hear one distant Nightingale there.

Other news comes from Lee Marshall who was at Bridgemary in the north of Gosport and saw a Raven fly over heading north west, and from Simon Ingram who had his first Whinchat at the Eastleigh Lakeside country park. Back in Gosport Lee saw a Hobby over the Wildgrounds and remarks on a large scale arrival of both Swifts and Swallows (this ties in with John Norton's sighting of 50 Swifts near Titchfield Haven). From much further afield Cris Little, living in Yorkshire, tells me that the first Swifts have just arrived up there, a few days after the first House Martins.

Peter Raby was on the seafront at Titchfield Haven as usual early this morning and complains that the seawatching at the moment is the dullest for many years. Among the few birds he did see were 7 Sanderling, 2 Dunlin and 2 Whimbrel, but in the reserve the Barn Owl and the two Avocets were still showing with 5 Common Sandpiper and only 5 Black-tailed Godwit as far as

he could see. The flock of Eider is still on the sea - Peter only saw 5 of them but John Norton saw 13. +++

Both Bullfinch and Little Owl generally become difficult to find around this time of year while they are nesting so it is interesting to see that Richard Carpenter found both species when he was at Brownwich today (PS on May 3 Lee Marshall saw the regular Browndown Little Owl sunning itself openly on the fort not far from Stokes Bay).

This evening I paid a quick visit to the Hayling Oysterbeds at around 7pm but only saw two pairs of Little Tern flying high and wide ranging, showing no interest in the nest island, on which were two (copulating) Oystercatcher and a few Black-headed Gulls. I could not wait another hour until dusk so I do not know if a good crowd of terns came to roost. On the old bund along the west of the lagoon a pair of Canada Geese seemed to be at home and a couple of Turnstone flew over the main lagoon. Other than these and the gulls I saw three Egrets, seven Shelduck and at least half a dozen Whimbrel. At Langstone Pond on my way out I heard three Reed Warblers singing and also heard a Cuckoo in the vicinity

News relating to yesterday's sightings which I saw on the SOS website today includes a Montagu's Harrier seen over the A23 (Brighton to London road) at Hickstead (a little west of Burgess Hill), and what must be a late Merlin over Steep Down, just north of Lancing on the west side of the river Adur. At the mouth of that river a Manx Shearwater was in Shoreham Harbour (sounds unusual to me), and over in East Sussex three Black Swans have appeared at Pett pools. (just east of Hastings).

WED 01 MAY

John Chapman heard the first Reed Warbler back at Langstone Pond this evening, and a burst of other messages shows that there has been an arrival of these birds in the past couple of days. At Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter found Reed Warblers in what he calls normal numbers for early May, and Kevin Stouse heard two at the IBM Lake. Yesterday (Apr 30) Bob Chapman put out on the HWT website a bulletin of news from Farlington Marshes in which he estimates a total of 20 Reed Warblers there. On the previous day (Apr 29) one of them arrived unexpectedly in a built up area of the Sussex coast (St Ann's Well Gardens in Hove), and at least two more were in the more expected surroundings of the Itchen Valley country park. Sedge Warblers, which arrived first, have already produced messages such as {{ All of a sudden sedge warblers are everywhere}} from the HWT warden at Winnall Moors on Apr 26, and as early as Apr 17 Richard Carpenter reported a sudden increase in numbers at Titchfield Haven {{ from just 1 or 2 to being present and singing all over the reserve. }} while on Apr 23 Ian Thirlwell heard 15 at the Milton Common Lakes in Portsmouth and the warden at Rye Harbour reported a count of 219 on his reserve on Apr 24. In summary it seems that both species are now back with us in normal numbers, although I still think the Sedge Warblers are doing a little better than usual - for instance, Sedge Warblers are fairly unusual at the IBM Lake in Portsmouth and I cannot recall ever hearing more than one there, but today Kevin Stouse heard three (with only two Reed).

For some time Giles Darvill has been looking for the return of Sand Martins to a nest colony in coastal cliffs at Barton on Sea in the extreme south west of Hampshire. Today he found them busily working away to create new tunnels in the cliffs some 400 yards from the old colony and Steve Keen says that he watched 30 to 40 birds digging away here back on April 23.

A single Magpie is regularly in our garden (presumably while a mate is sitting on a nearby nest) but today it gave a couple of unusual displays of its killing power and wide-ranging taste for food. The first came to our attention when the Magpie leapt from a patch of long grass onto the mown lawn struggling to hold a full size Slow-worm in its bill, then ate the whole body to leave no trace on the lawn. Later I saw the bird running fast around the flower beds and saw it was successfully pursuing a fast-moving adult Frog, recapturing it each time the Frog sought refuge in thick vegetation, but unable to prevent the Frog from leaping off down the garden path once or twice. Although I did not see the end of the Frog I'm pretty sure who won.

Both Kevin Stouse and Tony Parkinson have sent me news from the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth today. Both have seen the first family of Canada Geese with their seven goslings, arousing my fears that the 18 pairs of adults which I counted on the site on Apr 13 will all raise

young (an average of 5 young per pair could add 90 goslings to the Canada Goose army before the summer is out). Much better news is that Swifts, Swallows and House Martins have all been seen over the buildings (which create an updraught carrying insects from the lake surface to an aerial 'fast food bar' above the buildings). Tony tells me that he saw around 15 Swifts there both this evening and yesterday evening. Kevin adds another interesting observation of the Moorhen family on the main reception lake which hatched five young on Apr 15 but after the first day or so the family seemed to be down to just four chicks. Now, more than two weeks later, Kevin has seen all five chicks back together - it seems that four remained with one parent while the other parent took the fifth chick elsewhere out of sight, but has now brought it back.

Both Richard Carpenter and Mark House visited Titchfield Haven today. Richard found the two Avocet still present, heard a Cuckoo, and saw a pale Buzzard fly west overhead and a single Eider on the sea. Mark was luckier, seeing a summer plumage Great Northern Diver on the sea from 10:30 to midday before it flew east, along with more than 15 Eider (mostly males) off the Meon shore in the early afternoon. He also saw the Avocets but in place of the Buzzard he watched two Hobbies performing well over the woods and fields east of the Haven (presumably in the Stubbington area) for more than two hours after lunch.

Along at Hook (Warsash) Trevor Carpenter had a crowd of 60 Common (and 3 Little) Terns, 10 Swifts, 2 Swallows and a Cuckoo to make him feel that summer had really come at last. Nothing to do with the seasons is ever absolute in this country, so 3 Wheatears were there to give a flavour of early spring and 39 Black-tailed Godwit to act as a reminder of winter.

TUE 30 APR

John Eyre recently told us the strong evidence (ignored by the Rarities committee) for the famous Dummer Scops Owl being a local escape, and I feel there may be a similar story behind an item on the SOS website today telling us of {{ an unconfirmed report of a Scop's Owl calling at 3.00am at Park Crescent, Brighton. This is a private park for residents only at the north side of the Level near the Open Market. }} Of course this may be the first manifestation of a new style of burglar alarm for expensive houses which have to be one up on their neighbours....

Giles Darvill was at Keyhaven this evening and noted the presence of 55 Shelduck there, causing me to check Birds of Hampshire to see how unusual this might be. The book says that each year there is a movement of these birds east through the Solent in late April and early May, and gives the peak count as being 88 birds on Hurst beach on 25 April 1973 so I reckon this may have been this year's peak (no doubt aided by the strong wind encouraging the birds to rest while they could - though I realise the wind should have been behind them, so they may have travelled further than usual and felt the need to feed up before flying further).

Bob Chapman today put a brief status report for Farlington Marshes on the HWT website today, telling us that wader passage had been small and slow to date, the most interesting observation being of 6 Greenshank and 1 Ruff there on Apr 26. Most of what Bob says has already appeared in these notes but I see that Bob estimates the Sedge Warbler population to now number around 30 birds.

Ed Griffiths tells me that he can confirm my recent thoughts that Whimbrel are already moving north east overland from the Hampshire coast with his own observation of a party of ten over his local reserve (College Lake) in Buckinghamshire last Sunday (Apr 28). It seems likely that these were the same birds that had been seen about 45 minutes earlier over the Staines reservoirs, and they may well have come from the Hampshire coast. Ed and I would both be interested in any further observations of Whimbrel in flight overland in Hampshire, if only to get a better idea of the route taken by these birds (do they fly on a pre-set compass bearing in a straight line, or do they follow water features?) Inland birders are most likely to detect these birds by their unique calls, which echo through the sky as they set off from the coast and which probably continue throughout their journey, so I strongly recommend those who are not familiar with this 'unmistakeable' call to get it in their 'mind's ear' as soon as possible. +++

Also on Sunday Mike Rafter was in the Hurst area and noted around 200 Swallows heading north - the first really substantial arrival of these birds. House Martins may have also been arriving - though no one reported them from the coast I see that yesterday (Apr 29) Ben Darvill wrote of 'many' House Martins over the Itchen Valley country park.

Finally for today a couple of snippets from Sussex. The first is the arrival of just one more Wood

Warbler in East Sussex (at Belle Tout wood above Birling Gap on Beachy Head), the second is a less certain report of what were thought to have been two Common Cranes flying low over an area north of Bexhill.

MON 29 APR

Six more Swifts arrived at the Eastleigh Lakeside country park this morning to give Richard Mould-Ryan a tick, while others were over the Itchen Valley country park, and in both places Richard tells us there were good numbers of House Martins. At Titchfield Haven around 100 Sand Martins were seen by Richard Carpenter from the canal path and Swallows, Swifts and House Martins were all present there, as was the regular Barn Owl.

A question was raised recently as to whether Whimbrel were likely to be seen as far inland as Woolmer Pond and the answer seems to be yes. Birds of Hampshire tells that they are regularly seen inland within a few miles of the coast, and when they leave our south east Hampshire harbours on their way north they almost always head north east overland rather than following the coast. Today John Shillitoe adds new evidence that they are still using damp fields north of Portsdown to feed while on passage - he saw 9 today in the Hipley area (north of Southwick village at the northern foot of Portsdown), and his wife saw a flock of 30 flying over fields in the Newtown area (west of Denmead) which is only a little north of Hipley. Another person who saw inland Whimbrel recently was Dave Unsworth who had 11 over the Itchen Valley country park on Saturday (Apr 27) - he also had a smart male Whinchat there on that day. I suspect that a search of fields in the Lyeheath/Sheepwash Farm area closer to Denmead might well turn up Whimbrel at this time of year, and the Campdown fields adjacent to the A3M immediately at the northern foot of Portsdown is another place that they may be found. +++

Another of John Shillitoe's interests is in Corn Buntings, and I see that John Clark has recently (Apr 27) visited the Hoe Cross site near Hambledon and found four singing Corn Buntings there but, like John Shillitoe on the majority of his visits, could not find the large feeding flock that almost certainly is still somewhere in the area.

Jason Crook has just heard that the colour ringed Spoonbill which was at Farlington Marshes from Apr 4 - 11 (maybe 12?) had reached Minsmere by Apr 13 and is now in Holland. No news so far of the three adult Spoonbills that flew west from Selsey Bill on Apr 25, hugging the coast and heading for Hampshire. From Hook/Warsash Trevor Carpenter tells us that a third Avocet dropped in there this morning, disturbing an amorous relationship between the pair already there (does the fact that they were mating make it likely that they will try to nest there?). There are still 28 Black-tailed Godwit at Hook, with 3 Gadwall, and overhead Trevor saw 7 Swallows and 5 House Martins (maybe reflecting the increased proportion of House Martins among the arriving hirundines?).

On Apr 24 I passed on David Harper's comments on Corn Bunting behaviour, telling us that it is quite usual for Corn Buntings to be singing on breeding territory and then feeding as part of a large flock at some different site later in the same day, and his studies show that the birds may operate in this split-mode from mid-winter through to mid-May when they finally take their breeding duties more seriously. Maybe this is also true of Yellowhammers as Lawrence Holloway today reported 10 of them still feeding on his lawn (where he has been scattering seed for them through the winter). +++

From the other side of Hampshire David Taylor lists some of his recent sightings at Hengistbury Head. Today he watched 5 Bonxies heading for Hampshire, along with 2 Arctic Skuas, but it now looks unlikely that we will break the record, set on 24 Apr 2001, of 11 Bonxies seen in one day over Hampshire waters. Passage of these Great Skuas normally peters out as we get into May. Other recent sightings from Hengistbury have included a couple of Pom Skuas yesterday and 17 Manx Shearwaters on Apr 26 with a couple of Arctic Skuas on the intervening days.

Other miscellaneous reports from past weekend include one of a lone Reed Warbler seen by Richard Carpenter at Browdown on Apr 28 which does little to abate my concern over the small numbers of Reed Warblers being reported this spring. Although John Eyre's checklist of Hampshire Birds indicates that they are not normally with us in strength until the beginning of May it shows much the same pattern for Sedge Warblers which have been here in large numbers for about two weeks. Maybe the Reed Warblers are sticking to the time table more

rigorously than Sedge Warblers but I still worry that they may have suffered some major disaster, although I draw some comfort from the fact that newly arrived Reed Warblers do not immediately settle in at their breeding locations - they can be found miles away from water in scrub and hedgerows until reed growth in the breeding places is sufficiently advanced to support nest building. +++

In contrast to the single Reed Warbler Richard found 15 Common and 2 Lesser Whitethroats at Browndown, along with a Stonechat and a Cuckoo. Still on the subject of relative numbers between migrant species I see that Brian Fellow's weekly report from the Brook Meadow site at Emsworth also shows a full house of six singing Whitethroat (also 4 Blackcaps and 3 Chiffchaff) but does not mention Reed Warbler although the nearby Peter Pond is the only local place within Havant Borough from which a Reed Warbler has been reported this year.

The walkers led by Kevin Stouse beside the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour yesterday were lucky with the weather and enjoyed 54 bird species ranging from 5 Brent that almost certainly will stay through the summer to 4 Whimbrel and 40+ Black-tailed Godwit that may continue their journeys northward at any minute - some of the party also heard a brief burst of what was almost certainly Corn Bunting song. 42 Common and 3 Little Terns were seen with plenty of Turnstone and a single Dunlin - also on or by the water were 15 Shelduck, 2 Great Crested Grebe and 2 Little Egret (but surprisingly Kevin does not mention Grey Heron despite being just across the water from the Old Park wood heronry). Probably over that wood they saw two Buzzards, while the Sparrowhawk and Kestrel which they saw could also have been based there.

PLANTS:

SUN 05 MAY

An afternoon visit to a couple of sites on Portsdown gave me three plant species to add to the flowering list. I went first to Skew Road above Portchester and found Mouse-ear Hawkweed out in some profusion on the motorway bank, but no sign yet of flower stems on the tight clump of Common Spotted Orchids near the north end of the road bridge, nor on the Small Yellow Foxgloves at the west end of the site. Masses of deep blue Common Milkwort was the most eye catching flower here. Going back towards Havant I stopped at Fort Purbrook, parking in the cul de sac road on the south side of College Lane - here, on the north side of the road more than half way up the sloping road, was one of my expected species, Common Gromwell, in full flower (hardly eye-catching!) and on the bare chalk of the roadside slopes there was the usual mass of Aquilegia in every colour. Below Fort Purbook itself Salad Burnet was just starting to flower.

SAT 04 MAY

The Havant Wildlife Group walked the Nutbourne/Prinsted circuit on the north shore of Chichester Harbour this morning, adding three good finds to the list of flowering plants - Lesser Trefoil, White Bryony and Common Toadflax.

Walking from Havant down the Langbrook stream to the South Moors and Budds Farm, then back along the shore and up Wade Lane, I found Cut-leaved Cranesbill and White Clover flowering in several places, and on Budds Mound the first Dog Roses were out. My first Silverweed flowers were out by the Langbrook stream and I found Hogweed beginning to come into general flowering as was the Sea Sandwort on the north pier of the old railway line. One objective of my walk was to see if the Southern Marsh orchids were showing any sign of flower heads in view of the recent, exceptionally early, report of them starting to flower at Browndown. I found plenty of well grown basal leaves, but not one example of an incipient flowering spike.

FRI 03 MAY

My first Ragged Robin was flowering today by the eastern stream on the Warblington Farm fields, and further upstream a few flowers had opened on Water-cress. Also in this damp area were my first Spike Rush flowers and very nearly out was Lesser Spearwort (which has been out elsewhere for some time). While in this area I went back into Nore Barn and made a further search for the Hairy Garlic, looking in several places I had not searched before. I also had another look at the prime suspects and confirmed that their flower stems were all sharply triangular (the flowers seemed no nearer to bursting out of their 'cellophane wrapping'). Later

in the day I found Prickly Sow-thistle flowers in Havant.

THU 02 MAY

Wild Mignonette had started to flower by the Hayling Coastal path today, and flowers on Elder bushes reminded me that I had seen them first on Apr 30.

WED 01 MAY

Silverweed had started to flower at Titchfield Haven today, according to Richard Carpenter, and Meadow Buttercups are now becoming widespread. Also today Kevin Stouse tells me that the Common Spotted orchid plants, which flower in their hundreds on the motorway banks around the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth, are now becoming obvious to the casual glance and the first should be in flower soon.

TUE 30 APR

This evening I made a quick visit to Nore Barn at Emsworth in search of the Hairy Garlic which Pete Selby had told me of yesterday and I may or may not have found the plants. First I searched the northern edge of the main Wayfarer's Way path (which is where I said the plants should be found in my instructions - see yesterday's notes - based on what Pete had been told) but found nothing. Then, as there was some uncertainty in the original message, I searched some of the many subsidiary paths through the wood and here I found a large cluster of what I think were the plants. They had a mass of long thin leaves and unopen flowerheads on relatively short stems, but when I used my x15 hand lens on one or two of the leaves I could find no hairs, and when I felt the stem below the unopen flowerhead it seemed very 'three cornered'. In the same wood I found both Ramsons and Three-cornered Leek (which is an abundant escape hereabouts), and I am pretty certain the smaller plants with unopen flowers were a different species so I will have to go back and search them more diligently.

Bob Chapman's news from Farlington Marshes on the HWT website today tells of more Adder's Tongue Fern than usual in the 'Aerial Field' north of the A27, and a note from John Goodspeed says that the Purple Gromwell on the Hilsea Ramparts in Portsmouth is still flourishing despite a clearout of the flower beds in which, I suspect, the plants were originally planted before they took off on a life of their own. John does not actually say the plants were in flower but I see that they had started flowering by Apr 23 last year. If you want to see them go to the back of the Shell Garage on the west side of the A3 just south of the Portsbridge roundabout, and climb the steps immediately behind the back wall of the garage, then look about you when you reach the 'landing' half way up the steps.

MON 29 APR

Richard Carpenter found the first flowers on Southern Marsh Orchids in the Browndown area west of Gosport yesterday - I'm not sure where they occur there but I would guess it is close to the River Alver north of the Lee to Gosport road. In a drier part of Browndown he found Common Milkwort in flower (Martin Rand surprised me by finding this out at Durlston Country Park as early as Apr 6 this year). On Saturday (Apr 27) Richard was in the Botley Woods and found Creeping Cinquefoil flowers as well as those of Tormentil.

Pete Selby has today told me of an interesting find in the Havant area recently reported to him by a visitor from Woking. This was of a garden escape called *Allium subhirsutum* (or Hairy Garlic) found in Nore Barn wood between the western end of the housing on the Emsworth shore and the Warblington Farm fields. To find the plants enter the wood from the Emsworth end, heading west on the main footpath (Wayfarers Way/Solent Way) along the north side of the wood. The plants are on the right (north) side of this path a little over 100 metres from the start of the trees, and stretch for 5 to 10 metres along the foot of the hedge (start looking for them after passing a pathway into the wood going left from the main path). The plants may not yet be in flower but should stand up to 45 cm tall and have narrow leaves (2-10mm wide) which may be slightly keeled but are prominently hairy along their edges. I imagine the flowers will be white and bear some resemblance to those of Ramsons and form a fairly loose, upright, bowl-shaped umbel. From what Pete says this plant has only been found at a few locations in South Hampshire (he quotes the Tye area of central Hayling, Bishops Waltham and Eastleigh) and is not like the commoner garden escapes that proliferate in our semi-urban areas.

INSECTS:

SUN 05 MAY

Mark Litjens was at Old Winchester Hill in the Meon Valley today and made what may be a significant discovery of a single very tatty Duke of Burgundy. I know this species has in the past been found at Beacon Hill across the Meon Valley (where it has almost died out), and at two other sites close to West Meon (a few miles north), but I was not aware that it occurred at Old Winchester Hill itself. Its presence may be due to recent northerly winds as the site just north of Old Winchester Hill seems to have more of these butterflies than Noar Hill itself. This Hampshire hotspot is listed in the Butterfly Report as 'The Mountain' but that name does not appear on the large scale maps and I guess it is a 'private name' used by locals (perhaps invented by Christopher Holt when he recorded the butterflies of the West Meon area) - it probably refers to the high point of Whitewool Hanger beside the minor road coming south from West Meon to Old Winchester Hill. Also found by Mark were 5 Dingy and 2 Grizzled Skippers

SAT 04 MAY

Most exciting butterfly find of the year so far, at least in my estimation, was of seven Pearl Bordered Fritillary in the New Forest, found by Mark Litjens today in Pignall Inclosure not far from the big Hollands Wood camp site just north of Brockenhurst. Prior to that Mark was at Keyhaven where he found 5 Wall Brown and 4 Small Copper, and later in the day he was in the Botley Woods where his list of eight butterfly species included 3 Grizzled and 4 Dingy Skippers and 18 Brimstones.

Yesterday (May 3) brought two Eyed Hawkmoths to Graham Roberts trap in Cosham (Portsmouth), and saw the emergence of the Speckled Yellow moths that will soon be common in many woods. Strangely the first news of this day flying moth came as a query from Mike Collins, who had seen one on downland near Goodwood House north of Chichester - I suspect there was woodland not far away, but I cannot think of any other moth answering Mike's description that would be seen in daylight at this time of year. To back this up Lee Marshall saw Speckled Yellow for the first time in the Botley woods on the same day and found the first Hampshire cluster of Adela reamurella longhorn moths there (the species had been seen at Gurnard in the Isle of Wight on Apr 27). When Lee got back to Gosport in the evening his moth trap captured two new species for his year list (though both had been seen elsewhere earlier) - they were Iron Prominent (seen on Apr 4 by Philip Hack near Southampton) and Knot Grass (seen by Sarah Patton at Chichester on Apr 25).

Philip Hack, at Nursling close to the M27 and Test valley, found another two firsts for the year in his moth trap - one was The Spectacle, the other a Flame Carpet. Three other species that were first for Philip had been seen earlier - the Muslin moth by Barry Collins in Havant on Apr 21, a Lunar Marbled Brown by Lee Marshall at Gosport on Apr 3, and a Lesser Swallow Prominent by Rob Edmunds at Fleet on Apr 21

FRI 03 MAY

The first Hairy Dragonfly of the year was seen at Titchfield Haven today according to Richard Carpenter (I'm not sure if he saw it himself or was told of it).

Lee Marshall found two new species for the year in his moth trap at Rowner, Gosport, this evening - the first was Brown Silver-line, normal for this time, but the second was apparently a Shaded Broad-bar which should not emerge until July. On checking the life-cycle of this moth I see that its eggs hatch in the autumn, soon after laying, and the caterpillar survives through the winter (presumably dormant) and then spends some time feeding up in the spring. I wonder if the mild winter allowed some caterpillars of this species to continue feeding through the months when they would normally be dormant, bringing forward the emergence of the moth by over two months? +++

This reminds me of a query recently posed by Adrian Martin who found a moth which seemed to be a Green-brindled Crescent, but as that species is not expected on the wing until at least September he is very dubious of this identification and is asking more expert moth people to suggest alternatives.

Large White butterflies seem to be fairly common now - I found one in my garden yesterday and another one near Emsworth today, where Small and Green-veined were also found along with both male and female Orange Tip and Speckled Wood. In my own garden Holly Blue brought

my year list to six species.

THU 02 MAY

A Small Heath butterfly was found at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester on the very early date of April 23, or so Phil Budd heard from the anonymous finder of this butterfly.

Just one new moth was in Lee Marshall's trap at Gosport this evening - the Maiden's Blush.

WED 01 MAY

The return of warm weather brought five butterfly species out for the first time this year in my garden here in Havant. Prettiest was the regular Holly Blue, followed by a Peacock and a fresh Speckled Wood. The other two were whites which paused long enough to let me check their wingtips and see I had a Large as well as a Small White.

Lee Marshall has forwarded to me several moth trap lists put out recently on UK Moths newsgroup by Rob Edmunds at Fleet in north Hampshire and Sarah Patton at Chichester. I think the following extract lists those that are new for the year but I have been struggling to remember how to operate my system, which I set up and used last year, for maintaining a list of all first dates. With that I just put in a list of all recently reported moths and get out a list of those that are new, or have earlier dates than the 'previous earliest', but these have not yet been subjected to that check as I can't remember exactly how to work the system... something to do when I have finished this website update!. +++

The ones that I think are all new are, starting with those in Rob Edmunds' trap, Brindled Pug on Apr 21, then Pebble Hook-tip and *Tachystola acroxantha* on 23/4. Sarah Patton's list starts with Heart and Dart on Apr 24, followed by Cinnabar, White-spotted Pug, Lime-peck Pug, Flame Shoulder, Treble-bar and Double-striped Pug all on Apr 25.

TUE 30 APR

From the Butterfly Conservation website I see that last Saturday (Apr 27) Chris Clifford at Gurnard on the Isle of Wight described a cluster of more than 30 small moths with long antennae flying around a small elm sapling, and Phil Budd had no difficulty in identifying them as *Adela reamurella*. Phil went on to point out something which I did not know about distinguishing this common species from other longhorn moths - Phil says {{ In about a month from now a related micro-moth called *Nemophora degeerella* with even longer male antennae could appear in similar situations. However this moth is dark coppery brown (not green) with a distinctive gold band across each forewing and doesn't tend to gather in such large swarms }} +++

Also on the BC website are three interesting reports from Brian Fletcher who on Apr 24 found the first Dingy Skipper at Noar Hill with 2 Duke of Burgundy (the first I have heard of since Sue Clark found the first there on Apr 13). Still on Apr 24 Brian Fletcher went on to the Yew Hill reserve south of Winchester where he found the first Green Carpet moth as well as a Green Hairstreak. The third observation from Brian dates from Apr 19 when he found the first small *Pyrausta aurata* (Mint Moth) in his Winchester garden. +++

Finally from the BC website I enjoyed Derek Mills comment on the battle between those who call *Aucita hexadactyla* the Twenty Plume Moth and those who call it the Many Plumed Moth. Derek quotes Maitland Emmet's book "The scientific names of the British Lepidoptera - their history and meaning" regarding *Alucita hexadactyla* (where the second word refers to the division of each wing into six divisions or fingers, hex meaning six). The book says that {{ some innumerate Englishman called it "the twenty-plume moth"! So who was the Englishman who initiated this change in name as the previous name was more consistent, if not precise, and why did everyone follow like sheep? }}

Bob Chapman's status report for Farlington Marshes on the HWT website today says that both Blue-tailed and Azure Damselflies can now be seen there as well as Large Red Damsels.

MON 29 APR

Today a Poplar Hawkmoth emerged in the care of Lawrence Holloway at Aldwick (Bognor Regis) and allowed him a good photograph which can now be seen on the diary page of his website.

Also today I had a series of messages from Lee Marshall telling me of his recent moth trap records and forwarding news from Rob Edmunds and Ian Thirlwell/John Langmaid. +++

Lee's own 'firsts' have been Lime Hawkmoth, Puss Moth and Pale Mottled Willow, all found at Gosport on Apr 20 - he also recorded his first Caddis Fly species on Apr 18. On Apr 21 Rob

Edmunds, at Fleet in north Hampshire, added Garden Carpet moth to the year list and on the same day Ian Thirlwell and John Langmaid (out on a daytime trip to the Portsdown/Portchester area) added Common Carpet and found a number of larvae (leaf miners, etc) of the minute moths which are John Langmaid's speciality.

While sending me this information Lee Marshall tells me that the plume moth which Brian Fletcher found in Winchester on Mar 12, and which I reported on Mar 23 as being a different species to the Twenty Plumed Moth found by Lee Marshall on that day, was in fact the same species. Older books can still be found using the name Many Plumed Moth but more recent books all use the name Twenty Plumed Moth for this same species.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 04 MAY

Walking past Langstone Pond at sunset I am pretty well sure that I saw a Water Vole swim across a narrow channel and disappear into the reeds. I was coming from the village and saw the animal just about level with the east end of the Mill buildings, and all I saw was the top of its back above the water in the semi-darkness of the narrow channel, overshadowed by branches - it was swimming from the seawall side to the reed covered island (which has a low bank in which holes could be dug (I saw none). Later in my walk a Pipistrelle was very active over the Lymbourne stream as I crossed the footbridge from the Wade Court fields onto the Billy Trail.

WED 01 MAY

For those who skip my bird news page here is a repeat of one entry there today. A single Magpie is regularly in our garden (presumably while a mate is sitting on a nearby nest) but today it gave a couple of unusual displays of its killing power and wide-ranging taste for food. The first came to our attention when the Magpie leapt from a patch of long grass onto the mown lawn struggling to hold a full size Slow-worm in its bill, then ate the whole body to leave no trace on the lawn. Later I saw the bird running fast around the flower beds and saw it was successfully pursuing a fast-moving adult Frog, recapturing it each time the frog sought refuge in thick vegetation, but unable to prevent the Frog from leaping off down the garden path once or twice. Although I did not see the end of the frog I'm pretty sure who won.

MON 29 APR

During the past week up to three pairs of Water Voles have been seen in the River Ems around the Brook Meadow area at Emsworth, but on Thursday Brian Fellows witnessed another attack on them by a dog. Luckily it was not another small Terrier, which would probably have succeeded in killing one of the voles, but a lumbering Labrador type, which leapt into the river and made a lot of commotion as it tried to dig into one of the vole tunnels, and Brian had time to point out to its owner (quite oblivious to the possible damage the dog was doing) what was going on and getting the dog called off.

SUN 28 APR

Having recently commented on the paucity of Hare sightings this spring I am glad to see that Robert Watson found four of them in fields beside the A340 road north of Basingstoke last week (Apr 25), but I am even more pleased to recall a sighting of 16 Hares in the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Feb 11 this year, seen by David Thelwell.

FRI 26 APR

Brian Fellows gives me the good news that there is definitely at least one pair of Water Voles active in the River Ems at the Brook Meadow site where they were seen on Apr 23 along with one Eel in the water. Water Voles are also doing well at the Winnall Moors site on the Itchen in Winchester but the absence of a comma in the account of their status which appeared on the HWT website today makes it appear that they have a strange diet - the report says {{ Water voles are regular sights, feeding on the river margins and fresh otter spraint ... }} Had the comma been included after river margins we would then have read as a separate item that otter spraint shows that otters are flourishing here.

TUE 23 APR

I know that Red Deer can be found in the New Forest but I have never come upon them myself so I was very pleased to hear today that Giles Darvill had come across 12 hinds of this species when walking today in remote part of the New Forest, not too far from Burley. It's probably not

wise to give too accurate a location and to hope that the beasts remain unseen by the poachers and by the 'wildlife photographers' intent on getting close-up pictures, let alone the dog walkers!

Here in Havant David Parker tells me that he much enjoyed a close view of two Fox Cubs last Saturday when driving down East Leigh road (running between the BUPA hospital and the Denvilles area). This reminds me of seeing cubs in what was probably the same spot one lovely spring morning several years ago - the cubs were up on a bank, peering at me round the trunk of a large old oak tree.

MON 22 APR

Walking on Fritham Plain in the New Forest today (with not a human being in sight) Giles Darvill came on a group of 24 Fallow Deer out in the open in the middle of the afternoon when they might be expected to be hiding up in woodland cover - Giles says the sight of them behaving so naturally was like a natural scene from the Serengeti in Africa rather than the over-populated and highly regulated New Forest. Another natural scene was witnessed by Charles Cuthbert last night at Alresford Pond where at least 20 small bats (Pipstrelles?) and three or four larger ones (Noctules?) were feeding over and around the pond at dusk. Less natural has been the deserted scene in many Hampshire farm fields from which the Hares have vanished - Graham Osborne tells me he has seen a few around Cheesefoot Head and at Old Winchester Hill in the past month, but where are the reports of twenty or more Hares in the fields beside the Test below Romsey, and the sightings which I used to record beside the A3 at Blendworth or the fields east and north of Stansted House?

One large mammal that can still be seen not far from Havant is the Common Seal. Over the past few years numbers in Chichester and Langstone harbours seem to have been increasing and we have had occasional sightings of pups (not all surviving), and this trend looks set to continue this year with a report from Barry Collins of seven seals in Chichester Harbour last Saturday (Apr 20).

WEEK 17 APR 22 - 28

BIRDS:

SUN 28 APR

The Testwood Lakes, between the M27 and A35 east of Totton, have suddenly become a popular birding spot and look set to retain one of their current attractions (a first summer Little Gull) for some time. It was still present today and Paul Winter tells us that a similar first year bird was reported from that area throughout last summer, so this one may also stay. Paul also tells us that a new vantage point overlooking Eling Great Marsh is now open to the public - go to Redbridge railway station and cross over the foot bridge to access a small patch of scrub on the east side of Southampton Water. If there are no birds to be seen you might feel inspired to write a hymn or two - I understand that Isaac Watts wrote one of his most popular hymns (starting 'Sweet hills beyond the swelling flood') when inspired by this view across Southampton Water to Eling.

Colin Bates watched a notable (for April) movement of 20+ Swifts, 20+ Swallows, and 10+ House Martins west over the Itchen at Bishopstoke this morning. He asks if Swifts are earlier than usual this year and my opinion is that, while the first arrival date of Apr 21 was not unusual, the fact that three birds were seen in different places on that day, the widespread regular sightings since then, and the small parties (rather than odd individuals) being seen, all add up to an early full scale arrival. Admittedly Colin's count of 20+ Swifts is trivial in comparison to the flocks of 500+ that may be expected in mid-May, and none of the reports so far have been of birds showing an interest in nest sites, but I still think this is a better than average start to the year for these birds. Incidentally I must take issue with Darren Fry, assistant warden at the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve, who has put another of his very welcome bulletins of news from that reserve on the SOS website, when he says that all four hirundine species are present there - in my book Swifts are in quite a different family from the Hirundines (Swallows and Martins), and it is clear that Darren is thinking of Swifts as a fourth hirundine species.

Four Sanderling were on the beach at Hill Head this morning, seen by Peter Morrison, and I

remain puzzled at why these lovers of sandy shores are so regularly seen along the shingle and mud shores of the Solent between the Hamble and Portsmouth Harbour. This is no new phenomenon this year (unlike the observations of Sanderling regularly feeding on the concrete strip below Southsea Castle this winter - that was new as far as I know). Peter also saw a Bonxie fly east off Hill Head today.

In this afternoon's gale I walked down the Langbrook Stream and found one Egret on the South Moors with a Sandwich Tern in the air above it and many gulls sitting out the storm on the grass (not a usual roost place for them). A single Whimbrel was on the shore here. Walking back through Langtone I found at least eight more Egrets day roosting in the Wade Court trees, and a large family of Mallard ducklings on the Mill Pond where there is still no sound of Reed Warbler.

SAT 27 APR

A male Kentish Plover spent five minutes in Pagham Harbour today before flying off. I wonder if it was heading for the Pilsey Sands where, over the years, Barry Collins has amassed more records of this rarity than anyone else in Sussex. Elsewhere in Sussex the Pulborough Brooks reserve had three Black-tailed Godwit, one Dunlin and one Ruff, with a Hobby and 5 Swifts overhead.

Here in Hampshire Will Walmsley was with a HOS walk party in the Shatterford/Denny Wood area of the New Forest where a third Wood Warbler for the year was heard

Recent news from Sussex which has only just reached my eyes starts with a sighting of a Black Tern yesterday over what I think must have been the small, unnamed, triangular lake between Ivy and Copse Lakes at Chichester. Ten Swifts were seen overhead there. Also on Apr 26 another Turtle Dove was heard near Lewes and sea watchers at Splash Point (Bexhill) saw 20 Brent, 7 Eider and 4 Manx Shearwater all fly east. On Apr 25 three adult Spoonbills flew west past Selsey Bill and a Blue-headed Wagtail was seen at Shoreham with a normal Yellow Wagtail at Amberley. Nigel Voaden gives us more detail on the unidentified Eagle he saw over Ambersham Common that day (his guess is that it was Spotted or Lesser Spotted, but he is not certain). At Pulborough Brooks 2 Wigeon and 1 Pintail were still present, along with 5 Nightingales, 3 Whimbrel and 3 Egrets as well as 4 Black-tailed Godwit, 1 Common Tern and 1 Ruff. From Rye Harbour in East Sussex comes a probable sighting of a ringtail Montagu's Harrier (second one for the year following one at Church Norton on Apr 24) and news that 2 Garganey, 1 Black-necked Grebe and 11 Bar-tailed Godwit were to be seen along with the first Swift for the Rye Harbour reserve. +++

Hampshire late news for Apr 25 consists of one item - a report from Robert Watson that 47 Pied Wagtail are still using the nighttime roost on the IBM building in the town centre (he counted 72 there on Apr 19).

Going back to Apr 24 someone saw at least one Corn Bunting on Thorney Island, and I look forward to hearing that there is more than one on the island this summer. Finally, I see that the first Reed Warbler was at Pulborough Brooks on Apr 23

FRI 26 APR

The first Lapwing chicks of the year were seen in the Hook (Warsash) area by Bob Marchant on St George's Day (Apr 23), and today David Thelwell tells us that a pair of Swallows have finished re-building and lining their simple nest at a site near Timsbury in the Test valley. Still on the subject of nests and nestlings Kevin Stouse tells me that the Moorhen chicks which Colin Bates saw on the Itchen (also on St George's Day) were not the first of the year - he had seen a family of five on the small lake by the main reception at the Portsmouth IBM site when he arrived for work on Monday Apr 15 (they may have hatched earlier over the weekend). Kevin adds that four of these five babies are still alive today, nearly two weeks old, and that the Swan pair is still sitting by the main lake where it presents no problem to walkers on the fire road around the lake - unlike the nest of a pair of Swans at the Winnall Moors HWT nature reserve in Winchester. The Swans there have chosen to nest right in the middle of the only path around the site!

We have heard of what are probably summering Brent Geese, just two or three seen together, being found off Titchfield Haven and the mouth of the Hamble on several recent occasions, and I was beginning to wonder if there were none in Langstone Harbour where in most years up to

a dozen birds stay behind. Today two people (John Gowen and Mike Collins) have told me that there is one loner to be seen off the mouth of the Langbrook stream on the Langstone South Moors shore, and Mike goes on to report that yesterday evening (Apr 25) he found a smart male Whinnchat and three Wheatears on the South Moors.

From Titchfield Haven reports of Black-tailed Godwit have recently shown rapidly decreasing numbers. On the Titchfield Haven 'official website' we read that there were 57 there on Apr 18 and only 42 on Apr 20. Looking from outside the reserve Peter Raby could only see 6 on Apr 22 and 12 on Apr 23. Then on Apr 24 Trevor Carpenter saw 80 birds on the reserve, and today Richard Carpenter reports a count of 110 which suggests to me that a new wave of these birds has just arrived from the south, stopping over on their way to Greenland. Perhaps unusually the numbers of these birds being reported from the Hook area just along the coast has recently been higher than I would have expected with 41 there last Tuesday (Apr 23), and last week there were 130 present at Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight just across the water, so it may well be that the changing numbers are in part a reflection of internal movements around the solent area. +++

Another place where good numbers of Black-tailed Godwits have recently been seen is the Fishbourne Channel near Chichester. Here Eric Davis has been keeping an eye on those he sees in his regular walks between Dell Quay and Fishbourne, and on Apr 20 he counted 150 here, with another count on Apr 23 only finding 100. Much more importantly for a precise picture of the movements of these birds he has (along with other people in other areas) been keeping Pete Potts informed of all sightings of colour ringed birds, of which there were six present on Apr 20 and 1 on Apr 23. +++

While on the subject of wader passage I see that Whimbrels are now getting into full flow with 61 having been recorded at Hurst on Apr 20. Since then 28 went past Selsey Bill on Apr 24 and 16 were at Fareham Creek today.

Other birds seen at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter this week have included two Hobbies yesterday and one Hobby today when there were also 3 Avocet, 3 Bar-tailed Godwit, a Cuckoo and 6 Swifts (reports of Swifts are now widespread). Although Richard doesn't mention Reed Warblers I expect some were present but my general impression is that, unlike Sedge Warblers (for which the count at Rye Harbour today was 219, and which have been reported widely as been present in large numbers), Reed Warblers have been in short supply, so it is good to hear from Bob Marchant that there were at least 6 in the reeds by Hook Lake today.

Today Phil Lord was at the Testwood Lakes site (just south of where the M27 crosses the river Test) and found a single Sanderling there - rather an unusual inland bird and almost certainly a first for this fairly new HWT reserve. Also at that site was a first year Little Gull, and another of these was at Netley on Southampton Water this evening, seen by Richard Bonser.

THU 25 APR

A second Wood Warbler for the year was found by an SOS mid-week walk party at Woolbeding Common (just north of Midhurst) on Wednesday (Apr 24), and two Turtle Doves were found by Barry Collins on Thorney Island today, with another one seen in the Hundred Acres area near Wickham by John Shillitoe (who says he has heard that it first arrived several days ago). Two other migrants that have been arriving in good numbers in the past few days are Garden and Grasshopper Warblers. The latter have been heard reeling today at Niton (close to St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight) and at Church Norton, with another at Hastings yesterday and one at Selsey on Apr 23. Garden Warbler sightings have been more widespread but I rather liked Lawrence Holloway's report of one singing briefly from bushes in his garden in Bognor Regis, an unlikely habitat for this bird to settle in - and it did not stop! +++

Nightingales are now back in most of their usual haunts, and Andrew Howard today comments on how faithful they are to their traditional sites. Andrew was lucky enough to have one singing outside his bedroom window in the Petworth area last summer, and last night it was back in the very same bush (almost a week earlier than it's arrival last year). I think the fact that the Nightingales continue to return to our Marlpit Lane site (just north of the A27 west of Chichester) is a prime example of how difficult it is to deter them from coming back to the same place. I have no idea when the birds first chose this site as suitable but in recent years large scale gravel extraction nearby, the planting of a filled in gravel pit with conifers, the setting up of

a minor waste collection point and regular clay pigeon shooting in the centre of the Nightingale territories, have not deterred the birds. I believe that Nightingales fall into two categories - those that like very damp sites and those that go for dry ones. Here at Marlpit Lane there is no water and maybe the 'dry' birds are tougher than the 'wets'. +++

Other recent reports of Nightingales tell us that 9 of them were in the Botley Woods today, and (to make up for other deficiencies of the railways?) 3 could be heard singing from the platform of Berwick Station (alongside Arlington Reservoir a little west of Eastbourne)

Raptor news is today topped by an unidentified Eagle heading west over Ambersham Common towards Hampshire (will Jason add yet another Eagle species to his Farlington list?), but other raptors seen yesterday were equally exciting. At Church Norton on Apr 24 a ringtail Montagu's Harrier was the first for the year (not so welcome was the presence of an escaped Saker in the same area), and from Rye Harbour came a report of a male Goshawk. Also on Apr 24 Barry Collins found two Short-eared Owls still present near the Thorney Deeps, while on Apr 23 a late Merlin was seen at Selsey.

Barry Collins was in Stansted Forest today in search of butterflies but he soon looked up when he heard the deep croaking of a Raven passing over. Where it came from and where it went I have no idea but Barry said that after he had watched it arguing with a local Crow for about five minutes it headed north west. Among resident birds seen by Barry were 2 Buzzards and a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, while a Tawny Owl was heard calling at 2pm. Another unexpected sighting today was of 80 Golden Plover in the Sparsholt area west of Winchester, seen by David Thelwell. Although late in the season the open fields in this area are typical habitat for the Golden Plover, but not for the other birds which David saw - 1 Little Ringed Plover, 1 Greenshank and 2 Shelduck. I know Shelduck can be found in strange places miles from water (and I know of none around Sparsholt village or college, though I remember reading of Swans on flooded fields not far away in very much wetter times over a year ago) so I find the presence of Greenshank and Little Ringed Plover very odd - can anyone tell me if there is perhaps now permanent water somewhere in this area? +++

Another unexpected sighting at Selsey Bill yesterday was a fly-past by a pair of Goosander and another late sighting from Sussex was of two Purple Sandpiper still at Brighton yesterday, while on Apr 23 I see that 8 Egrets were still night roosting at Rye Harbour

WED 24 APR

The first Roseate Tern was resting on the beach at Hill Head late this afternoon when the rising tide forced it to fly along the beach, giving Trevor Carpenter excellent views. Last Sunday (Apr 21) the first Black Tern was in the same area (possibly within Titchfield Haven) but I have only just seen this news on the official Haven website. Not the first of its kind, but nevertheless interesting to those who have yet to see one this year, a Swift flew north over Lymington to give Colin Bates a tick, another Swift came in over Titchfield Haven for Richard Carpenter and in the evening Simon Woolley had six over Winchester. (P S Writing this on Thursday morning Apr 25 I see that 8 more have been seen this morning over the Haven and a couple over Cams Bay at Fareham)

Mike Collins was concerned when he recently saw seven Corn Buntings eating newly sown cereal seed which had come from bags clearly marked with a warning that the seed had been dressed with chemicals and that any spillages of seed should be buried to avoid damage to wildlife. Having aired this on HOSLIST Dr David Harper from Sussex University replied that this was a widespread problem which, despite trying, he had failed to get across to English Nature or to DEFRA. From his studies of these birds he had plenty of evidence that new sowings and spillages are the main sources of Corn Bunting food at this time of year, and he adds that {{ all the Corn Buntings we catch at this time of year have bright orange bills, coloured by the chemical dressing on the seeds, despite the fact that the dressing is meant to have a taste that will put off birds from eating it.}} David does not comment on Mike's final sentence, which was the question {{Is this why so many of our farmland birds are disappearing ?}} but presumably, had he come on any dead birds that had been poisoned he would have mentioned it, so perhaps the Corn Buntings are able to survive whatever is in the dressing?

More, and better, news of Corn Buntings comes today from John Shillitoe who has at last found

the flock of Corn Buntings in the Hoe Cross area near Hambledon which Doug Robertson brought to our attention at the beginning of April (when Doug reported seeing up to 37 birds there fairly regularly). Today John found at least 28 Corn Buntings in a stubble field but was distracted from counting them when he found a Whinchat in the same field. Later he found a second Whinchat and at least four more Corn Buntings that were not part of the main flock. David Harper, who has devoted a lot of time to studying Corn Buntings in East Sussex, is not at all surprised at the presence of a feeding flock at this date, and tells us that it is common for males to regularly commute between their breeding territories and the area used by a feeding flock from mid-winter until mid-May when the first nests are made. From observation of 461 nests he has found the earliest clutch was not laid until May 11 and the peak period for first clutches was from June 22 to July 6 (some, perhaps after initial failures, were still laying in mid-August). What does surprise David in John's news is that the birds are still finding food in stubble...

The SOS website today publishes a interesting bird ringing recovery of a Turnstone found recently in Pagham Harbour. This bird had been ringed as an adult in August last summer (2001) when it was at the town of Alert on Ellesmere Island (the northernmost part of Canada, within the Arctic Circle, lying to the north of the northern tip of Greenland).

TUE 23 APR

The first Wood Warbler of the year was heard and seen today by Giles Darvill in Berry Wood (between the A31 at Picket Post and Burley - not far from the delightfully named 'Mouse's Cupboard'). Two more 'firsts' were recorded today by Colin Bates by the River Itchen in the Bishopstoke area - a pair of Grey Wagtails feeding the first of their chicks in the nest, and on the water the first Moorhen chicks (we've had quite a few baby Coots, but no Moorhens so far). With House Martins now being seen in small numbers many people will share my sadness at the loss of them as breeding birds in many places. Several reasons have been suggested, including loss of the small muddy puddles that they need for building material, an apparent difficulty they have in getting their material to adhere to modern brickwork, a diminution in the insect food they need (at least in the vicinity of our houses), and the horror some people have of 'mess', causing them to knock down the nests before the birds can settle in and drop their droppings on our windowsills. +++

If you are not one of those who want to drive them from your house why not listen to what Cliff Oakley has to say about the success he has had in getting them to nest on his modern home in Petersfield by using artificial nest boxes? He first put up a single nest box twelve years ago and for three years the birds ignored it, but when he added two more boxes they were immediately occupied and in the past few years his house has contributed significantly to House Martin breeding success. Cliff says {{ I have been keeping records of 'my' house martins for 4 years now and their breeding records are as follows: 1998, three pairs produced 6 broods; 1999, two pairs produced 5 broods; 2000, three pairs produced 8 broods (One pair were at the nest well into October); 2001, two pairs produced three broods. }} +++

I'm sure there is more to it than just putting up a few boxes but if you want to have a go and do not have a ready source of information about the practicalities I'm sure Cliff will try to answer your questions - his address is cliffoakley@btconnect.com

At dusk I found Jason Crook and Chris Cockburn standing guard over the first substantial arrival of Little Terns at the Hayling Oysterbeds lagoon with a tight group of some 35 Tern wheeling and weaving low over the water and occasionally settling on the northern end of the nest island. Alistair Martin had visited the lagoon late in the afternoon but could only see three Terns high in the sky, taking little apparent interest in the island, and when I arrived some 15 minutes before sunset my first impression was of a very loose group of at least twenty birds flying fairly high over the outer bund walls and harbour, but as the sun sank lower the birds formed a tighter group and centred their attention on the lagoon (at least one caught a fish in it), occasionally landing on the island but quickly taking off as one of them 'got the jitters' about something in an unfamiliar environment. I suspect that as darkness fell they will have overcome most of their fears and settled down to spend the night on the island. I would not be surprised to find a hundred or more birds settled on the island and claiming nest sites by next weekend... +++

Cycling down the coastal path around 5pm I saw one bird fly low across the track and disappear upwards into a hawthorn - looking into the sun as the bird flew in front of me I thought it showed a red tail, and further down the track I heard a brief burst of what might have been Redstart song. On my way home I also heard a loud 'wheet' call, audible above the traffic, from conifers at the south end of Langstone Bridge, so it may well be that a group of Redstarts had just arrived and were making their way north up the island. I had much more certainty in identifying my first Lesser Whitethroat song, also heard by the track, but had no other special birds - a Swallow flew over, Willow Warbler and Chiffchaff sang, and there was a single Wheatear on the shore but no Turtle Dove purring from the trees. +++

Back at Langstone just after sunset I counted 16 Egrets in the Wade Court trees and guess there are still at least 20 roosting there. From Langstone Pond the Cetti's Warbler sang, and offshore on the rising tide one of the pond Swans could be seen but I still have not discovered the Swans nest site nor heard a Reed Warbler there.

An unusual sighting today was of what was probably the albino Common Gull that has been seen several times early this year in the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour, then apparently moved to the Shoreham area (one seen on the River Adur on Mar 23) before returning to Langstone (last seen by Dave Pearson at Broadmarsh on Apr 1). Today's sighting was by Ian Thirlwell on the south-east shore of Langstone Harbour, but he only claims it as a 'possible'. Other sightings that may be of interest include a group of 36 Bar-tailed Godwit flying east off Hill Head, 17 Eider on the sea off Titchfield Haven, and 5 Brent, 2 Avocet and 41 Black-tailed Godwit at Hook/Warsash.

MON 22 APR

Top item in a busy weekend's news, as far as I am concerned, was the arrival of the year's first Turtle Dove at Eastleigh Lakeside park on Sunday (Apr 21) - once again Simon Ingram's unrelenting watch on this site has paid off. The other migrant in which I am specially interested at the moment is the Swift, and the latest messages show that, in addition to those over Fareham and Winchester which I reported yesterday, at least one more was seen - also on Apr 21 - at Farlington Marshes by Jason Crook. In the same batch of news I find that Will Walmsley's Whinchat (reported by me yesterday at Farlington Marshes) was part of a small influx that brought another to the New Forest (seen by Peter Morrison) and another to somewhere in Sussex. Far too many other migrants have just arrived for a full list but local sightings include the first two Whitethroats at Emsworth's Brook Meadow as well as more than 20 Common and 4 Lesser Whitethroats on Thorney Island.

A little while ago I reminded you that Pete Potts and others would be at the Black-tailed Godwit nesting grounds in Iceland from Apr 17 to May 10, and everyone left here was asked to record and report all the colour ringed birds they see during that period in order to get a better feel for the speed at which the birds travel north to Iceland. No observations of colour ringed birds in my news, but I do see that when Peter Raby was at Titchfield Haven today he could only see 6 Black-tails left there, though Steve Keen found 120 on the Lymington marshes yesterday. No news yet from Iceland, but David Taylor copied an interesting piece of news from Birdline on to HOSLIST, telling us that someone at the northern tip of Norway has just counted 8316 Pomarine Skuas heading east. I wonder what impact this will have on the Sussex Pom King race this spring (maybe all the birds have gone round the north of Scotland instead of through the English Channel this year, and travelled much earlier than usual - we will have to wait and see)

Another piece of dramatic sea-watching news comes from Trevor Carpenter who was at Hill Head yesterday and saw a big Grey Parrot heading west (worth a bob or two if you can coax it down?). Of course, with their ability to talk, these parrots may be on duty as part of a new and improved Birdline news service, being sent up rather like the aerial reporters that provide traffic news for the American TV stations, so don't distract the parrot with offers of fruit while it is on duty! Another observation from Trevor was of the Titchfield Haven Barn Owl, which has been reported recently hunting over the reserve in the mornings, now showing well in the evening. Yesterday he twice saw it perched on the rooves of hides at 17:45 and 18:30, long before sunset. +++

Among Trevor's more usual news from Hill Head yesterday was a sighting of 16 Bar-tailed Godwit

flying east, and another group of 10 Bar-tails were seen yesterday by Steve Keen at the Lymington Marshes. These birds may have been scarce in Hampshire this winter but I suspect that from now on we will see a normal passage of them east along the coast with the Whimbrel. At Lepe yesterday Paul Winter saw a flock of 99 Brent on the shore with another two Brent flying past west. Today Trevor Carpenter saw 31 Brent fly east past Stokes Bay, so it seems that the normal pattern of Brent appearing in good numbers on the west solent shore, and then flying east without touching down again in Hampshire, is being repeated.

Charles Cuthbert took a look at Alresford Pond on two evenings in the past week, finding 7 Little Egret roosting there on both nights (Apr 21 and 19), while on Apr 19 a female Hen Harrier was still using the reeds to spend the night.

Nothing to do with Alresford Pond, but also on Apr 19, Richard Bonser had 9 Corn Bunting in the Cheesefoot Head area (plus a couple of Grey Partridge) and yesterday at Upper Swanmore Richard Carpenter also had a Corn Bunting. +++

Another bird that remains of general interest is Red Kite and several sightings were reported yesterday. Around 10:30 in the morning one was following the A27 west past Farlington Marshes; at 11:20 one was over Titchfield Haven; at 11:40 one was over Hedge End; and finally I hear from John Goodspeed that two were over the Southleigh Forest, north of Emsworth, around lunchtime. +++

Also not far north of Emsworth, at Forestside, David Parker has been noticing that his bird seed feeders have been emptying at a faster than usual rate and now knows why - not Squirrels but Rooks are at it. Perhaps because the ground is too hard for digging earthworms a couple of the Rooks have learnt to hammer at the seed feeder, causing seed to fall out in large quantities. I don't know if the hammerers get any but a circle of Rooks on the ground below have been gobbling up the seed as it showers down.

Finally a round up of items I have missed so far, starting with today's sightings. Over the Roydon Woods Ravens are a regular sight, and at Quarr Abbey near Ryde on the Isle of Wight a pair of Treecreeper were seen, maybe making a nest as the pair at Eastleigh Lakeside are doing. In Emsworth the Coot which nested too close to the west bank of the Slipper Mill pond has been grabbed by a Fox (or so a deserted nest and pile of feathers would indicate) and at Peter Pond the first Reed Warbler is back. On Southampton Water the leucistic Herring Gull continues to show - recently it flew over the Saints new football stadium, today it was at Spitfire Quay near the mouth of the Itchen. At Gilkicker today Gary Calderwood had another single Yellow Wagtail go north while a Guillemot floated by going east (did it oversleep and let the tide carry it north of the Isle of Wight when it should be off the southern cliffs?). Off Titchfield Haven there were 17 Eider and in that area Sanderling continue to be seen (Trevor Carpenter had 83 off Browdown and Peter Raby had 2 off Titchfield Haven). Among Sunday's sighting (Apr 21) was a Serin over Hastings, and at the headwaters of the River Test Mike Wall found more than 80 Coot still in the Overton area (along with a dead from natural causes Green Sandpiper and a lively pair of Bar-headed Geese). At Titchfield Haven two Avocets were still present, also a Spotted Redshank, and on the Lymington Marshes 6 Knot were seen plus 19 Whimbrel, 4 Greenshank and 4 Little Tern - someone must have reported a Little Stint there as more than one person reports that they did not see it! +++

A phone call from Alistair Martin told me that yesterday he saw half a dozen Little Tern at the Hayling Oysterbeds, and that they had plucked up courage to land on the much changed nest island, though they were not at the southern end, which previously has had most nests, but at the bend in the island. Alistair also found the Spotted Redshank, which I had seen on Saturday night, was still present.

PLANTS:

SUN 28 APR

Just one new plant on my list today - Hemlock Water-dropwort with fully open spherical flower clusters. Also today I noticed opening leaves on Ash trees for the very first time! Yesterday the Havant Wildlife Group were in West Walk woods near Wickham and added the elegant Wood Millet to the flowering list of grasses, and Rowan to the trees.

FRI 26 APR

Horseradish plants had suddenly come into flower on a bit of waste ground here in Havant today, and in the evening, when I parked in the Hollow Lane carpark close to the Hayling Island shopping centre, I noticed leaves of a pea plant struggling out from under fencing at the edge of the carpark. I'm pretty sure these were the leaves of the yellow Meadow Vetchling that will soon be flowering everywhere.

WED 24 APR

This evening the first of the annual series of summer Wednesday evening walks, organised by the Havant branch of the Hampshire Wildlife Trust, took place in the Clanfield area. The walk should have been led by Geoff Butland, but he sadly died a few days ago after a long illness, and so the group which assembled were first told the sad news but then enjoyed a peaceful and flower-rich walk through Lowton's Copse where the Bluebells and Wood Anemones carpet the woodland floor. Among them were Early Purple Orchids (three of them with white flowers), the first Twayblade orchids were in flower as was the first Pignut. Masses of Yellow Archangel provided a contrast to the other colours, and other plants included Solomon's Seal and Goldilocks Buttercup. Gwynne Johnson tells me that she was able to check out something she had recently learnt about Moschatel flowers - namely that the four flowers which face sideways each have five petals while the single flower pointing upwards has only four. +++

If you want to join this friendly group exploring local wildlife on Wednesday evenings brief details of the walks are listed in the Imminent Events section of my What's New page, with contact phone numbers for the leaders if you want to know more.

Following Martin Rand's report of Bitter Vetch seen in flower last Sunday I thought I would check out the plants in Havant Thicket, where I did find them flowering but saw little else other than the first Horse Chestnut tree with all its candles lit - not in the Thicket but at the roadside as I drove through Leigh Park

TUE 23 APR

Richard Carpenter was in the West Meon area today and added False Oxlip to the year list of flowering plants. He also discovered a 'new to him' small colony of Early Purple Orchids and saw Sanicle in flower (I also saw this at Old Idsworth Farm last Friday - Apr 19 - but forgot to mention it)

I spent some time on the Hayling Beachlands shore looking for Upright Chickweed and Heath Pearlwort today but found neither. What I did find was my first Birds-foot Trefoil and flowers on both Sea-Sandwort and Bucks-horn Plantain. The ubiquitous Sand Sedge was also flowering and the lovely Thrift (or Sea Pink) was just beginning to put on its display. Bur Chervil and the Duke of Argyll's Teaplant were in full flow and a mass of Corn Salad had appeared where I saw it last year, while my last note was of what I am sure were the first shoots of plants that will prove to be Pale Toadflax. Coming back up the Coastal Path I found my rabbit proof fence around the Saw-wort plants was still in place, looking as if it may do its job - to make sure I added more gorse to fill in weak places in the defensive ring.

MON 22 APR

Richard Carpenter was on the east Solent shore today and found Large Bittercress flowering by the roadside (presumably in a wet ditch) just west of Titchfield Haven, and further west in Chilling Copse he found the first Eyebright in flower. Yesterday Richard was at Itchen Abbas by the upper Itchen and found Twayblade Orchid in flower with Great Tussock Sedge out at Ovington, nearer Alresford. Giles Darvill was walking in the New Forest west of Fritham today and confirmed what I said in connection with the report of Crab Apple blossom in Havant Thicket on Apr 13, namely that the New Forest is one of its strongholds as a native tree - today Giles saw lots of the trees in flower and enjoyed their scent.

Yesterday Martin Rand had a full day out in the south eastern New Forest, starting at Crockford Bridge on the southern fringe of Beaulieu Heath, then walking south through East End and on past Sowley Pond finding the following personal first flowerings {{ Round-leaved Crowfoot (*Ranunculus omiophyllus*), Pond Water Crowfoot (*Ranunculus peltatus*), Lesser Spearwort (*Ranunculus flammula*), Heath Dog Violet (*Viola canina*), Heath Milkwort (*Polygala serpyllifolia*), Tormentil (*Potentilla erecta*), Creeping Willow (*Salix repens*), Bog Myrtle (*Myrica*

gale), Bogbean (*Menyanthes trifoliata*), Lousewort (*Pedicularis sylvatica*), Deergrass (*Trichophorum cespitosum*), Common Cotton-grass (*Eriophorum angustifolium*), Pill Sedge (*Carex pilulifera*) - already in fruit!, Carnation Sedge (*Carex panicea*). }} Other than the Tormentil which was out in Havant Thicket on Apr 13 these are all new to my list. In East End, still following the Crockford Stream south, Martin met Elizabeth Young and Richard Reeves who happened to be sitting in a bed of Upright Chickweed with Heath Pearlwort flowering in the same area (I must look out for both species on South Hayling where I found Heath Pearlwort last year and see that Francis Rose has recorded the Chickweed in SZ 7198 - Lousewort should also be flowering in the Sandy Point reserve on Hayling). In the Sowley Brooms wood south of East End and west of Sowley Pond Martin found lots of Narrow-leaved Lungwort beside the north-south ride (it may be choked out by other growth before long), and found more when he turned west on the other track. Later in the day Martin went east to Kings Copse Inclosure (between the Beaulieu River and Fawley refinery) but could not find the Lungwort said to be here - he did however add Bitter Vetch to the year list of flowering plants, reminding me to look for it in Havant Thicket and the south of Blendworth Common..

INSECTS:

SUN 28 APR

It's good to hear a couple more reports of Grizzled Skipper (one in Botley Woods seen by Richard Carpenter yesterday and four of them seen on Magdalen Hill Down by Patrick Fleet on Apr 24). Much more interesting to me however was the sighting of four Brown Argus on Magdalen Hill Down by Patrick on Apr 24, which is a very early date for this species. I think the comment supposedly made by Phil Budd may have been 'twisted in translation' as it says that he was not surprised to hear of the Brown Argus but was very surprised by the Grizzled Skippers (Phil saw one there himself on Apr 15, one day earlier than Jim Berry's sighting of one at Kingley Vale).

Today's gale was not conducive to butterfly flight but I did enjoy the sight of a Green Veined White roosting on a Bluebell flowerhead here in Havant this afternoon.

THU 25 APR

Today David Thelwell was by the Itchen Navigation not far south of Winchester where he saw two Mayflies emerge from the water. Whether these were the first for the year I have no idea but I feel more confident that two Azure Damselflies seen at Titchfield Haven today were among the earliest to emerge (and are the only ones I have heard of so far). Another first for the year came from Barry Collins on Thorney Island where he had the first two Blue-tailed Damsels and one Large Red. At Titchfield Haven more than 15 Large Red Damselflies showed that their season is now fully under way. Speckled Wood butterflies are also well established now and a new emergence brought one to my garden in Havant and 14 of them to Richard at the Haven. Yesterday Lawrence Holloway found Wood Ants stirring in one of their big nests in the Botany Bay wood (close to the A285 just south of Duncton and east of Seaford College) - Green Tiger Beetles were also out hunting there.

On Apr 23 Lynn Fomison came on a Painted Lady in the Ropley/Bramdean area and on the evening of Apr 22 a migrant Diamond Back moth was trapped at Rye in East Sussex (with it was another migrant, The Gem, but that had already been recorded in the influx that occurred back on March 7).

Here in Emsworth I see that three Small Tortoiseshell were seen at Brook Meadow on Apr 23.

WED 24 APR

Barry Collins date of Apr 22 for the emergence of Small Copper was matched by Phil Budd at Netley on the shore of Southampton Water where he saw three of them, but his excitement was dampened by one of the rangers of the Royal Victoria Country Park who had seen one in the previous week. Phil has however recorded the earliest date I have heard of for Green Hairstreak with one at Magdalen Hill Down on Apr 9 (equalling the first date last year but still one day later than the year 2000). Also at Magdalen Hill Down Phil had a Grizzled Skipper on Apr 15 with a Red Twin-spot Carpet moth on that day and a first Ruby Tiger on Apr 18.

Two more moth firsts were recorded recently at Titchfield Haven. On Sunday night (Apr 21) they had a Chocolate-tip in their moth trap and on the previous night (Apr 20) a Scarce Prominent

(there is a good photo of the latter on the Titchfield Haven web site page. Also on Saturday (Apr 20) Lawrence Holloway detected less welcome insects, Lily Beetles, in his garden at Pagham.

When I was in Havant Thicket this afternoon I watched a small cloud of very black flies above a Goat Willow tree and am pretty sure they were St Mark's Flies, so named because they first appear around that saint's day (Apr 25). These were not the first, as Richard Carpenter had seen some at Chilling Copse on Apr 22.

A very early Black-tailed Skimmer dragonfly was seen today by Lawrence Holloway at Ambersham Common, south east of Midhurst, to start the real dragonfly season. Lawrence thinks it was very recently emerged and had not yet acquired its true colour.

Brian Fellows tells me that he has just been given a most unusual present - the pupa of an Elephant Hawkmoth - and intends to 'inter' it in the ground of Brook Meadow where it will have a great choice of Willowherb on which (if it is a female) to lay its eggs. The gift came from a gardener whose Fuchsias had been denuded by the caterpillars of this moth, and when this gardener found one of the pupae in the soil she decided to 'donate' it to the local conservation group.

MON 22 APR

Small Copper and Wall Brown have both appeared on Thorney Island and been seen by Barry Collins - the Wall Browns emerged on Saturday (Apr 20) and the Small Copper today - seen with Large White, Holly Blues and Speckled Woods. In the north of Hampshire Rob Edmunds witnessed another milestone in the insect year when he found the first Cockchafer in his moth trap this morning (presumably it was flying last night). Rob's trap has had Brimstone moth, Swallow Prominent and Iron Prominent recently, and on Apr 16 I commented on the difference in dates between the first records from north Hampshire and its south coast in connection with Rob's first Swallow Prominent. I see this also applies to the Iron Prominent which Philip Hack recorded in Southampton on Apr 5

John Goodspeed seems to have been first with news of another moth - Small Waved Umber - which he found at his home on Portsdown sometime last week (I have noted the date as Apr 21 by default). Also on the evening of Apr 21 Barry Collins had his moth trap on here in Havant and recorded 1 Powdered Quaker, 1 Clouded Drab, 2 Nut-tree Tussock, 1 Common Quaker and 1 Muslin Moth. Clouded Drab and Common Quaker have been seen earlier (Lee Marshall found a Common Quaker in his flat on Feb 19!) but I think the other three species are all firsts.

Alan Cokes has sent me a clear close up photo of a large cluster of small white insect eggs laid on a 'knuckle' of a branch of a Camellia bush in his Waterlooville garden - I have no idea of what species laid them but if anyone can offer suggestions or wants to look at the photo just drop me a line.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 28 APR

Having recently commented on the paucity of Hare sightings this spring I am glad to see that Robert Watson found four of them in fields beside the A340 road north of Basingstoke last week (Apr 25), but I am even more pleased to recall a sighting of 16 Hares in the Broadlands estate at Romsey on Feb 11 this year, seen by David Thelwell.

FRI 26 APR

Brian Fellows gives me the good news that there is definitely at least one pair of Water Voles active in the River Ems at the Brook Meadow site where they were seen on Apr 23 along with one Eel in the water. Water Voles are also doing well at the Winnall Moors site on the Itchen in Winchester but the absence of a comma in the account of their status which appeared on the HWT website today makes it appear that they have a strange diet - the report says {{ Water voles are regular sights, feeding on the river margins and fresh otter spraint ... }} Had the comma been included after river margins we would then have read as a separate item that otter spraint shows that otters are flourishing here.

TUE 23 APR

I know that Red Deer can be found in the New Forest but I have never come upon them myself so I was very pleased to hear today that Giles Darvill had come across 12 hinds of this species

when walking today in remote part of the New Forest, not too far from Burley. It's probably not wise to give too accurate a location and to hope that the beasts remain unseen by the poachers and by the 'wildlife photographers' intent on getting close-up pictures, let alone the dog walkers!

Here in Havant David Parker tells me that he much enjoyed a close view of two Fox Cubs last Saturday when driving down East Leigh road (running between the BUPA hospital and the Denvilles area). This reminds me of seeing cubs in what was probably the same spot one lovely spring morning several years ago - the cubs were up on a bank, peering at me round the trunk of a large old oak tree.

MON 22 APR

Walking on Fritham Plain in the New Forest today (with not a human being in sight) Giles Darvill came on a group of 24 Fallow Deer out in the open in the middle of the afternoon when they might be expected to be hiding up in woodland cover - Giles says the sight of them behaving so naturally was like a natural scene from the Serengeti in Africa rather than the over-populated and highly regulated New Forest. Another natural scene was witnessed by Charles Cuthbert last night at Alresford Pond where at least 20 small bats (Pipstrelles?) and three or four larger ones (Noctules?) were feeding over and around the pond at dusk. Less natural has been the deserted scene in many Hampshire farm fields from which the Hares have vanished - Graham Osborne tells me he has seen a few around Cheesefoot Head and at Old Winchester Hill in the past month, but where are the reports of twenty or more Hares in the fields beside the Test below Romsey, and the sightings which I used to record beside the A3 at Blendworth or the fields east and north of Stansted House?

One large mammal that can still be seen not far from Havant is the Common Seal. Over the past few years numbers in Chichester and Langstone harbours seem to have been increasing and we have had occasional sightings of pups (not all surviving), and this trend looks set to continue this year with a report from Barry Collins of seven seals in Chichester Harbour last Saturday (Apr 20).

WEEK 16 APR 15 - 21

BIRDS:

SUN 21 APR

Will Walmsley today claimed the first Hampshire Whitchat of the year at Farlington Marshes, and I have heard nothing to refute this claim though there was a surprising second hand report of two having been seen on the Isle of White on Mar 24 (nothing since heard of them!). Yesterday Will watched a Swift fly north east over Winchester, but this was not the first - Trevor Carpenter had seen one fly east over Fareham Creek before 8:45 that morning. As far as I know these are the first to reach England (though no doubt I will soon be told of others in Devon or Kent!). +++
These are just two species among a whole host which have been arriving this week, starting on Tuesday (Apr 16) when hundreds of Willow Warblers were said to have arrived at Selsey Bill with one or two each of Pied Flycatcher and Common Redstart. Another single Pied Flycatcher was at Beachy Head on Wednesday (Apr 17) and four of them were seen at Church Norton on Apr 18, along with 3 Grasshopper Warblers, 3 Ring Ouzels and 2 more Redstarts. On Apr 19 female Cuckoos were reported from East Head and Sidlesham Ferry, and yesterday (Apr 20) another Grasshopper Warbler was said on the pagers to have been at Keyhaven. With the weekend birders out in force there was a flood of reports of migrant arrivals, mainly from Sussex but Mark Litjens did tell us of 3 Nightingales in the Botley Woods and David Holland heard a Nightingale in the Test Valley along Bunny Lane at Casbrook Common (David gives a grid ref of SU 3524-87 - probably a good site for Nightingale as this spot on my map has a couple of Ponds within the Casbrook Common area). Saturday sightings from Sussex start with two separate Grasshopper Warblers (Thorney Island and Beachy Head). At Newhaven one among seven Swallows was said to have had orange underparts (Red-rumped Swallow??) and 3 Yellow Wagtails flew over, while at Brighton another 3 Yellow Wagtails were seen with 1 House Martin, 9 Whitethroats and over 40 Willow Warblers. At Amberley in the

Arun valley two more Nightingales were singing.

Seawatching has been hotting up and on Wednesday (Apr 17) the log from Selsey Bill included 1084 Common and 7 Velvet Scoter, 200 Commic and 196 Sandwich tern along with 10 Little Tern, 20 Little Gulls, 10 Arctic Skua, 4 Long-tailed Duck and 2 Great Northern Divers. On Apr 19 six more Velvet Scoter went past Selsey, and on Apr 20 watchers at Newhaven saw 4 Bonxies, 8 Arctic Skuas, 21 Whimbrel, 120 Sandwich Tern, 133 Common Tern and 189 Common Scoter as well as 4 Little Gulls (and a single Brent going the wrong way -west). At Selsey yesterday there were 27 Little Tern plus 2 Arctic Skuas and 2 Great Northern Divers. Today's news includes a Red-necked Grebe off Birling Gap near Beachy Head, and a list of 250 Commic Terns, 23 Little Terns, 38 Little Gulls and 22 Velvet Scoter off Seaford with 4 Arctic and 2 Great Skuas. All these Scoters were probably seen at St Catherine's Point as they passed the Isle of Wight where a few more Terns and Scote were seen along with 6 Kittiwake. Very few reports have been of waders but today Gary Calderwood again reports Sanderling passing Gosport (in this case 14 of them going west off Gilkicker Point) - as none of the other seawatching points have similar sightings of Sanderling I can only guess that these are birds still winter resident in the Solent (perhaps Ryde Sands area?) which regularly pass Gosport as the tide drives them from feeding to roosting areas.

It has been a good week for raptors - one of the more interesting sightings was made by Mike Jones when in the New Forest where he saw a Hobby being chased by a Merlin today. Also today John Eyre had a male Hen Harrier over the Aldershot area. Yesterday a female Merlin came in off the sea at Newhaven and on Thursday (Apr 18) a Short-eared Owl flew in over Brighton marina - another was seen at Amberley on that day and on Saturday (Apr 20) Barry Collins told us that he still has two resident on Thorney Island where, also on Saturday, he again had two Ospreys and a female Marsh Harrier. Another large bird said to have been in the Hampshire sky yesterday (Apr 20) was a White Stork seen by 'anon' and put out on the pagers as flying east from Hedge End towards Fareham (back on Tuesday Apr 16 there was another report of an unidentified Stork over Brighton but that was heading northeast away from Hampshire). Another bird worth a mention, especially following Russell Wynn's story (see Apr 18) of a close encounter with a tame Purple Heron on Pevensy Levels, is a drake Garganey which on Friday (Apr 19) was giving similar close up views in a 'roadside ditch' on the Pevensy levels.

Early mist soon cleared to give a pleasant morning at Warblington Farm for our fourth CBC visit. Two Swallows, perched together on a wire above the farmyard, set the tone for a morning of summer migrants with Willow Warbler and Chiff Chaff, Common and Lesser Whitethroat, Blackcap and Sedge Warbler all recorded on the farm and a distant Cuckoo heard from it. Along the Chichester Harbour shore which borders the farm on its southern side one Common Tern was seen and the first party of whistling Whimbrel was heard. One late Snipe was the only reminder of winter, and small parties of Starlings hectically rummaging in short grass showed that they now have young in their nests (back at home a Starling eggshell on my front lawn told me that the pair in one of my chimneys is among the proud parents). No juvenile birds were seen on the farm but the presence of both Little Owl out of their nest may have been a sign that the living quarters are getting a bit crowded and that the parents have been sent out to bring back more food - one parent was on the tree next to the one with the nest hole, the other was a couple of fields away. Tony Gutteridge saw the Owls and also saw a Great Spotted Woodpecker chucking unwanted scraps of wood out from its nest hole. Tony also commented that a sudden increase in the number of Moorhen on the farm this year may be the result of last year's F&M restrictions - fewer people walking their dogs, more success by ground nesting bids?. +++

Three of the shore fields on Warblington Farm have only just been ploughed and were being rolled today - these three fields are the ones over which Skylarks have been singing earlier in the spring, and today just two birds were still singing above the fields in an attempt to keep up their spirits in the face of adversity? One other Skylark was singing over and briefly landed on another field, but we will have to wait and see if it moves there permanently. On the newly rolled fields some 80 Black-headed Gulls had landed, and among them four adult Med Gulls stood out prominently. Overhead a party of four Shelduck performed their noisy, slow-speed,

wing-whistling display flight.

SAT 20 APR

A cycle ride to the Oysterbeds on Hayling just before dusk gave me my first Little Terns, three of them, calling and flying over the nest island, but making no attempt to land before they flew off south into the harbour - I wonder if their calls were a commentary on the changes to the island since they were last here - reshaping of the surface, doubling the number of lettered posts identifying the separate breeding plots, and the appearance of the neat rows of 'allotment garden sheds' in which their chick can shelter from rain and Kestrel attack. Also in the Oysterbed pools, in addition to some 20 Redshank and 30 Turnstone were four silent Whimbrel, one equally silent Ringed Plover and a summer plumaged Spotted Redshank which I would have overlooked had it not repeated it's 'choo-it' call. On shore one of the Linnets had its bill full of nest material, and high overhead, going east over Langstone Bridge, were a party of around 14 Shelduck (heading for Holland?) +++

Coming back past Langstone Pond the Cetti's Warbler was calling, but was drowned out when a pair of cackling Canada Geese landed briefly on the water before thankfully taking off again. With dusk now close at hand a single Grey Heron also took off from the pond, and in the Wade Court trees to the north of the pond I counted a minimum of 20 Egrets settling down for the night - with this number in mid-April I think we may see the roost remaining in use throughout the breeding season.

John Shillitoe was out on his regular Saturday cycle ride from Wickham to Hambledon and back down the Meon Valley today, finding only 6 Corn Bunting in the Hoe Cross area (admittedly not in the early evening when the big flock is said to appear), but going on the find a lovely flock of 340 Golden Plover in summer plumage in the Green Lane area north of Hambledon (Green Lane is a long road going from the centre of Hambledon to Big West End Farm near Chidden and I think these birds are in the section going north east from the main Hambledon to Droxford road). Another good roadside sighting today was of a pair of Grey Partridge beside what sounds like a quiet minor road called Luzborough Lane in the Romsey area - it turns out to be a busy stretch of the A27! At Woolmer Pond at least two Brambling are still present (also on Apr 21).

FRI 19 APR

A Grasshopper Warbler was one of four 'firsts of the year' at Farlington Marshes today according to Bob Chapman's news on the HWT website this evening - the other three were Reed Warbler, Common Sandpiper and a smart drake Garganey. The 'Gropper' (an ugly but generally accepted abbreviation of the mouthful 'Grasshopper Warbler') was not the first in Hampshire - Bob Marchant claimed that with one at Hook Lake near Warsash on Apr 7 after Ed Griffiths put in an unsuccessful bid based on a bird making unusual noises in the Point Field at Farlington on Mar 16 (Ed accepts that his bird was not 'reeling', and no one so far has recorded this elusive bird as having any other vocal repertoire!). The Garganey also was not the first for Hampshire (it is I think a relatively late bird for the county) - my notes tell me that the first was at Normandy (Lymington) on Mar 27 followed by one at Budds Farm on Mar 28, two drakes at Titchfield Haven on Mar 29, and a pair at Woolmer Pond which arrived on Mar 30 and were still there on Apr 6. Other sightings in the county have included two pairs at Hook on Apr 8 and two separate sightings at the Milton Common lakes on Apr 3 and 9. Today's bird at the Farlington Deeps was described by Jason Crook as 'very mobile' and is almost certainly the same one that showed for Ian Thirlwell at the Milton Lakes today. +++

Also seen at Farlington Marshes by Martin Gillingham this evening were a Short-eared Owl, two Gadwall and a couple of House Martins (the first seen at the Marshes only showed up yesterday).

I spent the morning at Idsworth Farm where two Swallows were perched on wires above the farm entrance to greet me as I drove in. The Swallows have been back at the farm for most of the week but a Cuckoo which I kept hearing throughout the morning may have been a new arrival as I see that Stephen Harwood heard the first at Catherington this morning, as did Colin Bates in the Eastleigh area of the Itchen valley. Another bird which is currently becoming less of a rarity is House Martin - yesterday the first was seen at Farlington Marshes and today Steve Keen had his first in the Lymington area and Bob Marchant had two at Warsash though I have

still to see one here in Havant. While on the subject of arriving summer birds I see that a pair of Whitethroats were already busy nest building near St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today and that Redstarts are now common in the Acres Down area of the New Forest where Giles Darvill watched a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker high in a stag-headed oak and heard four Tree Pipits singing but could not find a single Wood Warbler - their average arrival date in Hampshire in recent years is given at Apr 22 but they were back on Apr 16 in 1999 and Apr 11 in 2000. +++

My walkabout at Idsworth Farm this morning encountered two Grey Partridge (possibly a remnant of the 50 released there in Sept 2000) and one of these must have been perched high in a tree from which I saw it fluttering down (showing its orange-red tail flashes) before it crashed into bushes along Huckswood Lane. Another chance observation was the calling of a Tawny Owl from in or near a really old massive Beech tree, now a twenty foot high stump which could well have a nesting owl. The calls drew my eyes to the tree and over it was a large raptor (probably a Buzzard but seen as a broad winged shape through the trees) flying with a Crow in pursuit - the owl probably thought it was under attack from them. No sight nor sound of Corn Bunting back here in this once regular site for them, and similarly no sign (other than fresh pellets) of the resident Barn Owls that may well have chicks by now - while I was out walking David Uren, whose farm this is, was fixing a new video camera to observe the nest. He had fixed a special infra-red camera there but could hardly make out the images it gave so he is now trying a more conventional approach with the camera connected (by a very long wire!) to the TV in his house - the theory being that the images appear on the screen and are at the same time captured by a normal video recorder for later inspection (fast forward cuts down the boredom of real time nest watching!). And finally ... lying on the ground below the owl nest box were two freshly shot rats, put there in the hope of saving the owls a couple of longer journeys to fetch food for their young. If anyone has ever heard of owls taking dead food I would like to hear of it - my guess is that this will only provide food for foxes. Perhaps if the corpses were actually put on the platform outside the nesting compartment of the owl box that would be more acceptable - the female might think the male had left them there for her and the chicks?

On Wednesday (Apr 17) I passed on Barry Collins observation of the first Osprey back in Chichester Harbour, catching a fish off Pilsey, eating it on the sands, then going for a snooze on Stakes Island. Yesterday an Osprey could be seen perched on a post in the Pilsey area for a couple of hours before it caught a fish and flew north west with it towards Emsworth, and today Barry saw two Ospreys around the south of Thorney Island. Earlier in the morning Brian Fellows had been in the extreme north east of Chichester Harbour carrying out his Breeding Bird Survey in the Fishbourne area where he found just seven Swans on the water of Fishbourne Channel where the summer flock will soon start to build to 100+ birds (although I did not mention it in my last update I found 15 Swans at the Broadmarsh slipway on Wednesday Apr 17 and mentally noted that as a start of the flock building there). Also on Fishbourne Channel Brian noted 20 Dunlin and 18 Black-tailed Godwit along with 1 Snipe, 4 Redshank and 6 Shelduck (two Great Blackbacks, if adult birds, were probably unusual at this time of year), and on land I am pleased to see that he found 9 Rook nests in trees where I think he was afraid that the rookery had been purposefully destroyed last year (but this year there were no Jackdaws anywhere in the area, and only 3 Starlings and 2 House Sparrows in the surveyed square). Almost inevitably Blackcaps were the commonest songsters!

News of wildfowl in inland Hampshire comes from Dave Pearson who was at Alresford Pond this evening, and from Mike Wall at the Vyne floods north of Basingstoke. Both report good numbers of Gadwall (30 birds at both sites) and Teal (again 16 birds at each site). Special at the Vyne were four Little Ringed Plover, ten Redshank and twenty five Lapwing, and at Alresford the pair of Great Crested Grebes and two Pochard were seen but no Ruddy Ducks, perhaps because this was an evening visit, though that made the absence of roosting Cormorant and Egrets the more significant (there were also no gulls).

Recently I was surprised to hear of Woodlark in a part of the Meon Valley where I have not heard of them before, and today I am pleased to say that I have further news of a pair almost certainly nesting in the valley. Their numbers in this area have fallen in recent years but I can at least say they are not yet extinct here! I wonder if anyone else has news of how they are faring in

other parts of Hampshire (just impressions of their current status in the New Forest and north east Hampshire, without revealing exact sites).

Tony Parkinson tells me that one of the Great Crested Grebes was back on the IBM Lake today, but if it was one of the pair which nested here last year it may have felt crowded out as there were 5 Swans at the west end of the lake (including the resident pair in whose well constructed nest Tony could see no eggs so far). Better news was that two Cetti's Warblers could be heard and Tony was lucky enough to actually see one of them.

Richard Carpenter tells me that the Black-winged Stilts seen at Titchfield Haven last Wednesday (Apr 17) were a one day wonder with no further sightings yesterday or today. The two Avocets, however, are still around though it sounds as if they have made one or two trips along the coast to Hook. Peter Raby was also at the Haven today and saw one Little Tern offshore with a young male Eider. Two Greylag Geese flew away from the reserve, but in it there were still 37 Black-tailed Godwit, 3 Dunlin and a Common Sandpiper.

Other items in today's news that I have not already mentioned include two Yellow Wagtails at Hook/ Warsash (again just flying north). On the Isle of Wight there were still some 130 Black-tailed Godwit in Newtown Harbour with 2 Knot, 1 Ruff, 1 Turnstone, 1 Greenshank and a Common Sandpiper. On the Hampshire coast at Hook Trevor Carpenter was puzzled by a Great-blackback Gull with pink legs and yellow feet but also saw his first two Lesser Blackbacks for the site this spring with 20 Black-tailed Godwit and 2 Brent (presumably intending to stay the summer) and a female Eider offshore

THU 18 APR

Today's big local news is that a Nightingale is back at Marlpit Lane (near the A27 between Emsworth and Chichester) on the same day as it returned there last spring - this according to Brian Felows who heard it at around 8pm this evening. To the south of Marlpit Lane two separate Marsh Harriers were seen over Thorney Island during the day by Barry Collins - he watched a young male over the Little Deeps for 30 minutes and saw the second bird in the Pilsey area where an Osprey caught a fish, a Yellow Wagtail flew over north and two Med Gulls were present. +++

In Langstone Harbour the Purple Heron was still present at Farlington Marshes but very elusive - this bird has occasioned some interesting reminiscences of Purple Herons on HOSLIST, mostly of the very hard to see type of bird but also an account from Russell Wynn of how he was almost knocked off his bicycle, when riding at the Pevensy Levels in April 1996, by a Purple Heron which preferred to feed on the roadside verges and ditches with no thought of taking cover - it attracted a big following and gave excellent close up photos for several days. (Please note that I got my dates muddled over the arrival of this bird - it was first seen on Sunday Apr 14, not the day before).

Another reminiscence comes from Mike Bramwell in response to my question about the re-use of nests by birds such as Thrushes. As I expected he is certain that these birds always build a new nest for each brood, and this makes a lot of sense as the presence of large chicks in the nest is bound to attract attention to the nest site (as well as leaving it in a dirty and damaged condition) so a new nest is advisable for health, safety and security reasons. The arguments are slightly different for birds that construct large and durable nests in a limited number of available sites (crows, swans, raptors etc) which do repair and re-use old nests. Mike's reminiscence is connected with casting back a good fifty years in his memory to the days when as a youth he was intimately aware of all the local birds nests around the Jaywick Marshes in Essex, where he lived. He touches a chord that will be familiar to most older birders when he says that when he was a boy Red-backed Shrikes nested within fifty yards of his house - today that site is lost in 25 square miles of housing... Mike also reminds me that this has happened in the lifetime of a single Manx Shearwater that is currently in the news, whose ring shows it to have lived for around 50 years so far.

Derek Hale's Isle of Wight website has several items of general interest today, starting with a male Merlin still to be seen near St Catherine's Point (maybe just arrived from the continent), a female Ring Ouzel on West High Down near the Needles and a couple of Corn Buntings in the Whale Chine area. Six Rock Pipits were seen in the West High Down area (presumably

breeding birds? I usually omit Derek's references to Ravens and Peregrines that are also likely to be nesting now but I don't think there is much of a trade in Rock Pipit eggs, even if you manage to find the actual nests!).

At Woolmer Pond Moira Doherty found the summer plumaged male Brambling still present today - a very smart bird - and at Titchfield Haven Peter Raby recorded a single Bar-tailed Godwit with 45 Black-tailed, 2 Wigeon and 2 House Martins. Yesterday at Stokes Bay Peter watched a flock of 15 Arctic Terns fly by, along with single first year Little Gull and Arctic Skua. +++
Bob Chapman tells us on the HWT website that Apr 16 was the date of the first arrivals at Farlington Marshes of Cuckoo, Lesser Whitethroat, Common Redstart and Little Tern this year

WED 17 APR

Peter Raby was on the seafront at Titchfield Haven early this morning when his attention was drawn from the sea to the scrapes as he followed the flight of two Black-winged Stilts flying in - he was not the only person to enjoy the sight of these birds as they stayed on the scrapes throughout the day and may well remain there for a few days. I think the reserve was kept open late in the evening for this special event, and Doug Robertson says that when he was there he had the two Stilts, two Avocet and a Little Egret all in his scope at the same time. Other birds seen at the Haven today included the regular Barn Owl, still hunting over the reserve at 10:15am when Richard Carpenter was there, 42 Black-tailed Godwit, 2 late Wigeon, and a mass of newly arrived Sedge Warbler heard singing everywhere. Passing birds included 6 Swallows, 1 Common Sandpiper, 1 Sanderling, and small numbers of Terns (Common and Sandwich) and Dunlin. One adult Med Gull and a couple of Canada Geese added to the scene.

Another major event in the spring calendar was the arrival today of the first Osprey in Chichester Harbour. Unlike other migrant Ospreys which I have reported earlier this year this one did not just sweep through and vanish but was seen by Barry Collins to catch a fish in the water off Pilsley Island, then to spend the best part of an hour eating it on Pilsley Sands before moving to roost on Stakes Island which lies between the tip of Thorney and Cobnor Point - having found a good fishing spot with disturbance free dining and sleeping places this bird may well decide that it is in no great hurry to head on north.

Official but cautious confirmation of the Purple Heron at Farlington Marshes came today in a one sentence entry on the HWT website by Bob Chapman, dated April 17 and reading {{ A Purple Heron was sighted this week at Farlington Marshes. }} That doesn't give too much away about it's length of stay or location and all I can add is that it has apparently been in the area around the reserve building since last Saturday (Apr 13) and you are lucky if it shows for more than a minute a day - last sighting reported at 7pm this evening when the bird made a brief flight over the reeds near the building. This bird may have been around in Hampshire for some time as today's messages include one passing on an unconfirmed report of a Purple Heron seen as long ago as April 8 flying south east over the Itchen Valley country park (heading roughly for Farlington).

I think that the few sighting of House Martins so far this year have been of birds still on the move, but a message from Doug Robertson reporting two over Hambledon village this evening could be of birds that have reached their intended destination - this is no more than a guess based on the fact that there is no pond or stream in the village (at least at this time of year when flooding is not a current problem!) to attract the birds to feed on the insects that emerge from water. +++

A message from Martin Gillingham, who works in an office overlooking Victoria Park in central Portsmouth, offers much more certainty about birds having chosen their nest site. On March 11 this year he told us how a Sparrowhawk landed on a regular perch visible from his office window, and how a mob of seven Magpies surrounded it and tried to scare it off by shouting abuse. The Sparrowhawk took no notice of them until one of the Magpies began to break off twigs from the tree above the hawk and drop them on its back, which did cause it to fly off. Today Martin sends us an update on this story - far from scaring the Sparrowhawk off from its chosen tree there is now a pair of Sparrowhawks building a nest there and this morning Martin watched them mating - no mention of the Magpies in this message.

Other people out birding this morning included Trevor Carpenter - at Stokes Bay, Gosport, he watched 1 Little Gull, 1 Common Scoter, 49 Sandwich and 16 Common Terns all fly east.

Inland north of Emsworth Brian Fellows made his first visit to his Breeding Bird Survey plot on the eastern side of the Southleigh Forest, seeing nothing of special interest in the wood but finding his first Common Whitethroat and Swallow of the year over farmland east of the forest. A pair of Yellowhammer and a small group of Linnet were also seen along the hedgerows and will hopefully nest. More evident signs of nesting came from the Isle of Wight where at least three Cetti's Warblers were seen carrying nest material in the Bembridge area, and 41 Sanderling were seen off Ryde (no thoughts of them nesting!).

When I went out before breakfast to replenish the garden bird feeders the lawn had nothing unusual on it but an hour later I spotted something that looked a bit like a discarded banana skin in the middle of the close mown grass. When I went to have a closer look I found a freshly dead frog with no sign of how it had arrived there, and an hour later I looked again and found the frog had been reduced to two back legs and the bone structure that connects them, the bones picked as clean as if by ants. Although I have no visual proof I'm pretty sure the predator with a taste for breakfasting on raw frog was a Magpie ...

TUE 16 APR

The first Little Tern to enter Hampshire waters was in the west Solent last Sunday (Apr 14) but I have yet to hear of any in Langstone Harbour. Today Barry Collins reports that they are closing in, with one seen by him near the mouth of Chichester Harbour. Another first for Barry was a Cuckoo on Thorney Island near the Deeps, maybe arriving as part of a small wave of migrants that brought 20 Willow Warblers, 5 Wheatear and a male Redstart to Culver Down on the Isle of Wight (just about visible from Thorney Island), and a Common Sandpiper to Newtown Harbour on the Island.

Possibly arriving with the same wave of migrants, a Spoonbill was seen at Beaulieu today by Rosi Woods and a Nightingale was heard singing at 11pm in Botley Woods by John Shillitoe. Inland at Alresford Pond Charles Cuthbert checked the birds present this evening, finding 20 Swallows (there have been up to 50 there this week), 60 Sand Martins and 4 House Martins. Only 2 Cormorant had arrived to roost but there is now a good selection of 'resident' wildfowl - more than 48 Gadwall, 20 Tufted Duck, 18 Mallard, 10 Shelduck, 6 Pochard and 6 Teal with 2 Shoveler. Four Ruddy Duck were seen this evening but at least 6 are thought to be present. One Green Sandpiper flew over.

This being a Tuesday Brian Fellows was in Portsmouth and, at Baffins Pond, the annual mystery of the disappearing Barnacle Geese had taken place, leaving just four of them on the pond instead of the expected ten birds. Most people now know of the erratic winter movements of the feral geese between Baffins Pond and Titchfield Haven, but these similar erratic movements in spring have no known destination. On July 10 last year I wrote {{ I wonder if there is someone out there who knows the secret of where the Barnacle Geese that seem to be based at Baffins Pond go to when they are not at Baffins? We know that each year they move en masse from Baffins to Titchfield Haven (in company with a single Snow Goose and an odd hybrid Bar-Head Goose) in the autumn (end of September) and return to Baffins in the Spring (early February), but it is the erratic disappearance of sub-groups of this flock that is puzzling. Last year (2000) there were 12 Barnacles at Baffins up to Aug 22, then one disappeared leaving 11 at Baffins until Sept 26, shortly after which date they all flew to Titchfield. On Feb 6 this year just 10 returned to Baffins but on Apr 2 they were down to 9 and for most of April there were only 8, then there were only 4 or 5 (with 7 on a couple of days) through May and June. Now today all 11 have re-appeared with the Snow Goose and hybrid Bar-Head, but where have they been in the meanwhile??? }} +++

Other birds at Baffins today included one pair of Canada Geese with a nest (out of a total of 30 Canadas there), a pair of Swans with as yet no nest, 62 Mallard and 44 Tufted Duck. At Milton Common one Reed and four Cetti's Warblers were singing, one pair of Swans were sitting, and the lone male Gadwall was still hanging around (and a summer plumaged pair of Med Gulls made a smart addition to the scenery as they presumably wait to move to a nest site on the harbour islands). In the Eastney Lake area the Mute Swan pair are still present but with no nest, and other birds were 1 Egret, 2 Common Tern, 2 Black-tailed Godwit, 3 Shelduck and 5 Merganser - the latter will not be around for much longer and the Brent had already gone.

Alan Thurbon has recently had a query from a Kent birder who happened to be at Lepe recently

and saw Brent still present there. Alan asked if I had any comment and so I sent him the following ... In response to your query about the presence of Brent at Lepe after the main departure of these birds I can only quote the experience of past years with no explanation of where these late birds come from (perhaps Brittany?). Birds of Hampshire (published 1993) says ... Most usually leave by late March (but) at the Beaulieu estuary a build up occurs in late April and early May. In 1986 478 were there on May 6; counts there exceeded 50 in every subsequent year up to 1992, when 520 were present on May 3 and on that day 128 flew past Sandy Point, Hayling Island. Looking at my website entries for last year this pattern is still true. On 13 May 2001 the count at Lepe was 171 and on that day 90 flew past Stokes Bay at Gosport. On April 29 there were 175 at Lepe and on Apr 25 a flock of 46 flew past Stokes Bay. In addition to these late passage birds a growing number of birds spend the summer in Langstone and Chichester Harbours - I would expect 6 to 12 birds to remain in Langstone and 14-20 in Chichester Harbour. These are not apparently old or injured birds, and are seen in small groups around the harbour shores until mid-May, then hide away during the summer, but in early September they re-appear after their moult, tempting people to record them as the first migrant arrivals.

Among today's other messages I see that Peter Raby found three Brent still present at Titchfield Haven and around Stockbridge Mike Jones had Fieldfare (just 3 over) and Golden Plover (6 in summer plumage, present through the past week). Further down the Test at Casbrook Common Phil Lord had both Cuckoo and Whitethroat today, along with a Swallow and 60+ Sand Martins (Birds of Hampshire shows three breeding colonies in this general area). Nearer Havant Swallows were back around established nest sites in a Catherington garden where a Song Thrush has a nest in ivy on a wall and both Bullfinch and Yellowhammer visit the garden, possibly nesting on nearby Catherington Down.

Stonechat song is something that I hear only once every few years - no doubt for those who are out in heathland every day it is common enough, but even there it is easily overlooked among more strident and regular songsters, or possibly mistaken for the sound of a Dunnock or Linnet. Today was one of my days for hearing it and seeing the bird making the sound as it perched on top of the wire fence surrounding the Hayling Golf Course at Gunner Point. Other birds heard on my round of Hayling Island were a Willow Warbler singing in the hedge beside the Hayling Coastal path where it passes the pillbox at the end of the path connecting to the West Lane bends, and the pair of Med Gulls on the shingle at Beachlands where I looked for the Ring-billed Gull but did not spot it. I listened for but did not hear the sound of Little Terns over the harbour (and, despite it being on the early side, the purring of Turtle Doves in their usual trees just south of Stoke Bay). Two birds seen only were the regular Kestrel over the Stoke Common area and a male Wheatear on a field of bare earth half way down the coastal path.

MON 15 APR

The chances of my hearing a Cuckoo this year have increased a little today with the arrival of two more - one heard by Paul Winter at Lee village by the River Test below Romsey and the other at Church Norton - but I doubt I will see a Yellow Wagtail, the only one of these today was at Pett to the east of Hastings, and yesterday just one more was recorded in the Worthing area. Also at Pett were four Water Rails, thought to be birds still on the move from winter to breeding sites, and single Fieldfare and Redwing. These winter Thrushes have been seen widely during the week, with a flock of 60 Fieldfare at Danehill (northwest of Haywards Heath and close to Horsted Keynes in East Sussex) on Friday (Apr 12) and 12 seen by Andrew Howard near Petworth in West Sussex yesterday. Single Fieldfare were at both Lancing and Winchester yesterday and a few Redwing have been with most of these Fieldfare sightings. As well as the single Redwing at Pett today Lee Marshall had at least one heard flying over Fareham at 1am (with others going over his home at Gosport on the previous night).

Other winter birds still with us include 3 or 4 Brambling and up to 20 Redpoll at Woolmer Pond today - I suppose the Redpoll might stay to breed locally and I am pretty certain that Richard Ford, who saw them, hopes that the large number of Little Grebe (at least 24 of them) will nest there. In the Meon valley near Wickham Will Walmsley was delighted to recognize a couple of small duck flying over his Shedfield garden as Mandarin, and he is pretty confident that they may be nesting in nearby woodland. Further down the Meon at Titchfield Haven the winter

flock of Black-tailed Godwit seems to have dropped by another 20 and was down to just 47 today (Peter Raby's count from outside the reserve) but Peter also saw 10 Wigeon still present. Three Little Egret seen there could be local breeders from the Gosport area, as could seven Great Crested Grebe intending to nest on the reserve. The same would not be true of a couple of Brent, nor of a single Bar-tailed Godwit which dropped in to join the Black-tails (with so few Bar-tails this winter it is probably glad of their company!). +++

Over on the Isle of Wight at Yarmouth today another 30+ Black-tailed Godwit were seen with 3 Whimbrel and 2 Wigeon plus a juvenile Little Gull but bird of the day there was a Spotted Redshank in full summer plumage

Andy Collins thought he had seen an Iceland Gull fly up the River Itchen at Woolston when he was cycling over the Itchen Bridge last Tuesday (see Apr 9) and the bird was subsequently seen distantly by Ian Watts, but today Ian got closer to it and discovered that it was the leucistic Herring Gull first picked out by Richard Bonser earlier this year - its structure, brownish tinge to the white plumage, and above all its noisy cries gave it away.

My birding observations today were of domestic matters affecting the local birds, starting with an early morning view from my bedroom window of our 'front garden' Blackbird hen gathering masses of dry grass for nest building. By now this must be a second nest for the year and her actions made me wonder if it was normal for Blackbirds to build a second nest rather than re-use the one in which the first brood hatched - of course the first nest may have been destroyed by cat or Magpie, but if anyone knows the answer to my question I would like to hear it. +++

Heading out on my bike for a circuit along the coast east to Emsworth, Thorney and Prinsted another observation was of Goldcrest song - at least three separate birds heard en route - and in the Emsworth ponds I not only saw the Coot family of five young chicks on the Slipper pond but also noticed among the large flock of 'non-breeding' Swans on the Town Millpond three pairs which had moved away from the main flock and were going through the neck dipping motions of courtship (opposite the end of Waters-edge Gardens I even thought I could see a large egg lying on the bottom of the pond under water as further proof that Swans do not instinctively know the facts of life but have to learn them by youthful experiment). On Thorney Little Deeps a more experienced Swan is now sitting on the usual island nest site (as is the Emsworth Peter Pond bird - not yet vandalised this year!) +++

Two further observations were firstly of a House Sparrow collecting nest material, and secondly an indirect observation brought home to me, when talking to Elizabeth Aitchison in the Havant Tourist Info bureau, of one implication of the rock hard ground I had found throughout my cycle ride - Elizabeth commented that it was now impossible for the Blackbirds to find worms for their young, and when yesterday she put out a fresh hanging basket of soil (no flowers in it, just Nasturtium seeds) the garden Blackbirds immediately ransacked it for worms (the seeds were recovered from the patio floor uneaten!)

Just too late for the weekly bulletin of news that I put out last night for the Havant Wildlife Group came the first sighting of a Little Tern in Hampshire waters, seen by Steve Keen in the Hurst area, and a couple of other noteworthy sightings for yesterday are a Wood Sandpiper (pretty uncommon on spring passage) at Chingford Trout Pond (the lower end of Burton Mill Pond, west of Pulborough in Sussex), and (possibly) a Purple Heron at Farlington Marshes. All I know about this latter bird comes second hand from Will Walmsley who went to Farlington after being on Kevin Stouse's Pagham Harbour walk, did not see the bird himself but heard that it had showed briefly twice earlier in the day. Remembering the story of the great twitch to see one Purple Heron showing well on an inaccessible island (I forget where) that drew hundreds of birders before it was found to be stuffed, and having myself seen Grey Herons with very dark plumage, I hesitate to encourage people to look for a possible chimera (though we haven't yet got one of those on the British List!)

Steve Keen had a good day's birding in the New Forest and Lymington area today, clocking up 90 species and still getting home in time for his five year old's birthday party (and no doubt recriminations on not being there to help with the preparations!). In the Forest he heard Firecrest song and saw many Siskins, and on the coast he watched a pair of Peregrines collect a plump pigeon from a passing flock (hope they weren't racing!), saw a big flock of 214

Black-tailed Godwit (presumably pausing on their way north) and an unexpected total of 14 Egrets. Other sightings which interest me are of 48 Teal still present and the continuing presence of the male Garganey on Normandy lagoon which Steve says is remarkably tame (maybe it has lost its mate and doesn't know where to find another in this country?). Another layabout is a single Brent but I guess that the three Slavonian Grebe still there will not stay, though the flock of 12 Eider may remain through the summer and pass up the opportunity of breeding. +++

Kevin Stouse also had a good day out yesterday with the party of HOS birders that he led in the Chichester/Pagham area. They scored a total of 80 species, starting at the Chichester lakes with a Kingfisher and the chance to compare Blackcap and Garden Warbler song. Around Pagham Harbour they enjoyed a Short-eared Owl at work and saw the single Avocet and Ruff plus the two Whimbrel, three Bearded Tit and five Bar-tailed Godwit, also hearing Cetti's and Sedge Warbler song. No Reed Warbler there, but I see that Brian Fellows heard one by visiting the Arundel Wildfowl reserve.

Since Graham Roberts put up a Peregrine nestbox on the Sussex Heights tower block in central Brighton in 1998 it has been used to raise young each year, and last year the first egg was laid in the nest on March 24, so it is worrying to hear that there has been nothing happening at the nest so far. The pair were seen over Brighton on Apr 3 but that is about all. Maybe the parents are getting old, or maybe they are no longer happy with the nest site - last year work on the building seemed to disturb them and they ceased to roost there from July until November, and this year a second external camera has been installed which may not be to their liking. All we can do is wait and see ... +++

There is no shortage of Peregrines elsewhere and yesterday Steve Keen saw three of them over the Lymington marshes - two were a pair which he saw set off in pursuit of passing pigeons, returning with a plump pigeon in the talons of the female (nothing said as to whether she shared the meal with her mate). Other Peregrines, along with Ravens, regularly feature in news from the Isle of Wight.

Miscellaneous news from yesterday's birding includes a report from Paul Winter of the first juvenile House Sparrow out of its nest in the north of Southampton (here in Havant the birds are only now collecting material for what I assume to be their first nests). Paul also saw a better class of bird in the Baddesley area where his list included Lesser Spotted Woodpecker, Tawny Owl, and 11 Willow Warblers. If you enjoy birding in the Baddesley Common area you may wish to put in your comments to the Romsey planners in respect of an application to use fields there for flying model aircraft - a use which could destroy the peace and quiet of the area and have an adverse effect on bird life (though I know of one HOS member who joined the society after becoming interested in the raptors which seemed to be attracted to the model aircraft he used to fly - maybe they were trying to chase the aircraft out of their territory). If you wish to put your view write to Planning Services, Test Valley Borough Council, Council Offices, Duttons Road, Romsey, quoting reference TVS09349/1 by 3rd May 2002. +++

Down at Barton on sea Giles Darvill tells us that no Sand Martins have yet returned to their breeding colony in the sea cliffs, and from East Meon Christoph Harwood reports that Rooks are now sitting but his walk on Saturday only turned up one Lapwing +++

Sussex news for Saturday (Apr 13) mentions a Swallow with reddish underparts (Red-rumped ??) seen over the Westhampnett lake at Chichester where you could still see four Little Gulls (and a fifth was on a pool in the nearby Tangmere area). Four Great Northern Divers flew past Selsey and further east one Marsh Harrier was over Lewes Brooks and another over the Pevensey Levels (this latter bird was there on Apr 12 with what was thought to be an escaped Saker).

And finally .. the latest on what's going on at the Langstone South Moors. John Goodspeed tells me that the clearance of the Blackthorn around the Tamarisk pool is part of a plan approved by English Nature (this is an SSSI) and by the landowner, and suggested long ago by Bob Chapman, to provide more habitat for wading birds. The aim is to increase the wetland area and make it more open (at present the Blackthorn hides the view of the water from birds flying over the harbour, and could hide potential predators on any birds landing there to roost or feed). I support this action, though I realise that it may well be several years before the birds

start to use it! Concerning the bore holes on the IBM playing fields I am told that they are probably part of work to prove that there is no contamination in the soil - Hampshire Wildlife Trust need this proof before taking the land on as a Nature Reserve, so this work may well bring forward the date at which the land becomes a Nature Reserve (when we will probably see a lot more habitat creation activity).

PLANTS:

SUN 21 APR

At Warblington Farm this morning Marsh Valerian was in flower by the eastern stream and in the SSSI wet meadow several sedges were flowering, among them Lesser Pond, Distant and Glaucous plus another which I think may be Oval Sedge though I could not detect any female flowers at the tip of the upper mainly male spikelet (that may be because the lower female spikelets were only just starting to exert their stigmas and those at the tip are not yet ready to show themselves). In the south eastern shore field Divided Sedge can be seen and further up that eastern stream is a mass of Greater Pond Sedge.

SAT 20 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group spent this morning exploring the Purbrook Heath area and logged 63 flowering plant species which included the first Three Veined Sandwort and Heath Wood-rush that I have heard of. Others which have been seen in flower earlier but are nevertheless good finds are Solomons Seal, Red Currant, Wood Melick, Bush Vetch and (would you believe it? a type of Bramble. Glaucous and Pendulous Sedge were both abundant and one other sedge species would probably be a first for the year if only it could be identified (I suggested Spring Sedge but was told that was not right - the suggestion nevertheless reminds me that this tiny sedge should now be flowering on Portsdown and that I found it last spring in Warblington cemetery).

FRI 19 APR

Martin Rand took time out today to explore the area north and west of Fordingbridge, and in Rockbourne Churchyard found Meadow Saxifrage in flower. This flower is totally absent from south-east Hampshire and the whole of Sussex, and it looks as if the Rockbourne site may be the only one where it is found between Fordingbridge and Martin Down (though it is shown in the flora as occurring at a couple of other isolated sites in the Avon valley downstream of Fordingbridge). It's heartland is on the chalk of north and mid Hampshire, coming no further south and east than the Cheesefoot Head area (it was found in Bramdean in 1978). Less exciting newcomers to the year list found by Martin today were Bog Stitchwort and Wood Melick. He also tells me of {{ An attractive form of Lords and Ladies (*Arum maculatum*), with spathes entirely blackish-purple inside, under beeches far from houses north of Damerham, at SU102168.}} +++

Another news item to come to my attention today, when it appeared on the HWT website, is that Narrow-leaved Lungwort is now flowering well at Swanpond Copse on the Isle of Wight. To judge by the flowering of similar garden species the first flowers of the wild plant will have been out both on the Island and at Roydon Woods several weeks ago, though it may be much later flowering in the wild, under the shade of trees, than I imagine.

My own outing this morning to Old Idsworth Farm north of Rowlands Castle, gave me a good display of flowers including my first Toothwort, Goldilocks buttercup, Yellow Archangel and (fully out) Wood Speedwell. In the Huckswood Lane end of Barnet Copse Twayblade Orchids had unopen flower heads on stalks already six inches high, but the only genuine newcomer to my year list was the lovely Long-stalked Cranesbill - the plants I saw were one fields breadth into Sussex and I did not get round to checking the other locations for this plant in the Hampshire part of this extensive farm

THU 18 APR

Today Martin Rand was by the Itchen in the Brambridge area and found the delightful Water Avens in flower, along with the first Lesser Pond Sedge (probably also out at Emsworth's Brook

Meadow though neither I nor Brian Fellows have been checking the length of the terminal spikes on the glumes of Pond Sedges here to separate Greater from Lesser!)

WED 17 APR

It is some time since I found American Wintercress in flower but only today that I found open flowers on its (British??) cousin which most people call Yellow Rocket. This was out beside the Hermitage Stream at Broadmarsh but I saw nothing else new in this afternoon's tour of the Bedhampton and Broadmarsh area.

TUE 16 APR

My round of Hayling Island this afternoon gave no newly flowering plants but was still full of interest. On the thin, sandy grass of Gunner Point there were around 500 Green Winged Orchids in flower, three of them pure white specimens, and in the same area were three other plants that will be in flower next week or soon after. The one nearest to opening was the Sea Pink or Thrift, and soon after that some of the white flowers will open in the Sea Kale that now has tight closed buds. Probably third in the race will be the Tree Lupins, some of which are already showing the beginnings of their bright yellow flower spikes. On the sandy edges of the beach leaves of Sea Sandwort and Sea Bindweed can now be found. Back in the grassland around the orchids I was taken by surprise (as I am each year) to come on a patch of Polypody Fern growing in the sandy soil, far from the oak trees with which I normally associate it, and that same grassland once more drew from me the same confession which I remember making last spring - please take back my report of Sand Catstail grass coming into flower - the spikes which I saw last week have now elongated and clearly become part of the great mass of Sweet Vernal Grass that will continue to grow and will hide many of the orchids before they wither. Finally, on my way back up the Hayling Coastal Path I stopped to do a tiny bit of personal conservation work, cutting a few pieces of gorse to lay them on the ground as a rabbit fence around the plants of Saw-wort which Pete Durnell discovered last year (too late to include the plant in his book on Hayling Wildlife) and which were nibbled down by the rabbits without a chance to complete their flowering and set seed. Maybe some did succeed, or maybe this fine dry spring has generated seed that has lain dormant for many years - whatever the reason I found the basal leaves of half a dozen plants and hope they will flourish

MON 15 APR

The Danish Scurvygrass which recently painted white lines along many of our roadsides has now almost vanished but today I found a good display of its larger and later cousin, English Scurvygrass, in its usual local site at the water's edge east of Nore Barn on the Emsworth shore. Cycling through Emsworth to reach the shore I passed a couple of large flowering plants of Borage on one pavement edge and in a garden one tree of Laburnum had a few yellow flowers already open. Later, riding along Thornham Lane on Thorney Island another garden had flowers on a Spreading Oleaster tree like the one surviving amongst ivy against a wartime building on Hayling's Sinah Common near the wartime gun emplacement on the north side of Sinah Lake. Near the Thornham Lane tree was my first Bugle standing erect in full flower and on the roadside in Prinsted Greater Celandine was flowering against the outside of a stone wall. Fields west of Prinsted then added flowering Broad Bean to my list (a couple of left overs from a previous crop in what is now a wheat field). When nearly home I found a plant of Beaked Hawksbeard covered with open flowers after seeing my first single flower last Saturday.

Three people have sent me news of plants seen yesterday and I will start with Jim Berry who scored another first for the year with Yellow Pimpernel flowering in The Holt woodland adjacent to the Rowlands Castle golf course (there is a great display of Bluebells to be seen there now and in one corner of that wood there should now be Early Purple orchids by the hundred). Alan Cokes remarks on the display of Cowslips to be seen on the banks of the A3M where it passes under the Scratchface Lane bridge, and from East Meon Christoph Harwood writes of finding Wayfaring Tree in flower (I may not have mentioned it but I saw this out on Portsdown earlier this week) along with Goldilocks Buttercup, Red Campion and (I would have thought rather late flowering) Wych Elm.

INSECTS:

SUN 21 APR

Despite a fresh south east breeze today's warm sunshine brought out a good selection of butterflies, and Mark Litjens sightings at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester included 7 Green Hairstreak, seven each of Brimstone and Peacock, five each of Holly Blue and Orange Tip plus a single Red Admiral. Another Green Hairstreak was seen at Beachy Head in Sussex. The first butterflies were starting to fly before 10am this morning when I was in the fields of Warblington Farm, and I was able to get a close enough look at one half-awake insect to see it was a Green-Veined White - the first I have been certain of this year. A little later I saw two active Peacocks, and by the time I got home Holly Blue, Orange Tip and Small White were all active in my garden.

A very good first sighting which has only just come to my attention was of the first Grizzled Skipper, seen by Jim Berry at Kingley Vale, north of Chichester, last Tuesday (Apr 16). Last year this species was not out in Hampshire until May 4 which is about when I would expect it, but I see that in recent years there have been several first sightings in the first half of April (in 1998 as early as April 8). This year this is the only sighting I have heard of.

SAT 20 APR

Mark Litjens had a look around Whiteley Pastures (the south of Botley Woods near Fareham) today and listed 30 Brimstone (5 of them females) and 14 Orange Tip (3 females) as well as 13 Peacocks, 8 Speckled Wood, 8 Green-veined White, 6 Large and 2 Small White. He also found one Large Red Damselfly which, with a note of 3 seen in the Burton Mill Pond area of the Rother valley in Sussex, makes it look as if they are serious about emerging now.

FRI 19 APR

We have long known that the ups and downs in the population of Holly Blues is in great part caused by a tiny wasp which lays its eggs in the Holly Blue caterpillars - the caterpillars die and the new generation of wasps emerges from the corpses. Some caterpillars survive, but the more successful is the wasp in finding them the more the population of the wasps increases and that of the butterflies declines until a point is reached where there are not enough caterpillars to support the wasps. The wasp population then crashes and the butterfly population revives. It seems that a similar form of parasitism is the main cause of the lack of Small Tortoiseshells in the past few years, but less is known about the parasites in this case.

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In the Hampshire Butterfly Report for 2001 which dropped through my letterbox this morning an article by John Rowell, living on the Isle of Wight, tells how he has helped to unravel the plot against the Small Tortoiseshell. In the summer of 2001 he found a reasonable number of Small Tortoiseshell caterpillars and noticed that when the time came for them to pupate they were very lethargic, some of them making little attempt to move to suitable places to pupate, and those that did make it to the underside of a window sill were discovered by Blue Tits which threatened to eat up all the pupae. To protect them John gathered the surviving pupae and attached them to a stick which he suspended over an open biscuit tin. +++

When the time came for the butterflies to emerge John noticed white threads dangling from several of the pupae, and in the bottom of the tin several tiny white grubs. These were sent away for expert identification and turned out to be from two species of tachnid fly (not unlike our common house flies) - one species was an established British species (*Phryxe vulgaris*), the other was a species only recently invading Britain from Europe (*Sturmia bella*). Maybe it is this newcomer that has greatly increased the effect of a pre-existing regime of parasitism that the butterflies had always suffered. I am not sure if there is any way of reducing the impact of this parasitism but at least the cause of the decline of the Small Tortoiseshell seems to be known, and the butterfly is already this year demonstrating its ability to recover from attack. +++

One other fascinating fact coming from John's observations is that the butterflies that do emerge from the pupae seem to have an inbuilt memory of the exact location where they were 'born'. John put his biscuit tin out on a patio table to allow the butterflies to fly off freely, but after they had emerged he noticed that many of them came back to revisit the centre of the patio table long after the biscuit tin had served its purpose and been removed. +++

No doubt I have got some of this complex story wrong so you should read it for yourself - if you are not already a member of the Hampshire Branch of Butterfly Conservation, thus receiving the report as part of your membership, use the link in my What's New page to contact the Butterfly

conservation national website for membership details (you have to join the national organisation before you can join the Hampshire branch)

Among the many butterflies now on the wing I have not heard many recent reports of Red Admiral sightings but on Tuesday (Apr 16) Lawrence Holloway saw one, along with a female Green-veined White, when he visited Rackham, just east of the Arun river at the northern foot of the downs. On Monday (Apr 15) Steve Keen saw another of the less frequently seen species currently on the wing - a female Large White egg-laying on Broccoli.

TUE 16 APR

Best butterfly today was a fresh Green Hairstreak found in the Test Valley on Casbrook Common by Phil Lord today. Phil notes it as his personal earliest ever but a check on the recent Hampshire Butterfly Reports shows April 1 as the date to beat and several other sightings in the first two weeks of April. Second best was a very tatty Painted Lady seen at Noar Hill by Derek Mills, possibly a migrant, possibly one that had hibernated - a good sighting but no proof of an invasion of migrants. Despite searching Derek could not find another Duke of Burgundy at Noar Hill, but down in Portsmouth Brian Fellows did clock up one more Small Tortoiseshell, getting a small cheer from me!

From Fleet in the north of Hampshire Rob Edmunds sends me a brief note of what he has found in his moth trap recently. He says he has had a good haul of moths, but singles out three personal firsts for the year which have pleased him. Angle Shades turned up this evening with a Lunar Marbled Brown, and yesterday evening he had his first Swallow Prominent. Looking back I see that Lee Marshall has already reported all three of these from his trap on the coast at Gosport, making me wonder if slightly warmer night temperatures along the coastal strip are significant in the dates that moths emerge. Lee's dates were Angle Shades - Apr 4; Lunar Marbled Brown - Apr 3; and Swallow Prominent - Apr 1.

Another report that might interest dragonfly enthusiasts comes from Richard Mould-Ryan of the first Large Red Damselfly seen at Itchen Valley Country Park on Apr 10. Unlike some lepidoptera which seem to emerge everywhere on the same day I have so far only heard of three sightings of this insect - Richard Carpenter had one at Titchfield Haven also on Apr 10, Les Stride had one in Totton on Apr 5, and Bob Chapman had one at Farlington Marshes on the very early date of Mar 29 while there was possibly an even earlier sighting by someone who reported a large red dragonfly and left those interested in these insects gasping in amazement and making wild guesses as to what species had actually been seen.

MON 15 APR

With such an abundance of Small Tortoiseshell sightings this spring I have felt left out until today when I found one patrolling the Brook Meadow site at Emsworth - with it were three Small Whites and a male Orange Tip. Earlier I had been on the Thorney Island seawall at the west end of the Great Deeps where there should soon be Wall Browns on the wing (three have already been seen on the New Forest shore at Exbury - see Apr 8 - and the earliest ever Hampshire date is I think Apr 5). I saw no butterflies here but poking in the grass and other vegetation on the sea wall (looking for the Pointed Snails which seem to have vanished from this site) I did find two fat green caterpillars curled up, leaving me to estimate their length at about 3 cm. These may have been larvae of sawfly (I did not think to check the number of legs) but they could just possibly be Wall caterpillars which are green, overwinter as caterpillars and only take a fortnight in the pupa before emerging as butterflies - colour and size did not preclude this and there was plenty of grass here for them to feed on at night. Still on Thorney I found another great display of fresh Oak Apples beside the private road past Thornham Farm to Prinsted.

Although there were a couple of very early reports of Holly Blue this year, followed by widespread sightings recently, I get the impression that these lovely butterflies have not had a very good spring. In my own garden I had to wait a long time to see one but usually when one does turn up I see it (or others) sporadically over a week or so. This month the only one I saw was holding on for dear life to a leaf from which the chill wind was trying to tear it away, and since then I have seen no more so I am pleased to have a couple more sightings this weekend from Alan Cokes in Waterlooville and Gwynne Johnson in the Meon Valley.

From Gosport Lee Marshall sends me news of three more new moths for the year. Last night he

had a Brimstone Moth and a Pebble Prominent, and on Friday night (Apr 12) he recorded *Eriocrania subpurpurella* - a lovely bright pink moth whose caterpillars live as leafminers on birch trees. This moth appears on the same page of Chinery's 'picture book' as the longhorn moths that will soon be dancing around woodland bushes.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 21 APR

Back on Friday (Apr 19) Lawrence Holloway was in the Lavington Common area of Sussex (about halfway between Midhurst and Pulborough) when he spotted something rather unusual in a tiny stream. At first he thought he was watching a couple of Eels writhing about on the bottom, but a closer look showed they were Lampreys using their suckers to lift and shift small stones. No doubt they were in the process of creating a spawning bed for themselves and I am pretty sure that these would be the small Brook Lampreys which spend most of their lives as larvae (called for some reason 'Prides') feeding harmlessly by extracting detritus from the bottom of the stream where they hide under stones. When they become adult they cease feeding and once they have made their spawning bed and filled it with the next generation they die. Two bigger species are called River and Sea Lampreys and these are parasites on fish such as Trout and Salmon. I read that before the Industrial Revolution more than a million River Lampreys were caught each year in the Thames for food, but pollution has much reduced their numbers. Across the Atlantic the bigger Sea Lampreys were so numerous that they almost eliminated fish stocks in the north American Great Lakes after they were opened up for sea going boats (and the Lampreys) to get upstream to them.

FRI 19 APR

Fallow deer usually spend the day time quietly resting in places where there is little disturbance but this normal routine must have failed to secure peaceful rest for a group of seven Fallow does and young which I saw at midday today crossing the large open fields of cereal crops at Old Idsworth Farm. Around the farm fields I found more of their droppings than usual, so perhaps this is a group that has recently arrived here from elsewhere and has not yet discovered the best places in which to lie up. I have already mentioned the story of dead rats laid on the ground as potential food for Barn Owl chicks in the Bird news for today.

Last Tuesday, when Lawrence Holloway visited the RSPB Pulborough Brooks reserve, he noted the presence of at least 24 dark coated Fallow Deer. I suspect that over recent years a good number of these animals have escaped from the Parham House herd, and it seems that most of them are now at large in the Arun valley.

TUE 16 APR

In the Beaulieu area of the New Forest today Rosi Woods tells us she saw four Hares, and this reminds me that I do not seem to have heard a single report of a 'mad March Hare' this spring. Numbers of these creatures have been declining year by year, and while I do not think they are by any means extinct in Hampshire, this absence of reports is an ominous sign ...

MON 15 APR

Mid-April is about the right time for the first fox cubs to appear above ground and play around their earth but it is sad that the first sighting of them to come to my attention this year is of two tiny corpses seen dead by the roadside of the A3M between the Waterlooville and Horndean junctions during the past week. Along the same stretch of road Alan Cokes has also seen the bodies of four adult foxes and one badger this week ...

WEEK 15 APR 8 - 14

BIRDS:

SUN 14 APR

The first passage Whimbrel that I know of came in off the sea at Selsey on Apr 3 but seems to have had no followers until today when one flew in to St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight and three more were with 135 Curlew passing Stokes Bay at Gosport. Ian and Gary Calderwood at Stokes Bay also noted another flock of Sanderling (142 of them) heading east and one Egret flying north from the Isle of Wight, probably a local bird on a cross Solent fishing

trip (one of the Elson Wood birds returning to its nest ??) but also just possibly a new arrival from the continent??

Mike Collins was at Budds Farm before 8am this morning and watched three Avocet approach the pools as if about to land, only to be scared off by a Sparrowhawk, leaving Mike with the consolation of Whitethroat and Blackcap song.

A little later in the morning I made a circuit of north Hayling on my bike, being greeted by Willow Warbler song when I joined the Coastal Path along the path from the West Lane bends. Stopping here to scan the shore I was surprised to see a thin line of Turnstone stretching along the rising tide line, easily outnumbering the Oystercatchers that usually dominate the scene. Including a party on the bund walls of the Oysterbeds lagoon I saw at least 100 Turnstone which had probably just dropped in on passage and with them were a few Dunlin and half a dozen Grey Plover in a tight group (not well spaced out as they normally are when feeding). Also seen offshore were 6 Shelduck (another 10 of these in the main pool at the Oysterbeds), a good dozen Merganser and a few Great Crested Grebe (a slightly unusual sight was a mixed flock of Merganser and Great Crested Grebe in flight). One Egret was fishing in Stokes Bay, one in the Oysterbeds and two more on the Northney shore (where another five Shelduck were on the mud). Not a glimpse or sound of Little Tern yet (average arrival date in recent years is Apr 12), and only one call from a Ringed Plover, but a Skylark singing overhead gave an early summer feel to the Oysterbeds.

SAT 13 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group were in the Havant Thicket area this morning and found Willow Warblers back - the scrub of Furzy Plain is one of the few places in the immediate Havant area where they can normally be relied on as regular nesting birds.

A more unusual sighting in today's news comes from Will Walmsley who has spent a couple of days at a farm in the Froxfield area where he saw some 40 Common Gull still present (it is difficult to find one on the coast now that they have gone north to nest) - the farm also had a Barn Owl and a selection of farmland birds including 30 Yellowhammer. Over in the New Forest Paul Beckett had close views of a Cuckoo in the Denny Wood area where a large raptor with down-curved wings gave tantalisingly brief glimpses through the trees - could it have been a Honey Buzzard? (Unlikely as the earliest ever record for Hampshire is Apr 21 in 1996 - probably just one of those common Red Kites!). Among Paul's other sightings were three Tree Pipits and at least one Garden Warbler.

At the IBM Portsmouth North Harbour site after lunch for this month's WeBS count around the lake I watched a classic display of neck dipping followed by mating by the two Swans whose nest Kevin Stouse first saw yesterday - the nest is large and professionally built and the female was soon back on it after they mated but I could not see if any eggs had already been laid. The nest is in a new location this year, close to where the Great Crested Grebes nested last year, but there was no sign of them today (and so far as I know only one has been seen on the lake this spring), nor did I see the second pair of Swans which Kevin saw there yesterday. Just one pair of Canada Geese had a nest and were sitting but there were 18 other pairs scattered around the site (with one spare bird) and I am sure the majority of these will at least attempt nesting. One pair clearly has had a go already as on the islands I found four Canada Goose eggs which had been eaten by foxes. Another bird that may have a nest is Shelduck - Kevin has seen two of them on the site and today one bird was loitering on its own. No Mallard ducklings were to be seen but a count of 39 adults (nearly all males) indicated a potential of 30 or more nests somewhere on the premises. There were also 19 Tufted Duck present, only three or four of them females (one giving a good impression of a female Scaup), but I doubt there are any females of this species sitting - they tend to nest very late in the season and I guess these were just spare males. Two Cormorants and two Herons were seen but the most interesting sight for me on the water was of 11 adult Lesser Blackbacks (British race) that have presumably just flown in with the intention of breeding - the question is will they fly on to traditional gulleries such as the rooftops of Bristol or will they have a go somewhere locally (there is plenty of flat roof space on the IBM buildings ...) +++

Among the land birds I first enjoyed one very strong burst of Sedge Warbler song with plenty of high whistles and lower pitched imitations of other songs, and later heard excited Kestrel calls

before I spotted the female of the pair high on the main building - she then flew round a corner and landed close to the male who promptly offered her what seemed to be a plump vole - she then flew off again out of sight. Among other birds seen were a pair of Song Thrushes which were I think collecting food for young in a nest on the islands near to where the Cetti's Warbler sang loudly. Blackcap and Chiffchaff were also singing on the site.

Entries on the SOS and Titchfield Haven websites include items that I have not previously heard of, starting with a Black Kite passing over Rye in East Sussex yesterday (Apr 12). On Thursday (Apr 11) Ambersham Common near Midhurst had 30+ Redpoll, 15 Siskin, and at last 5 Crossbill as well as a Tree Pipit and 9 Dartford Warblers. Two more House Martins were then over Birling Gap near Beachy Head (another of these was today near Bembridge on the Isle of Wight), a Lesser Whitethroat was at Peacehaven near Brighton and a Reed Warbler at the Arundel Wildfowl reserve plus a Marsh Harrier upstream at Pulborough (where a few Pintail, Wigeon, Shoveler and Teal could still be seen). At Titchfield Haven five Brent were still on the sea. On Apr 10 both male and female Marsh Harriers were at Titchfield Haven with a late male Merlin and another Merlin was seen on that day at Pulborough Brooks. Going back to Apr 9 I see that three House Martins were seen at Pulborough Brooks

FRI 12 APR

Anyone trying to limit the damage which a growing world population and increasing wealth does to our natural environment has my support in principle - I certainly want to live in a world full of varied, natural, wildlife and I am convinced that human beings cannot survive without nature's life-support system for body, mind and spirit. At the same time I cannot see any hope that the conservation movement as we know it can have any significant effect on the progress of the era of extinction in which we find ourselves unless it can succeed in a task that has defeated all the religions of the world, that of getting human beings to behave with respect to each other and their environment. +++

This statement of a philosophy of despair (still tinged with hope!) is occasioned by several things that have happened recently - firstly the verbal war between some birders and the county council countryside service over the Lymington marshes (is there any real difference between the attitudes expressed in that and the conflict we now see in the middle east - in both cases abuse and violence is preferred to the hard work of thinking out what are the issues and how can they be resolved); secondly, the deliberate starting of fires in woods and heathland by vandals, of which we have several recent examples including the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth; and thirdly a mis-trust started by well meant actions carried out without effective communication as to their purpose. This last aspect of suspicion leading to potential conflict comes to me in a message from Mike Collins, who is just one of many people who enjoy the Langstone South Moors area and is much worried by things he sees going on there which he fears are the beginning of the end for the natural environment there - in particular the elimination of the 'ancient' clump of Blackthorn on the west side of the Tamarisk Pool, and the boring of holes in the old IBM playing fields, following the grubbing out of the centre of the blackthorn hedge that separates the SSSI part of the moors from the old playing field. +++

I won't say anything about the hurling of abuse against the county council on HOSLIST over the Lymington marshes other than that both sides could have reduced the tension by thinking before they gave voice. In the case of fires in the Hollybank woods of course I am opposed to vandalism, especially when it endangers life, but fire has always been one of nature's habitat management tools and my personal first re-action after seeing the result of the first fire (and seeing that it had swept through swiftly, removing the dead bracken, bramble, etc which had choked the woodland floor over years of no management, without apparently damaging the lovely standard trees) was that the vandals had done more conservation work in a few hours than local volunteers and Havant Borough could achieve in years. In the case of the South Moors I am pretty certain that any fears of buildings appearing on the land south of the Penner Road factories are groundless, and that whatever has been done is part of conservation management plans. I know the attack on the central hedge was initiated and funded by English Nature to instal a fence line (presumably as part of further plans to maintain grazing on the SSSI while curbing scrub invasion), and I suspect that bore holes on the playing fields indicate that Hampshire Wildlife Trust is starting to implement a plan which was drawn up several years

ago when IBM agreed to transfer their land to HWT for use as a nature reserve (in return for planning permission to build more factories on the rest of their land). The plan which I saw included the creation of ponds and thickets on the old playing fields, and the return of the area around the Tamarisk pool to saltmarsh by allowing the sea to flood that area. +++

Coming back to my philosophy - if human nature were different to what it is, and everyone was prepared to agree on how the natural environment should be managed, and co-operate in that management even when it meant sacrificing some of their own property and 'rights to enjoyment', then all these problems would be avoided. As that is not the case my view of the most urgent task for all conservationists is that they should get together and demonstrate that unity of purpose, and readiness to sacrifice personal and group objectives, in the common cause of 'saving the planet'. If (to choose just a few examples) the RSPB, the Wildlife Trusts, governmental conservation organisations, Greenpeace, and all similar bodies in other countries world wide, could get together and convince the rest of the human world population by their arguments and actions that they had the solution to our environmental problems, then there might be some hope for an end to extinction and a flourishing of a 'heaven on earth'. I do not think that will happen, or that human brains are sufficiently powerful to provide the necessary computing power to take account of all the factors, (though I would give all my energies to support a serious attempt to start the ball rolling) and in the meantime I am too old and cynical to think it worth my while working hard to support the thousand and one lost causes of the environmental movement, each blindly intent on saving a tree or a butterfly, a whale or a tiger, through competition for members and money with all the other similar bodies - that way lies madness. In Titanic commemoration week, with no lifeboat in sight, I am forced to enjoy the last brief moments of my life listening to the gallant band playing on (or enjoying my personal observation of what wildlife is left to us).

Most people will listen to my ramblings and turn away muttering 'mad old fool', so I am more than glad to announce that it seems there is one person who seems to share my views, and who expresses them in a far more acceptable way. I am referring to Brian Clarke whose book 'The Stream' won a couple of top literary awards (including the BP Natural World Book Prize) two years back. Brian's approach is to present us with the facts of what is happening to our world by means of a parable (the story of a stream, the archetype of one that we have all known and loved, and its slow and unperceived death at the hands of humanity which does not know what it is doing). Brian makes no suggestion as to how we should deal with the problems raised, but his story has a very deep impact on almost every individual who reads it and presents the reader with an unanswered question that just could, if sufficient people read it, start the ball to which I have referred above rolling in the right direction. I mention this book now because it has just been re-issued in paperback and is yours for just £6-99 (Called 'The Stream' it is published by Black Swan and should be available everywhere).

Coming back to reality I see that a fourth Cuckoo for the year was heard in new Milton by Steve Keen today, while one of the first 'flocks' of Swallows (at least 20) were over Alresford Pond. In the Aldershot area Steve Mansfield found 12 Fieldfare and a Redwing still present with a dozen Redpoll and a smart male Brambling, and at Alresford Dave Pearson watched a pair of displaying Great Crested Grebe. Also on that pond was a good selection of ducks -still one drake Pintail with 12 Teal and 10 Gadwall plus a Shoveler, 3 Pochard and 10 Tufted Duck along with both male and female Ruddy Ducks.

Both Richard Carpenter and Peter Raby were at Titchfield Haven today. Richard's news is of the first Arctic Tern to be identified this spring, plus sightings of two Avocet still on the scrapes and a Dartford Warbler in the roadside gorse along the south of the reserve. Peter also saw the Dartford and was there early enough (at 08:30) to find a Barn Owl hunting the reeds around the scrapes - presumably seen from the road. This is the second recent sighting of a Barn Owl here and presumably shows that the bird is on overtime to find enough food for young in a nest. Also on Peter's list were 2 Greylag Geese, 67 Brent and 66 Black-tailed Godwit. One Egret was still present and a late Snipe was spotted. Yesterday Peter was also at the Haven and heard Reed and Sedge Warbler as well as seeing a Ruff and 6 Wigeon. One other piece of information gleaned from the internet today is that at Lepe one of the County Council rangers is also called Richard Carpenter - I hope he doesn't start to contribute news to my website and

require personal identification!

Kevin Stouse today tells me that a pair of Swans have started a nest at the west end of the IBM Lake, with a second, apparently non-breeding, pair loafing on the lake. I hope to see them tomorrow when I visit the site for the monthly WeBS count. Also this morning I had confirmation from Diana Bishop, who lives at Warblington Castle house, that a pair of Kestrels are once again nesting in the tower (all that remains of the castle). Perhaps when they have chicks to feed they will become more visible but so far neither Tony Gutteridge nor myself have seen either of the birds in our first three CBC visits to the area.

Other news for today comes from Simon Ingram at the Eastleigh Lakeside park where another single Yellow Wagtail flew north without touching down, and a late female Brambling was seen perched in a tree. Peter Hockin was also out today in the Avon Valley south of Fordingbridge and saw a single House Martin plus (at a guess on Mockbeggar Lake) two Ruddy Duck.

THU 11 APR

Both Ed Griffiths and Graham Osborne tell me that my remarks on the unusually tame behaviour of Hawfinches recently (see yesterday's notes) coincided with the publication of an article in the Daily Telegraph on the same subject. Two points in the article were about the declining numbers of Hawfinch in Britain (said to be down by 40% from an estimated 1989 population of 6,500 pairs in Britain) and the contrast in the behaviour of these birds here in England, where they are highly elusive and shy, and on the continent, where they are much tamer and regularly appear in gardens. The SOS website has given us the evidence of one Hawfinch flying in from the sea at Selsey Bill recently, and Graham Osborne not unreasonably suggests that the birds at Romsey, and in John Goodspeed's garden, are of continental origin and not concerned about showing themselves to humans.

So far I have had no problem in taking on board the various reports of Kestrel feeding behaviour, even the eating of carrion as a pair tucked in to the roadside corpse of a rabbit, but I do have difficulty accepting Trevor Carpenter's latest contribution on this subject which purports to tell us that he saw one Kestrel and a couple of Mallards having a communal meal of grass today on the Cams Hall golf course. Lest you think I am misquoting Trevor these are his exact words {{ Following recent discussion on Kestrel feeding habits, I thought you might be interested in a female Kestrel I watched feeding at Cams Golf Course this morning. It was grazing on one of the fairways and obviously finding plenty of food. It walked around without much style and shared its dinner table with a pair of Mallards. I watched it for over 10 minutes and it was still going strongly when I walked away. }} Yes, he did say 'grazing' which can only mean 'feeding on grass'. My own first thought was to wonder what crumbs had fallen from the lips of a hungry golfer but I then thought of the Starlings that we can already see working similar grassland collecting Leatherjackets for their young in the nest. Putting this together with Lee Marshall's report, not so long ago, of finding the pavements near his Gosport home alive with wriggling Leatherjackets it may well be that these grubs are super-abundant this year and I can imagine both Kestrel and duck enjoying them. Any better ideas?

Coming back to more normal bird news I see that Ian Watts today found the Woolston/Weston Iceland Gull still present in the Southampton area - it was on Spitfire Quay, upstream from the Itchen Bridge. Top of the news from Sussex in my opinion is the first Pied Flycatcher of the year - the news is late in coming through as the bird was in the Brighton area on Apr 4, when a Lesser Whitethroat and a Nightingale were both at Beachy Head (both of these arrived well before those I have already reported as being the first of the year!). More local news from Barry Collins on Thorney Island is of his first Reed Warbler on Apr 9 and Common Whitethroat on Apr 10. Also on Apr 10 there were 4 Little Gulls and 2 Common Terns at the Westhampnett pool by the A27 where it leaves Chichester eastbound. I also see that a few Little Egrets are still being seen in Sussex - two on Tern Island at the mouth of Pagham Harbour and two on the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes, both yesterday. On Apr 9 one more House Martin was over Balcombe (northern tip of the Ardingley reservoir south east of Crawley) and one more Hobby over Sheepcote Valley on the eastern fringe of Brighton.

WED 10 APR

This was a red-letter day in John Goodspeed's birding life with a Hawfinch spending five minutes in his garden in the built-up area of Portsdown Hill close to the old A3 - the Hawfinch was

apparently trying to imitate the Greenfinches that were feeding on the bird table and tube feeder. To me this observation is all the more interesting as it comes at the end of a winter during which some Hawfinch have been behaving in a way that is totally out of keeping with their normal elusiveness - I am of course referring to the small flock of up to 10 birds which could be seen daily feeding around a small patch of tree-lined grass forming a tiny bit of open space in a Romsey housing estate - albeit on the edge of the estate abutting a canal connecting the heart of Romsey to wilder parts of the Test Valley. These birds were present from at least Dec 18 to Mar 12 and one anonymous report said there were 20+ birds to be seen (but 10 or 11 was the highest 'actual' count I heard of). Sometimes the birds were seen on the ground searching for food among fallen leaves, one observer watched them trying to catch small flies in mid-air, and I noted that the trees around the site included several Planes on which large fruits still dangled like over-size cherries (and might have deceived the Hawfinch into thinking they were a source of nourishment). After those birds have dispersed (and we have heard of good numbers of Hawfinch back in at least two of their regular sites in the New Forest) come these reports of Hawfinch in gardens trying to take advantage of the food we put out for finches - John's report was preceded by one from a garden near Lewes in Sussex where, on Apr 7, Chris Chapman told the SOS website {{ I was very surprised to see a Hawfinch visit the garden today. The bird was feeding with the usual greenfinches, goldfinches and chaffinches on the sunflower hearts I regularly put out on the lawn to feed the birds.}} To top off the known facts the SOS website also reported a Hawfinch flying in off the sea at Selsey Bill yesterday. So much for the observations - what about the causes of this changed behaviour? Two obvious suggestions are (a) a great increase in the Hawfinch population and (b) a shortage of their food in the places where they normally find it without coming into contact with humans. There is a third suggestion that Hawfinches have at last cottoned on to the fact that there are a lot of people wanting to 'feed the birds' and they are trying to get their share of the handouts (will a special range of Hawfinch feeders suddenly appear on the market for next winter??). If anyone has any real evidence as to what is happening I am sure I am not the only one who would like to hear it, but in the meantime my money is on a cause that has reduced the natural food of Hawfinches - maybe on a continental scale, not just hereabouts, causing at least one bird to fly here as an illegal immigrant seeking the benefits of living in England!

The first Nightingale was in full throated song at Ashlett Creek near Calshot at the mouth of Southampton Water on Monday morning (Apr 8), heard by Les Stride, and a second was heard by John Firth at Awbridge this morning. John seemed surprised that the bird was singing in the daytime but I think most birders are aware that Nightingales will sing all day (as well as at night) at this time of year. I believe that they sing at night to attract night flying migrant females down from the sky, but I guess that during the day they still have to advertise their possession of territory to other males which might might otherwise sneak in and pinch the best places 'under cover of daylight'.

Birds of Hampshire tells us that most Goosanders have left Hampshire by mid-March but it is not unknown for stragglers to be seen throughout April, nevertheless I was surprised to see that Will Walmsley had come on a male Goosander on the River Itchen not far north of Southampton today. Other winter birds that are not so unexpected in April are Fieldfare of which Trevor Carpenter found more than 40 in the Kilmeston area south of Alresford today, and Mike Jones found more than 80 on Stockbridge Down (he notes with sadness that this is the first visit he has ever made to the Down on which he has not encountered a single Skylark - at this time of year they should be singing their hearts out despite the strong northerly wind.

Despite the revelation that Titchfield Haven has, since the end of last year, had its own bulletin board on the Hampshire County Council website, there is no substitute for the 'real time reports from our roving correspondents on HOSLIST'. When I checked the official site last night there was no news more recent than last Sunday, but reports from three visitors who were there today show that there is plenty of interest (and also make the point that each person is likely to see a different set of birds depending on the time of day and where they happen to be looking). This last point is borne out by Ron King who watched a Red Kite overhead for 15 minutes just after 11am before it drifted off east - neither of the other two visitors saw it, but Peter Raby (who was probably there early in the morning) watched a Barn Owl hunting over the reeds and

recorded both Tree Pipit and Yellow Wagtail (unfortunately he doesn't say if the Wagtail touched down to be the first to set foot on Hampshire soil - all the few previous reports have been of bird flying north without landing). Other items in Peter's list, which interest me but which would probably be overlooked by most birders as too unexciting to mention, are the continuing presence of a male Mandarin, a Pochard and four Wigeon. 68 Black-tailed Godwit were on the reserve and 3 Common Scoter offshore. Richard Carpenter also visited the reserve and notes the top birds that most visitors will have seen - 5 Avocets on the scrapes and a female Marsh Harrier which flew in for the first time yesterday, presumably as a migrant newly arrived from the south.

Tony Gutteridge and I made our third visit to Warblington Farm this morning for this year's Common Bird Census but found little to note out of the ordinary. The only item of general interest was the presence of four Little Egrets and six Teal still there after the general departure of these birds (yesterday I only saw two Egrets on the Hayling west shore - one at the Kench and one at the Oysterbeds). Two Snipe were flushed from the wet fields and four Skylark were singing (more in hope than expectation of breeding), and one Song Thrush sang loudly in the cemetery, reminding me that several of these birds (which have been generally silent during their first nesting period) have resumed singing, telling me that they have either succeeded or failed in raising a first brood and are now having a brief pause before a second attempt.

TUE 09 APR

On March 30 Jason Crook told us that the Broadmarsh adult Ring-billed Gull was then on the Farlington Marshes scrape after a last appearance at Broadmarsh slipway on Mar 26. Several other watchers had previously seen it retreat to the harbour islands each time the tide came in but no one seems to know where it goes in the summer when it is not seen in Langstone Harbour. Today Tim Lawman may have provided a new piece of evidence to help solve this mystery. This evening Tim was on the Hayling Bay shore, in the carpark south of Chichester Avenue (the next one east of the Beachlands funfair), and watched an adult Ring-billed gull for 30 minutes, sometimes with the bird within 10 feet of him, before it flew east towards Sandy Point. Tim goes on to say it was {{ probably the same bird that was present last summer, so it may establish its past routine of appearing from Portsmouth direction late afternoon before flying to where it roosts late evening. }} To me this seems to show that the Broadmarsh bird stays with us during the summer, but changes its habits to keep clear of the screaming mass of other gulls nesting on the Langstone Harbour islands, though it still leaves unanswered the questions of where it spends the days and where the nights during the summer - can't be far from Hayling. While on the Hayling shore in this carpark Tim also watched four adult Med Gulls behaving as two courting couples - to make it more interesting one bird of each pair had a colour ring on its leg - one green with 31M on it, one white with 49S. Tim has reported these and will hopefully hear their history soon. I will be interested to hear if he gets the details of the green one as quickly as the white as I recently sent off details of a green ringed one to Peter Meininger in the Netherlands and received an immediate reply saying {{ I have forwarded your mail to Camille Duponcheel, the coordinator of the green rings. I am responsible for the white-ringed Med Gulls.}} and have heard no more so it sounds as if the good old business 'customer service' practice of passing awkward queries on to another department has now caught on in the birding world. (To be fair a response may have gone to Alistair Martin who actually saw the bird, but I have heard nothing). +++

While discussing the Ring-billed Gull I must also report a couple of Iceland Gull sightings. One was seen today heading up the River Itchen by Andy Collins as he cycled over the Itchen Bridge, and another was said to have been in Langstone Harbour off Budds Farm on Sunday evening (Apr 7) - this news from Bird Guides via Will Walmsley.

I have already mentioned (see Apr 10) that a new Marsh Harrier flew into Titchfield Haven today - not the juvenile male that was there in the winter (last heard of by me on Mar 13) but a female that is presumably one of the migrants that seem to have been arriving since mid-March (e.g. one at Lower Test on Mar 20 and one in Pagham Harbour on Mar 22).

Another migrant arriving in better than usual numbers this spring is Garganey and today's news includes four birds (two pairs) at Hook/Warsash, seen yesterday by Peter Morrison - one pair on the old Links scrape and one on the 'new scrape' north of Hook Lake. Here in Langstone

Harbour Ian Thirlwell saw a drake on 'Duck Lake' at Milton today, possibly the same bird as one he saw there on Apr 3, and that one could have been seen there even earlier as Ian said it was 'back again' though whether he was referring to a sighting last year or to a visit from one seen on Budds Farm pools on Mar 28 I do not know - the only other unusual duck which I know of at the Milton Lakes this spring is a single Gadwall drake that was on Duck Lake on Mar 24.

Another Garganey was seen today on Normandy Lake at Lymington, and others may still be at Woolmer Pond and in the Pulborough Brooks area - a drake was on what I think to be Waltham Brooks (near Greatham Bridge) on Apr 7.

This morning I joined Tony Gutteridge in a visit to West Walk woods near Wickham in the Meon Valley in pleasant sunshine but with few birds - perhaps the best was a female Goldcrest which gave us a solo performance as it worked bare branches at head height only a couple of yards from us, calling incessantly. We had one glimpse of a small Sparrowhawk and of a soaring Buzzard, and may have heard a Garden Warbler as well as many Blackcap - the odd bird was in the right habitat (dense young birch scrub and gorse) and sang at a much faster tempo than the others but never showed itself and once or twice sounded more like a Blackcap with varied pitch and declamatory notes. Not having been to these woods for a couple of years I was surprised to see how the cleared area of Lodge Hill had vanished under scrub now grown taller than my head height, and an even denser growth of conifer and gorse in the Liberty Road clearing - I doubt Tree Pipit will be seen there this year and I am pretty sure Lodge Hill will have fewer or no Nightjar this summer (though the Woodcock will probably fly over, the owls call and the bats hunt their supper there). What may have been a Redpoll flew over the Liberty Road clearing, and when nearly back to the Hundred Acres carpark we enjoyed a small group of Siskin which announced their presence with brief rattles from the tops of pine trees (none of the usual complaining notes on such a pleasant morning). +++

In the afternoon I cycled to Hayling, finding a pair of Stonechat on the southern fence of the Golf Course and then seeing the male Stonechat in the 'brick field' east of the Oysterbeds on my way back north. Despite the strong chill north wind I had a brief look at the Tern Island in the Oysterbeds lagoon and in good light I could now see that the series of stone cairns each covered a section of black plastic drain tubing, open at both ends, no doubt there to give tern chicks somewhere to hide from Kestrels and other predators (not sure how effective they would be against a fox) as Ed Griffiths suggested. Very few birds to be seen - not even the usual pair of Ringed Plover - and only two Egrets seen along the wast shore (one at the Kench. one over the Oysterbeds), with not a single Brent. The only other birds of any note were three Med Gulls on the central Beachlands shingle.

On Apr 2 Colin Bates encountered a strange bird in a Bishopstoke garden which he described as being grey with a dark head and having a crest, and being noisy, all of which sounded to me like an escaped Cockatiel, but Colin told me it was definitely not a Cockatiel. Today Dave Unsworth seems to have come up with its proper identity - Red-vented Bulbul - after seeing the bird for himself. Dave says it's still showing {{ at the bottom of Sedgewick Rd, on the west side in the gardens backing onto Hamilton Rd. }} in Bishopstoke. Perhaps you would prefer to see a Cuckoo? If so a third one has appeared in Hampshire, seen yesterday by Mike Jones by the River Test in the Stockbridge area, following the first two seen on Apr 3 in Meon Valley and at the Lower Test reserve. Also seen by Mike was a male Ruddy Duck.

Yesterday Red Kites were seen over Southampton and just south of Winchester, but more interesting to me is news of one that has been seen on and off for the past week in the countryside north of Rowlands Castle - last seen high over Finchdean on Apr 7. My guess is that this bird has discovered the Southleigh Forest rubbish tip as a good source of fast food.

When Brian Fellows visited Baffins Pond today he found that the hybrid Bar-Headed Goose and four of the expected 10 Barnacle Geese were missing, as was one of the two Swans expected to nest there. To make up for these losses there are still 34 Canada Geese. 60 Mallard and 54 Tufted Duck on the pond Also still missing is the Emsworth Black Swan. On the positive side Brian found 66 Brent still present on the south east shore of Langstone Harbour. Yesterday he had much better news from his round of Emsworth waters - not only has the Peter Pond Swans nest still got its eggs (last year it was vandalised) but one pair of Coots on the Slipper Mill Pond have hatched a brood of 5 chicks - the first of the year to my knowledge.

Late news from last Sunday (Apr 7) is of the first Lesser Whitethroat of the year, heard singing at Pett between Hastings and Rye Harbour. Other Sussex news from nearer home is of a good flock of Godwits in the Fishbourne Channel of Chichester Harbour, also on Apr 7 - not only were there more than 80 Black-tailed but also 40+ Bar-tailed, a much rarer bird this winter hereabouts. On Fishbourne pond two Mallards each had 8 ducklings on display. On the other side of Chichester at the Westhampnett pool 3 Little Gulls and 5 Common Terns could be seen on Sunday, along with 40 Sand Martins and 1 Swallow.

More local news for last Saturday (Apr 6) comes from Steve Mansfield who visited Hayling Island for a seawatch at Sandy Point where there was a good show of Sandwich Terns and an interesting fall of finches - well, 15 Linnets, 8 Goldfinch and what may have been a White Wagtail with a few Meadow Pipits. At Black Point two Bar-tailed Godwit were seen and at the Oysterbeds 4 Knot, while Budds Farm pools had a Common Sandpiper and one Swallow.

MON 08 APR

Russell Wynn saw a pale phase Pomarine Skua fly through the Hurst narrows this morning and comments that this must be the earliest ever for Hampshire and for anywhere in the UK this year. While not wishing to detract from Russell's joy in what is certainly a very early bird and as far as I know the first in Hampshire waters, I must give Richard Ives his due for an extraordinarily early bird (clearly an 'oddy' rather than the precursor of main passage) reported in the SOS website as senn by Richard off Worthing on Jan 21 this year.

Two more noteworthy sightings were made today by Martin Hampton at the Hayling Oysterbeds where, on the rising tide this morning, he saw both a Curlew Sandpiper and a Little Stint. Plenty of Oystercatcher and Curlew were also present with Turnstone and summer plumaged Black-tailed Godwit plus the male Stonechat in the 'brickfield'. At Budds Farm pools the Swan pair were back on territory and the Shelduck pair were also there with a pair of Little Grebe - one Swallow flew over the South Moors. Interestingly there were still some 20 Teal at the Budds Farm pools - 20 Tufted Duck were not so surprising. Over at Stokes Bay, Gosport, Peter Raby was seawatching in the late morning and saw one House Martin fly in with four Swallows, and saw 7 Sanderling fly east.

At this time of year Peter Potts and others (mainly members of the Farlington Ringing Group) will be making their fourth consecutive spring trip to Iceland to record the arrival of Black-tailed Godwit at their nesting sites. Pete is always wanting all sightings of colour-ringed Godwits (send to ppotts@compuserve.com) but especially wants them during the period Apr 17 to May 10 when he will be in Iceland. Tying together last sightings here with first sightings there gives a good idea of the bird's journey time, the record so far being around 48 hours. One other aspect of Pete's study of the movements of this species that was new this winter was an expedition to Vannes (one the southern coast of Brittany in France) when they ringed 120 Black-tailed Godwit. Sightings of these birds are now coming in on a broad front from Norfolk to Southern Ireland as the birds move northward before making the final non-stop ocean crossing - these sightings show that there is no one preferred route used by the birds but far sightings have been in the Solent than elsewhere, showing how important our part of the world is to these birds. It also shows that the recent re-appearance of the birds on our shores is part of a movement northward of birds that have wintered south of the English Channel.

On Saturday (Apr 6) I reported Doug Robertson's observation of up to 37 Corn Bunting in the Hoe Cross area west of Hambledon, and a further message from Doug (who lives nearby and walks the Hoe Cross area throughout the year) is a response to requests from people who want to see the birds. Doug says they are elusive and there are two ways of looking for them. One is to go to the cross roads close to Hoe Cross Farm and walk north along the road towards East Hoe Manor, searching the fields either side of the road, the other is to be in the area of Hoe Cross Farm at around 6pm on a fine evening when the birds tend to assemble on the phone/power lines along the road. Hambledon does seem to be the remaining stronghold of Corn Bunting in south east Hampshire and these are probably birds that have gathered here for winter feeding and will soon disperse to nesting territories in a belt running north east from Hoe Cross to Chidden.

Yet another Red Kite was seen today over Awbridge in the Test Valley a little north of Romsey, and yesterday afternoon one went over Titchfield Haven. Also in the Romsey area yesterday

Phil Lord found 8 Golden Plover still on the Highwood Lane fields east of Romsey where he last saw just 4 of them on April 2). In the Meon valley Will Walmsley was pleased to have a couple of late Fieldfare next to his home garden at Shedfield last night (Apr 7). Further south along the Meon, also yesterday, Richard Carpenter saw a Kingfisher on the canal south of Titchfield and Peter Morrison had a White Wagtail in the reserve there. Much further upstream Richard heard Woodlark song in what I think was an unexpected place. Going back to Apr 3 when the first Cuckoo was at Beacon Hill in the Meon valley there is today further confirmation of their arrival that day with news of one at the Lower Test reserver on the same day. Finally a nice bit of birding by Martin Rand while he was plant hunting at Durlston country park in Dorset last Saturday (Apr 6). Martin writes {{ While warming up with cups of tea in the garden of the Durlston Head cafe, we were treated to the sight of a Peregrine riding out the easterly above our heads. As the wind made him "geostationary", it was the longest and best view of a Peregrine in flight I've ever enjoyed. }}

PLANTS:

SAT 13 APR

My visit to the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth for the monthly bird count gave me a good list of 48 flowering plants, newcomers for the year being White Champion, Yellow Iris, Changing Forget-me-not, Thyme leaved Speedwell, Black Medick and Beaked Hawksbeard (just one flower seen). In a damp patch near the Children's Pond Common Sedge (*Carex nigra*) had established a dense tuft with many male spikelets covered with yellow male anthers, and a single blue flower had appeared on the big Foxglove tree planted at the west end of the main reception lake.

The Havant Wildlife Group were in Havant Thicket this morning and added Tormentil to the year list. Jim Berry tells me they also found Creeping Buttercup in flower (is it unusually late this year?) and Crab Apple blossom.

This latter tree has always given me difficulty since I heard that Paul Bowman, the previous recorder for south Hampshire plants, would not admit records for it unless you could find sharp spines at the end of the fruiting shoots. I have looked in vain for these on the trees which to me seem to be Crab Apples (taller and less branched than a normal apple tree and having loads of really tiny apples). I am glad to see that Stace limits his description to 'often spiny' and goes on to say it is much over-recorded for the domestic apple but that it is often very difficult to separate from it! In Hampshire the genuine Crab is found commonly on dry bracken heathland in the New Forest and in old woods in east and north east Hampshire, but the distribution map in the Flora has no record of it in the Havant Thicket area (nearest records appear to be in the Southwick woods)

FRI 12 APR

The only new flower seen by me in Havant today was Greater Celandine but yesterday Jim Berry made a more significant find of the first Bugle flower in Havant Thicket while in the Hollybank woods (east end, well away from vandal fire damage) John Goodspeed found one of the specialities of the places - white flowered Common Dog Violet growing with many other lovely woodland plants among the Early Purple Orchid colony (still not at its peak). News from Lawrence Holloway for last Wednesday (Apr 10) confirms that the Red Champion is still flowering in the Church Norton area beside the minor road (Pigeonhouse Lane) leading to Greenleaze Farm - I still have not found it elsewhere - and tells of what must be a good colony of Early Forget-me-not flowering in what he calls 'The Dell' beside the seawall leading back from Church Norton to the Ferry (I guess this is in the area where Thrift grows on the shore and reeds and scrub are inland of the wall path).

WED 10 APR

A morning walking round the fields of Warblington Farm gave me my first flowers on Celery-leaved Buttercup and one Ash tree starting to open its flowers (well behind the Oaks hereabouts). Field Maple was also in flower - although I think I have seen this earlier I do not think I have recorded it. In Emsworth Brian Fellows found Creeping Buttercup starting to flower along with Field Forget-me-not.

TUE 09 APR

In the morning I saw my first Bilberry flowers under pines in West Walk woods near Wickham and an afternoon cycle ride to south Hayling today gave me ten new flowering plants which I do not recall others having reported. Last to be seen, but maybe of most general interest, was Horse Chestnut - one tree in Sinah Lane had at least four florets open though not yet a fully lit candle! Before that I saw first flowers on the Spreading Oeaster north of Sinah Lake, and at the Kench (in the Hayling Health Society estate) both Sea Radish and Round-leaved Cranesbill had flowers. My first Common Fumitory was flowering here but Martin Rand had found this en masse last Sunday. On the southern shore of Sinah Common the less interesting new flowers were on Sand Catstail (just one or two anthers exposed), Ribwort Plantain, Sheep Sorrel and the here ubiquitous Bur Chervil (again only flowering in one sheltered spot). In a Bound Lane garden the Duke of Argyll's Teaplant was covered with flowers but I could not see a flower on plants on Sinah Common. Best flower of the day was found by accident when counting the Green Winged Orchids (my non-comprehensive count found 134 flowering spikes) - I had just stopped by two of the orchids showing white flowers (where there were three white ones last year) and knelt down to check some Sea Mouse-ear on a mound beside the white plants when I found myself looking at my first Spring Vetch (and with it on the same mound more Early Forget-me-not). The Sea Mouse-ear was just that, but back on the east side of the central beachlands funfair I had refound the patch of Little Mouse-ear that I came on last week and will be pleased to tell anyone who is interested how to find it. By the mini-golf course there is lots more Shepherd's Cress in flower - like most plants it is having a very good season.

Martin Rand found Cock's Foot grass showing its anthers for the first time today in the Hedge End area of Southampton and had a more significant find at Crab Wood, west of Winchester, yesterday - here Solomon's Seal was in full flower. On Sunday (Apr 7) Steve Mansfield found another good display of Toothwort close to the Woodlands Trust reserve at Binswood between Alton and Bordon

MON 08 APR

My own short journeying around Havant today gave me first flowers on Pendulous Sedge (by the Homewell stream), Holly (outside the Havant museum), and Woodruff - the wild plant but growing in a garden (probably planted). I see that Richard Carpenter found genuine wild Woodruff very nearly out in the West Meon area yesterday so this is not too far ahead of wild plants. Yesterday I forgot to mention one new flower for the year of which I found a small stand on a dry bank just north of Havant station - that was Wall Speedwell.

Yesterday (Apr 7) Martin Rand made a 15 mile walk in the west Hampshire country between the Test and the Wiltshire border. Among his finds were Early Purple Orchids north of Little Bentley Farm (between Bossington on the river and East Tytherley), Wood Speedwell on Tytherley Common, and a fieldful of Common Fumitory near Kestrel's Farm (close to the main A30 north west of Broughton)

Last Saturday (Apr 6) Martin Rand went to Durlston Country Park in the Dorest Purbecks, finding thousands of the Early Spider Orchids in flower there. Much more surprising to me than these expected rarities were finds of Common Milkwort, Horse-shoe Vetch and Small-flowered Buttercup. Wild Cabbage and Early Forget-me-not were also out, as was a real rarity - Hairy-fruited Cornsalad (*Valerianella eriocarpa*) - though there were as yet no seeds to prove its identity.

INSECTS:

SAT 13 APR

Sue Clark was with a conservation work party on Noar Hill near Selborne yesterday and during the lunch break found a Duke of Burgundy enjoying the sunshine out of the chill north wind. This was her earliest ever sighting of this butterfly, and it is exceptionally early though I see that two males were out in the Selborne area as early as April 10 in 1997 (other than those I think this is the earliest ever in Hampshire). Reading the account in the 1997 butterfly report I see that Matthew Oates wrote {{ An early and promising Duke of Burgundy emergence was decimated by a sudden weather deterioration (very cold from May 5 to 8) as the butterfly was approaching its peak season }}

FRI 12 APR

Nothing new for today but I have remembered that when cycling to Hayling on Apr 9 I found the first fresh Oak Apples on trees beside the Hayling Coastal Path so look out for them elsewhere.

WED 10 APR

The White-shouldered House Moth and Powdered Quaker were new for this year in Lee Marshall's Gosport moth trap this evening, and also in today's news from Richard Carpenter is his first sighting of a Large Red Damselfly at Titchfield Haven. In Emsworth Brian Fellows noticed lots of Ladybirds in Brook Meadow today and wonders if they have just emerged from the larval stage - I don't know the full details of the life cycle of a Ladybird but my impression is that these are much more likely to be adults that have been hibernating under the bark of trees around the site, and which will soon be laying eggs - but I have no idea how long it will be before those eggs become full adults.

TUE 09 APR

In addition to what I wrote yesterday about Martin Rand's week end finds I did not mention that, while he was in Durlston Country Park on Saturday, he found a number of Oil Beetles (*Meloe proscarabeus*) in the short grass of the cliff tops. This is an insect I am not familiar with so I looked it up in my two Insect books by Michael Chinery - the Collins Guide to Insects which is mainly illustrations, and the Field Guide to Insects (also published by Collins) which has lots more text. The illustration shows a long thin black beetle (just over 2.5 cm long) with a superficial resemblance to a Devil's Coach-horse in having its abdomen divided into segments (though whether the Oil Beetle can raise the tip of its tail to imitate a scorpion I do not know). It is flightless, but has the vestiges of wing cases (elytra) partly covering the front of the abdomen. As it cannot fly it defends itself from attack by exuding a smelly oil when alarmed, hence the English name. In his 'text' book Chinery describes the life cycle of this beetle which is at this time of year out and about laying eggs (several thousand per female, laid in batches) in the grass or other herbage. When these hatch the larvae (in this case the first of several larval stages) which emerge climb the nearest flower and wait for an appropriate insect to visit the flower - I gather there are several species of Oil-beetle, each having a different host insect though they are all I think some sort of bee. When the bee lands on the flower the larva grips it tightly and is carried back to the bee's nest where it lets go of the adult bee and heads for one of its eggs - having eaten the egg to start its own growth it continues to feed on the pollen and nectar stores brought by the bee for its own offspring to feed on. As it feeds the beetle larva goes through several 'moult' and remains in the bee's nest until it eventually emerges as an adult beetle.

Most of my moth news now comes from Lee Marshall, but I have just found that the recent sightings page for Titchfield Haven on the internet has moth trap reports among which are four species that Lee has not yet come up with. On Mar 25 they recorded Pqale Pinion, and on Mar 23 Small-brindled Beauty, Pine Beauty and the Herald (I thought someone had seen this this spring but can't find the reference at this moment). Lee has now added another first, Oak-tree Pug, in his trap at Gosport on Apr 4,

MON 08 APR

While I was commenting yesterday (Apr 7) that no new butterflies had emerged this week Philip Hack was down by the Beaulieu estuary (at Lower Exbury) seeing the first three Wall Browns of the year. Not quite the 'earliest ever' in Hampshire (in 2000 one was out on April 5) it is far earlier than usual, in keeping with this wonderful spring weather.

Philip also saw at least one Small Tortoiseshell, but while Martin Rand was walking a 15 mile circuit in west Hampshire (including a visit to Bentley Wood on the Wiltshire border near Salisbury) he saw a total of 40 Small Tortoiseshells in the day. He also saw 17 Orange Tips and at least one Green Veined White.

On Saturday (Mar 6) Martin Rand was on the cliffs at Durlston Head in Dorset and saw a Painted Lady fly by (third for the year?)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 12 APR

A brief bulletin on the HWT website from Pamber Forest in the north of the county says that both

Adders and Grass Snakes are now to be seen basking there when the sun shines, but in the south Richard Carpenter reports sadder news of a dead Grass Snake floating in Hill Head harbour - I hope it was not battered to death by thoughtless ignorant humans.

Yesterday evening Andrew Brookes had been fishing off Selsey and his boat was heading home when an unidentified cetacean briefly showed its back above the relatively shallow water (13 metres at this point) but was not seen again despite stopping the boat's engine and looking for it. Not quite as good a show as the TV has brought us from Chesil Bank at Weymouth where bathers have been playing with a more than willing (puppy like) young Bottle-nosed Dolphin in very shallow water.

For details of the re-issue of Brian Clarke's book 'The Stream' in paperback see my Bird News page for today.

WED 10 APR

A very interesting message today from Les Stride in Totton reads as follows {{ A strange sight this morning around 8.0 clock. I found a sloworm in my pond lying with it's head about 2 inches out of the water. It was a large one and could not have fallen in as there is nothing above the edge of the pond. The edges of the pool are a rough and shallow, so it could have climbed out at any time. The question is do sloworms swim? I have never seen one in water before and we have always had them in the garden. I know they say most things can swim if they have to but I can see no reason why this sloworm was in the water, unless it wanted to be. Also at 8.0 clock it was pretty nippy and a bit early for a sloworm to be about. Thinking it was dead I lifted it out and to my surprise it curled it's tail around my fingers, so I put it in what I thought was a safer place. Do you think it was happy where it was and have you seen sloworms swimming? }} If I had to reply to this as a reptile agony aunt I would make up something along the following lines ... Yes, I am sure Slow-worms can swim, but no, I do not think it was there of its own choice and I suspect that by taking it out of the very cold water and warming it in your hands you probably saved it's life. My guess as to how it got there is that it was thrown there by a cat playing with it (I have myself found a dead Slow-worm with a series of puncture holes through its body and was told this was probably the work of a cat - they will play with and kill them but do not eat them). Alternatively it could have been dropped by a bird (perhaps a Kestrel carrying it off as a courtship present to its mate??). After the shock of being attacked the cold water would probably have put this lizard into a state when it no longer had the energy to move - even to escape death - and it was lucky to have got it's head above water thanks to the design of the pond.

Other less unusual news today comes from the (quite unrelated!) Carpenter twins. Richard was at Titchfield Haven and saw his first Grass Snake (much more at home in water than a Slow-worm) as well as hundreds of Tadpoles - the Snake was probably after their parents - while Trevor was on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley enjoying very close views of a hunting Weasel which took no notice of his presence and came within yards of him.

MON 08 APR

The weekly newsletter which Brian Fellows writes for the Emsworth Brook Meadow group announces that last week there were almost certainly three pairs of Water Vole present (where do they come from?) and the river also now contains Grey Mullet as well as Brown Trout

WEEK 14 APR 1 - 7

BIRDS:

SUN 07 APR

The first two Hobbies of the summer are reported on the SOS website today - one arrived in East Sussex yesterday and was seen at Lullington by the Cuckmere river just west of Beachy Head and the second flew over the Durrington district of Worthing this morning.

Here in Hampshire a Grasshopper Warbler was reeling in the reeds by Hook Lake (Warsash) where it was heard by Bob Marchant, and on the Cams Hall golf course at Fareham Matt Lawes watched as two Chiffchaff collected grasses and built their nest on the ground close to his feet

The pair of Garganey are still at Woolmer Pond and were seen today by Moira Doherty while

another Garganey (not sure if it is a newcomer) was seen at Normandy (Lymington) by Steve Keen who also saw 7 Ruff, 1 Little Stint, 1 Avocet, 1 Raven, 2 Little Gulls and 21 Brent still on the Lymington Marshes. At Stokes Bay (Gosport) Ian Calderwood watched 150+ Sanderling fly east, and both Les Stride and Mike Rafter watched what must have been the same Red Kite fly north over Totton and Romsey respectively. Another (or maybe the same) Red Kite was seen today by Will Walmsley somewhere in south Hampshire today.

John Eyre was out this morning making his first visit to the 1km square selected for him to carry out the BTO Breeding Bird Survey this spring - this is in the Winchfield area (near the M3 just west of Fleet) - and he found 80 Fieldfare and a few Redwing still present. Another good winter bird seen today was the Thursley Great Grey Shrike seen by Moira Doherty.

SAT 06 APR

A very unusual and very encouraging report comes from a newcomer to HOSLIST, Doug Robertson, who today found a flock of 37 Corn Bunting at the Hoe Cross site west of Hambledon. I didn't know that we had that many Corn Bunting left in the whole of Hampshire, and I fear this may be a party on the move which will not stay with us - no doubt John Shillitoe will keep us informed if they do. Another species which is approaching extinction in Hampshire is the Yellow Wagtail - still none have touched down at Farlington and today's reports are of two over Hurst and one over Eastleigh (all flying north without stopping).

Sue Drewett has juvenile Blackbirds being fed in a nest in her garden on the edge of the Hollybank Woods at Emsworth, and at Eastleigh Lakeside Simon Ingram found a female Mallard with 15 ducklings - both of these are the second reports for the year that have reached me. The news of the Blackbird's nest came to me via Brian Fellows who also told me about a dead Egret found by Martin Baggs with head injuries that might have been inflicted by a Peregrine. The corpse has been presented to Hampshire Museum service through Chris Palmer at Havant Museum.

At Woolmer Pond today Richard Ford had his first Tree Pipit while up to 30 Brambling were still present. Down here at Langstone I made an evening foray to Wade Court and found 20 Egrets still using the night roost - although I did not stay until it was fully dark I think this was an accurate count as soon after I arrived something 'spooked' the birds, putting them all up and giving me an accurate base count of 13 birds with the other seven arriving later.

The Spoonbill which arrived at Farlington Marshes on Apr 4 was ringed and Jason Crook has now obtained its history. It was ringed as a nestling on Holland in 1998 and has since visited France and Spain regularly, sometimes returning to Holland and once going east to Sweden. This is its first recorded visit to the UK and it is still with us today. Tony Parkinson tells me an Avocet was with it at Farlington yesterday evening.

Derek Hale's Isle of Wight website records a Hoopoe on the West High Down near the Needles seen yesterday (Apr 5) and I see that Simon Boswell was one of those who saw it. Another useful website which I have not yet visited is one of recent sightings at Titchfield Haven (www.hants.gov.uk/countryside/titchfield/tisrecent.html) and Paul Winter tells us that this records a female Golden Oriole at the Haven yesterday. The SOS website adds another Garden Warbler sighting for yesterday, heard and seen at Lullington (west of Eastbourne) and records yet another wandering Red Kite - this one going east over Bexhill towards Hastings.

Earlier sightings that have only just come to my attention are from Sussex and the Isle of Wight. In Sussex Reed Warbler song was heard at Arundel on Apr 4 when the Bonaparte's Gull was reported to have returned to Pagham (but there have been no other sightings of it reported since). Also on Apr 4 two Manx Shearwater flew past At Catherine's Point and on Apr 1 the first Stone Curlew of the year was reported flying north over Havenstreet (south of Ryde)

FRI 05 APR

The area around Eyeworth Pond in the New Forest is always a good place to find a Redstart and Alan Snook enjoyed a 'cracking male' there today, along with all three species of woodpecker, but yesterday in Denny Wood John Ruppertsberry had a real Redstart bonanza with an estimated 60 birds all around him, presumably having just flown in as a migrant flock and no doubt dispersing through the New Forest soon after arriving. The idea that all the Redstarts came together in one flock is supported by the lack of other reports of these birds yesterday - just one at Church Norton is all I can find. A few Redstarts have been seen since Mar 29 (when

Russell Wynn had one at Bishops Dyke, just south of Denny Wood), and John Rupperry had his own first on Apr 3 in Holmhill Inclosure (near the Highland Water stream a little west of Lyndhurst).

I have not been back to the Hayling Oysterbeds since last Tuesday when, in failing light, I saw some strange structures on the Little Tern nesting island. Ed Griffiths, however, may have come up with an explanation of what they are and he has sent me the following account. >> Reading your news of the mysterious 'tern bins' reminded me of news I read in one of the birding magazines last year of a successful initiative to protect (Little ?) Tern chicks from predation, by providing 'half pipe' sections for them to hide under. I believe these were dipped in glue then sand, to give a more natural appearance than the black shapes you mention, and placed round side up to form sort of open ended tern nissen huts... I feel sure that this would be the intent of the constructions you observed <<

Avocet passage along the south coast continues its long drawn out and erratic course with three more dropping in at Titchfield Haven today to give a total of five on view there. I suppose that birds which breed in Holland or East Anglia and winter in Poole Harbour or the Exe estuary not have the same constraints put on their movements by the weather as do arctic breeding waders which are forced to wait for ice to melt (if they are not to find there is no food for them when they arrive) and are equally pressured to get there at the first opportunity if they are to find good nest sites and and raisee young before the weather closes in again. Whatever the reason I see that Paul Troake at Rye Harbour recorded the first three Avocet on the Camber sands in mid-February (one also arrived at Cuckmere Haven on Feb 18). Another surge occurred a month later on Mar 15 when 10 turned up at Rye and 8 flew past Portland Bill, and I'm pretty sure some birds (possibly non-breeders) will appear along the south coast throughout April and into early May. +++

Other birds currently at Titchfield according to Richard Carpenter include some 70 Black-tailed Godwit and 5 late Wigeon (the great majority have gone from here and from Farlington Marshes - these may be birds that have opted out of their version of the commuter rat-race). Three Greylag Geese were at Titchfield Haven yesterday and two were still there today, making me wonder how many more years south east Hampshire can escape the plague of these geese affecting much of England (and even north Hampshire). One Ruff and one Little Ringed Plover are more acceptable visitors, and offshore 20 Eiders do no harm - I wouldn't mind a great raft of these moving in to give us the sound of one of their crooning concerts. A little to the east Trevor Carpenter watched 11 Common Scoter fly east and even had his first two Sandwich Tern. Inland I had a surprise when walking past Aldsworth Pond to see a silent Green Sandpiper fly up from the smaller pond near the track to Sindles Farm. Nothing much else on the pond other than a few Tufted Duck, Mallard, Coot and Moorhen plus a couple of Canada Geese and one Swan on the water (none on the nest). Also in the Sindles Farm area I was pleased to see displaying Lapwing over two fields - the one immediately south east of Stansted House and the one south east of Sindles Farm on the ridge that runs along towards Aldsworth House. Over each of these fields I saw three Lapwings, two performing together as a pair and a third on its own, and on the field near Stansted also saw a pair on the ground, one hopefully sitting. In the Stansted Groves I may have had my first Garden Warbler but could not get a glimpse of the bird - it was in a block of thick new scrub - typical Garden Warbler habitat - and gabbling much faster than a Blackcap - but I could not be certain of it's identity.

THU 04 APR

I have heard no more of the Reed Warbler reported to have been at Pagham Harbour on April 1 but at least two people have told me that one was reported at Titchfield Haven today (still no first hand reports!). First hand news from Jason Crook at Farlington Marshes does not include Reed Warbler but does feature a Spoonbill which he saw on the scrape and the appearance of a single Pochard. Regulars still at Farlington include one Short-eared Owl, one Spotted Redshank, one Whimbrel and one Pale-bellied Brent (no doubt with a few Dark-bellied but Jason does not mention them). Ten Pintail may be birds that have wintered there or just passers by, as are more than 50 Merganser now in the harbour. The two Black-necked Grebe are still in the harbour with three Sandwich Tern and many more than 15 Med Gulls. +++
No more Yellow Wagtails at Farlington, and only two reported anywhere on the south east coast -

one over Whitehawk Hill overlooking Brighton marina, and one at Pagham yesterday. House Martins are in similarly short supply but no doubt they will turn up in good numbers eventually - just one of these was at Burgess Hill, north of Brighton today, and one more was by the River Test at Romsey, seen by David Thelwell who comments that this is the first year in which he has seen House Martin before Swallow. +++

At Hook today Trevor Carpenter had another 51 Black-tailed Godwit with single Sedge and Willow-Warblers plus 1 Wheatear

Little Egrets have not yet totally deserted us although when Barry Collins went to check out the Great Deeps traditional roost on Thorney Island last night he did not see a single bird. This evening however 37 Egrets came into their alternative roost on Thorney and at Langstone I saw at least six birds on the Wade Court trees well before sunset but with the tide high.

Elsewhere in Hampshire a few winter birds can still be seen - at Eastleigh had 4 Golden Plover today (and a lone Egret in the Itchen Valley country park yesterday). while in the north of the county 40 Fieldfare were virtually the only birds seen by Mike Wall on Watership Down.

On the IBM North Harbour site at Portsmouth a Whitethroat was a nice surprise for Kevin Stouse during a quick lunchtime stroll - he also heard Cetti's Warbler which can probably now be classed as a regular here (occasional reports for the past six months), and I was interested to hear of two Shelduck seen in separate places - they usually put in an appearance at this time of year, probably searching for nest sites but never in past years stopping here (with an increasing rabbit population I suppose there may still be a year in which they do stay to nest). Kevin also saw one Swan on the lake, so there is still a chance they will nest.

I am not a gull watcher but nevertheless I read through a note from Russell Wynn (addressed to 'dedicated gull watchers only') and came away feeling even more justified in not wasting my time in trying to sort out the species, sub-species and races - let alone the age differences - of these admittedly imposing birds. I had thought that I was getting close to recognizing a Yellow-legged Gull when I saw it but Russell gives me another reason (besides the Caspian Gull problem) to give up - he recently put a picture of a Herring Gull with yellow-legs (but pale mantle) on the Surfbirds website and the experts have told him that it may be a Herring Gull of a yellow legged subtype of the race known as *Larus argentatus omissus* (called omissus because it is left out of the list of ten races listed by Peter Grant - well that's my derivation of the name), or it may be any other type of Herring Gull that's been eating the wrong food (it seems that eating some shellfish can turn a gull's legs yellow in the same way that Shrimps bring out the pink in Flamingos).

Two more Red Kites were reported today, one seen over Pagham Harbour and the other in the Denny Wood area of the New Forest (seen by John Rupperry), but the interesting raptor news comes from Peter Hockin in a follow up to Ron Toft's account (see yesterday's news) of a Kestrel practice bombing rabbits. Peter starts by wondering if the Kestrel was in fact putting on a show of its hunting skills to impress a female Kestrel perched nearby but not seen by Ron. He goes on to describe his own observation made today in the open country north of Fordingbridge. He says >> Yesterday lunchtime I had three buzzards circling over the Fordingbridge-Rockbourne road. Two were at medium altitude- stooping and showing off generally. A third was holding off - much higher up - maybe hoping to break up the happy couple?? As I watched this bird I suddenly became aware of another raptor - much smaller - maybe only a quarter of the buzzard size. This could have been a sparrow-hawk. The thing was that for no apparent (sensible) reason it was mirroring the manoeuvres of the top buzzard, sometimes coming within what seemed to be a few feet of its back, moving away and then returning to perform the identical soaring turns but not appearing to try to threaten it in any way - learning by association perhaps??. <<

Still on the subject of raptors I hear from Kevin Stouse that he was at Pagham last Sunday (Mar 31) and watched a Marsh Harrier which no one else seems to have reported, perhaps because of limited visibility in drizzle - possibly the first arrival of this summer's birds from the south? It flew past him low and close before soaring high. Also at Pagham yesterday (Mar 3) four Whimbrel were seen to come in off the sea (and three Whimbrel, maybe another group, were seen at Selsey Bill with an Arctic Skua, 8 Velvet Scoter and 2 Great Northern Divers) - these sightings are enough to tell me that the expected Whimbrel passage has started, but at the

same time possibly making Barry Collins think again as to whether the three Whimbrel that he saw on the Thorney shore on Apr 2 really were the wintering birds that he thought or the first passage birds. +++

Another item from Kevin Stouse relates to Apr 1 but was, I am sure, no attempt at an April Fool joke. Following a winter in which Bar-tailed Godwit have been rarities in the Langstone area Kevin saw more than 50 on the mud east of Langstone village on Monday morning - I suppose this shows that while there have been few here this winter they are not extinct world wide, and are prepared to drop in on passage, though I thought we had had our share of passage birds when Brain Fellows had the peak count of Bar-tails in our area during the February WeBS count for the Hayling Black Point - he had 121 on Feb 9. Kevin's news for Apr 1 also include a sighting of a Wheatear on the Langstone South Moors, and back on Good Friday he watched a Willow Warbler for an hour in his own garden as well as seeing 65 Black-tailed Godwit and two Water Rails at the Farlington lake.

WED 03 APR

The first Cuckoo of the year was heard today by Trevor Carpenter on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley; the first Common Whitethroat was claimed by Russell Wynn somewhere in the Lymington area; and up near Farnham, while carrying out a butterfly transect at Bentley Station Meadow, Derek Mills heard the first Garden Warbler (with three Blackcaps singing in the vicinity for contrast). Not the first of the year, but no doubt equally exciting, was a Serin singing in Church Norton churchyard where it was heard by Lawrence Holloway - all these birds being recorded today.

Two Common Terns were calling loudly enough to draw John Chapman out of his house at Langstone to see them over the old Hayling Island railway bridge at 5pm when the tide was at its highest - John says he had close enough views to be sure they were not Arctics. Normally most tern species are recorded over the open sea, passing along the coast, before they are found in the harbours but this year the first Common Tern that I have heard of was at the Westhampnett pool (Chichester) on April 1 with just one other sighting (of two 'Comms') off Seaford near Beachy Head on the same day

Also in the Langstone Harbour area today was a drake Garganey seen by Ian Thirlwell at the lakes on Milton Common (Ian's message says the bird was >> back on 'Duck Lake' this afternoon << which could mean that he has seen it earlier in the past few days, but I have not seen any messages to that effect). Another good bird seen in a slightly unexpected setting today was an Osprey which came sailing over the Beaulieu river while Simon Woolley was visiting Exbury Gardens for non-birding purposes, and yesterday Russell Wynn had another Garganey in the Lymington area.

Among other birds seen today Ian Thirlwell found 17 Black-tailed Godwit off the Milton Common shore, and six Pintail plus an Egret were at Pulborough Brooks. Egrets will be few and far between in the next two or three months for most birders, and other than two which I saw today in the Langstone area this one at Pulborough was the only one reported. Yesterday Simon Woolley saw just one flying south at dusk along the Itchen at Winchester and the only other reported sighting was of one on the Sussex Ouse south of Lewes. A sighting of 30 Fieldfare in the Meon Valley today by Trevor Carpenter shows that they have not all left us yet (Steve Mansfield saw 23 by the Candover stream north of Alresford yesterday and Trevor saw 40 at Hook on the previous day - Apr 1). Coming the other way are Common Redstarts - I have already reported one at Beachy Head on Mar 31 as first of the year but Russell Wynn has now pre-empted that with a record from the New Forest Bishop's Dyke area on Mar 29, and today Giles Darvil had one in the Sloden Wood area of the New Forest (west of Fritham) while Mike Rafter had one in the northern New Forest yesterday. Other birds worth a mention today are a couple of Avocet in the Lymington area, seen by Russell Wynn, and 15 Red-legged Partridge seen on Beacon Hill by Trevor Carpenter - I would expect these birds to abandon communal life in coveys about now and to find the males aggressively defending their territories against all comers (including humans) by shouting at them from the highest perch they can find in an open field.

Finally for today here is a message from Ron Toft recording an observation he made today on Stockbridge Down concerning >> rather unusual Kestrel behaviour. A male bird persistently

dive-bombed a group of half-a-dozen or so adult rabbits in a fallow arable field on Stockbridge Down. When I first saw the bird, it was in hovering mode above the field margins. When it suddenly plunged, I expected to see it seize a vole or other small mammal on the ground. Instead, it swooped low over one rabbit, soared up, and then repeated this behaviour several times over a period of about 20 minutes. I got the impression that the Kestrel wasn't serious about the 'attacks', and the rabbits didn't seem unduly perturbed, easily moving out of the way. The Kestrel did, however, touch the back of at least one rabbit. Has anyone else observed this behaviour before? Could it have been an experienced young male trying out his hunting techniques? <<

TUE 02 APR

Top news today is of the first two broods of Mallard ducklings, seen by Steve Mansfield on the Candover stream (which runs due south from the village of Brown Candover to join the Itchen just west of Alresford).

Following Bob Chapman's report of a single Yellow Wagtail passing over Farlington Marshes on Mar 29 the absence of further reports was making me wonder if we would ever see another but the SOS website today tells us of at least three more in Sussex (but none reported in Hampshire). One of the Sussex birds was not far from Hampshire, seen today at Ford by the River Arun south of Arundel, but the other two were in East Sussex at Rye Harbour, seen yesterday (Apr 1)

More news from Bob Chapman is today on the HWT website, where he tells us that the Brent flock at Farlington Marshes is now down to just 170 birds, with one tatty Pale-bellied bird among them. Nearly all the Wigeon have also left but the two Black-necked Grebe are still in the harbour, now both in summer plumage (it is now a regular annual occurrence to have two or more birds left in Langstone Harbour during the early summer and seen again in early autumn, though their is neither habitat nor any other indication of attempted breeding, although this species has bred in Hampshire).

Brian Fellows was also birding on the Portsmouth shore of Langstone Harbour today, finding two eggs in the Swan's nest at Milton Common and 56 Shelduck on the mud offshore with 54 Brent. In the nearby Eastney Lake the winter Common Gulls had vanished, as had the pair of Swans that seemed to be thinking of taking up residence, and there was only 1 Brent to be seen. Going north to Baffins Pond the Swans that may still return to nest there were absent during Brian's visit but he did enjoy (?) the sight of 30 Canada Geese with the 10 Barnacle Geese, the Snow Goose, the Embden and the hybrid Bar-head. 50 Tufted Duck and 68 Mallard were still present.

Over in Sussex at least one Little Gull was at the Westhampnett pool at Chichester today, seen by David Parker, and there were two there on Apr 1, while on Thorney Island Barry Collins is beginning to see summer birds - today he had 3 Swallows, 5 Sand Martins, 3 Wheatear and 3 Sedge Warbler - following his first Swallow seen yesterday (when three Whimbrel were together at Wickor Point near the west end of the Great Deeps - Barry thinks these were all winter birds).

Up in the north of Hampshire Martin Pitt was in woods south east of Hannington (a few miles north west of Basingstoke) and heard an aggressive Willow Tit >> calling strongly and chasing Marsh tits off territory! << and in Basingstoke itself a Peregrine is still using the IBM building as a night roost - Martin saw it on Apr 3.

As the phrase 'The Eagle has landed' has been used on an earlier occasion I will have to be content with 'The Magpie has fledged' to celebrate(?) the appearance of the first juvenile Magpie seen today out of its nest and noisily begging for food from its parent - and to acknowledge my ignorance shown by using the word 'fledge' to mean 'acquire feathers' where everyone else uses it to mean 'fly from the nest'. To prove my contriteness (to Dennis Bill and others) for committing this crime against the English language I have made an honest attempt to use the word in it's proper sense, and to do my bit to influence the writers of dictionaries to change the definitions they use to come in line with the accepted meaning of the term. +++

This juvenile Magpie was seen in a tree beside the Hayling Billy Trail in Havant as set out on my Tuesday cycle trip to Hayling Island, during which I saw a few birds of minor interest. Nothing much on the way south but reaching the Beachlands shore of Hayling Bay I noticed one Med

Gull on the shingle and then heard a Willow Warbler in the Tamarisks surrounding the Golf Course, south of which a small flock of 20 Linnets were bouncing around as my progress disturbed their feeding on the ground. At the harbour entrance a long winged smallish gull flew west over my head, showing dark wing tips from below but not giving me a decent view until it was over by the Eastney shore where I confirmed my guess that it was probably a Kittiwake by the darker grey of its upperwings and the absence of white on the wingtips. Coming up the west Hayling shore as the tide had just started to fall I heard one Med Gull fly over the fields and then heard and saw a party of some dozen Turnstone among the Curlew and Oystercatchers (with the odd Redshank), and at the Oysterbeds I watched the resident Ringed Plover making display flights around the lagoon island as a pair of Merganser took off from the water. On the island I could see that more good work had been done to raise the level of the nesting area with added gravel but I was baffled by the line of small cairns of larger stones that have appeared along the ridge - I could not see clearly in the dusk but it seemed as if a line of black plastic flowerpots had been laid on their sides, then fixed in place with the large stones beside, behind and above the pots, leaving the front open. Are these there to save the Terns from getting wet when it rains? is this an avian equivalent of dog mess bins (a place for the birds to deposit their droppings and other rubbish)? or could this even be an attempt to provide nesting places for Shelduck in holes hardly large enough to accommodate the body of a Shelduck, let alone its head? (I have a vision of a line of Shelduck masquerading as battery hens, each with its backside in a flower pot and its head in full view to allow the warden to count the number of birds and check they were not shirking their parental duties). Some 14 Shelduck were present on the main pool as half a dozen fishermen who had been fishing from the outer bund walls (where no one is permitted to walk) started to make their way home to tea now that the tide was low enough for them to cross the gaps in the wall. Just one Egret flew over the pools, and back at Langstone one more could be seen perched on the Wade Court yew where it may have been the last to roost here this spring (or could be a dutiful parent waiting near a mate sitting on a nest)

At Eastleigh Lakeside country park Colin Bates today saw 32 Golden Plover and encountered what sounds like an escaped Cockatiel, but the big news from that extraordinarily productive site relates to yesterday when a female Ring Ouzel spent the day there, being seen by at least two adult and one juvenile birder (the second adult being Simon Ingram - helping to make up for his recent 'big dip' when others saw an Osprey fly over the site while Simon's view was obscured by trees! - and the juvenile being his seven year old son)

MON 01 APR

The main thing that strikes me in today's messages are the reports of Skuas starting to move up channel. Three Arctic and one Great Skua went past St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today, one Arctic was seen from Southwick in Brighton, and at Splash Point, Seaford (just west of Beachy Head) twelve Arctic Skuas were seen. Other reports from seawatchers on the Isle of Wight include one Black-throated Diver, and from Sussex I read of 140 Brent passing Brighton and four Velvet Scoter off Splash Point - yesterday another 150 Brent winged their way past Beachy Head.

Both Dave Pearson and Mike Collins noted the return of the albino Common Gull to the Havant area today. Dave saw it where it may well be seen again in the Broadmarsh area at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream, while Mike had a more interesting sighting of it in the middle of Leigh Park as he was driving to B&Q - the bird was also near the Hermitage Stream where it passes the roundabout at the junction of Middle Park Way and Purbrook Way. (I wonder if Barry Collins will get it on his garden list?). Other local news came from Brian Fellows in Emsworth where the Swan herd now numbers 97 and thus sets a record for the month of April - the Black Swan is still missing and so far there have been no reports of where it has got to.

The first Common Redstart of the year landed at Beachy Head yesterday (Mar 31) and today came reports of a Serin at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight and of a third Ring Ouzel - this one at Brighton following the one at Selsey Bill yesterday and the earlier one at Hastings on Mar 15. As might be expected there are numerous reports of other summer arrivals though none of them (other than Chiffchaff, Blackcap, Sand Martin and Sandwich Tern) in any great numbers. Wheatears may be pouring in at Portland Bill but in Hampshire and Sussex a sighting of six so

far has been something to get excited about - yesterday there were 20 at Selsey and 11 at Newhaven so things may be changing. Swallows have been seen widely but never more than two at a time and the entry on the SOS website for yesterday was typical, reporting >> Two bedraggled Swallows on telegraph wires in wind and drizzle at Annington (south of Steyning) <<

We still have a few winter birds around as Will Walmsley discovered when he was at Farlington Marshes today and saw 2 Black-necked Grebe in the harbour, one dressed for summer, the other for winter, as well as two Pintail and one Pale-bellied Brent (probably a different bird to the three off the South Moors in the afternoon - see below). In the Itchen Valley Colin Bates found a single Redwing in the Brambridge area, and at Woolmer Pond Richard Ford saw 2 Brambling and 2 Siskin plus 4 Shoveler and 12 Gadwall. +++

Titchfield Haven laid on some special attractions for Bank Holiday visitors today in the shape of a drake Mandarin, a couple of Avocet and a Ruff, seen by Paul Winter who also saw single Swallow near the Rownhams services on the M27 (actually at Toothill, just north of the M27 close to the hopefully named Nightingale Wood). Another bird deserving a mention was a singing Stonechat heard at Lepe by Martin Rand on Saturday (Mar 30) - in view of Trevor Carpenter's surprise at hearing one at Hook on Mar 26, and the lack of reports of this bird's song, it might be worth keeping your ears open for a truncated burst of Dunnock-like song when you are in Stonechat territory in the next week or so.

I was not expecting to see interesting birds in a brief walk to Budds Farm this afternoon, and it did not surprise me to find only two Teal and two Shoveler on the pools, though there were thirty or more Tufted Duck still present with the pair of Shelduck - but not the Swans - that will probably nest here. In the bushes I twice heard quiet snatches of Willow Warbler song (I think there were two birds) and I was told by a couple of birders who had been at Pagham today that Reed Warblers had arrived there. On the South Moors shore with Mike Collins we saw three Pale-bellied Brent (one not so clearly pale bellied as the others) with less than fifty Dark-bellied, and near the Tamarisk pool five Egrets were sitting out the high tide. At the mouth of the Langbrook stream three adult Med Gulls were with Black-headed, and off the Royal Oak at Langstone a party of six Curlew, flying east high, were calling pleasantly to each other, not only showing where the missing harbour birds have now gone but also giving a forcible reminder of the migrant Whimbrel that will soon be filling the sky with their calls.

PLANTS:

SUN 07 APR

I am not allowed to drive until next Thursday when I have the final check on my eye after the cataract operation and this has caused me to walk in places that I might otherwise have bypassed. This afternoon, for instance, I decided to walk up the Hermitage Stream through Leigh Park as far as the A3M/ Hulbert Road junction and recorded 63 different plant species in flower. The best of these was perhaps Scarlet Pimpernel but I also found my first Creeping Buttercup (I have been surprised to find Meadow, Hairy and Bulbous before Creeping). Hardly a first for the year, but an indication of the start of summer flowering, was my first Yarrow for some time, and the damp grassland near the stream had my first Meadow Foxtail grass showing its anthers (this was seen by Brian Fellows at Emsworth some time ago). More of the Grey Field Speedwell which I found last Friday for the first time is now flowering by the wall of the Post Office sorting office in Beechworth Road, and in the East Pallant carpark blue flowered Cornsalad is out on the old wall (there is a mass of it at Havant railway station at the top of the steps leading up from Market Parade, with Storksbill in the same flowerbed). The plants in my own road which I thought (see Apr 3) might be Valerianella dentata have now acquired a blue tinge to their flowers and are probably the common *V. locusta* (maybe influenced by creosote!)

SAT 06 APR

The Havant Wildlife Group, visiting Pagham today, found the first Red Campion flowers that I have heard of, and at the south foot of Hilsea Lines John Goodspeed found a good display of the Adder's Tongue Fern which flourishes here each year. My own find of the day was really a garden flower - the first Honesty flowers that I have seen.

FRI 05 APR

A walk from Havant to Stansted House and back today rewarded me with its intended objective - the sight of 20 spikes of Early Purple orchid already in flower at the Stansted Forest site, though I see that Lawrence Holloway beat me to it with finds of other Early Purples at Ebernoe (north of Petworth in Sussex) yesterday. On my walk I came on American Wintercress in flower by the roadside at the junction of the Emsworth Common Road and the Horndean road near Havant BUPA hospital (the plants are on the north side of the Emsworth Common and the east side of the Horndean road, right at the junction), then saw Wood Speedwell flowers just starting to open in part of the Stansted Woodland (with my own first Wood Sorrell in Southleigh Forest). On my way home Grey Field Speedwell was showing tiny sky blue flowers nestling among its dark leaves at the edge of a pavement in Denvilles. Other plants worth a mention are the Lesser Periwinkle in the hedge bordering Southleigh Park (junction of East Leigh and Southleigh Roads), buds of Bush Vetch (but no flowers for me!), and buds on Spindle bushes that will very soon be in flower. Lilac is now flowering everywhere and I saw the first signs of Laburnum buds. Walking the dog last night in the Warblington area I came on my first Spotted Medick flowers.

WED 03 APR

First my apologies to Martin Rand for misquoting his news (see what I wrote on Apr 1 about his Good Friday outing to the Hambleton area) of 'Red Flowered Lesser Periwinkle' in Madams Copse near Hambledon. My eyes are doing pretty well after the cataract operation last week, but in this case they slipped from one line of his message reporting the specially good display of Lesser Periwinkle flowers in the woodland to a description of Cowslips now flowering on nearby downland - it was some of the cowslips that had 'brick red flowers', seen on Soberton Down above the village hall on the other side of the valley - Martin had been on the minor road called 'Chalk hill' which runs south from the road junction by the community centre/village hall. Today I did no more than walk my daughter's dog (with us while she visits Iona in the Scottish western isles) round the north of Havant to add four plants to my own personal list of firsts for the year, though all but one have already been seen by others. The one not previously reported was a great surprise, being a crop of some Corn Salad growing from the pavement edge of my own road at the foot of a well creosoted fence - as it has white flowers there is reason to hope that it will turn out to be *Valerianella dentata* rather than the commoner *V. locusta*. My other finds were the lovely deep blue spikes of Germander Speedwell flowers, still very early in the season but well beaten by Richard Carpenter's find at Pagham Harbour on Mar 3, Field Madder (beaten to this by Jim Berry's find yesterday - see below), and Sticky Mouse-ear (which has been hovering in bud for ages and has probably been seen in flower by many people before me).

TUE 02 APR

The first two Green Winged Orchids which I came on in the Gunner Point area of Hayling today were standing tall with all flowers open and outstretched, but these were in a sheltered spot and I only saw four other plants with erect flower stems, none of them with fully open flowers. The only other new flowering for the year to go on my list was Eastern Rocket, of which I saw one young plant in the Beachlands area and then found the usual cluster of them around a stone immediately south of the 'ice cream shop' at the entrance to the carparks along the harbour entrance (in some years they are flowering here in January and I had begun to wonder if they would appear this year). Sea Champion, recently seen by Martin Rand at Lepe, was out and the Shepherd's Cress was probably at its peak (if anyone wants to see it don't wait too long!). On the shingle the purple early leaves of Sea Kale now make a pretty sight, and by the Sinah Lake the Tartarian Honeysuckle is in full flower and will probably benefit from some pruning where it has been cut back so as not to impede vehicles using the entrance road). East of the funfair at Beachlands, where I found Heath Pearlwort last summer, I was pleased to find more Early Forget-me-not (just three plants spotted, nothing to compare to the mass flowering in the bus turn round at the Ferry Inn) and while in this area I took a specimen of something that did not look like the Sea Mouse-ear that is now flowering abundantly hereabouts - when I got home and had a look with a lens I found the flower sepals had broad silver edges proving that I had my first Little Mouse-ear (*Cerastium semidecandrum*).

More new flowers were seen today by Jim Berry in a walk north from his home in Rowlands castle to Finchdean and Old Idsworth. The best of these to my mind was Goldilocks Buttercup but he also found the first Crosswort, and his own first Bush Vetch, Ramsons and Garlic Mustard (or Jack by the Hedge). To end today's list I must add Hoary Cress -most of this will remain in bud for some time yet but beside the Hayling Coastal Path where it skirts Stoke Bay on Hayling several plants were in flower (this is the patch noticed by the Havant Wildlife Group a couple of weeks ago as being more advanced than elsewhere).

MON 01 APR

A walk around Havant and the South Moors today gave me a list of 45 flowering plants, among them four new ones for the year - Garlic Mustard, Dove's Foot Cranesbill, Hairy Buttercup and Cleavers (or Goosegrass). With the Cranesbill was a patch of budding Ox-eye Daisies that will open within days, nearby a plant of Beaked Hawksbeard also had many flower buds, and further from fully flowering were my first plants of Horseradish. In one garden a single flower had opened on a flowerhead of Lilac. In the centre of Havant, on the old wall which forms the south side of the path running along the south side of St Faith's churchyard, my eye was caught by unfurling fronds of Hart's-tongue Fern and with it I was not surprised to see fresh Wall Rue fronds, but with them I was very surprised to see a plant of Maidenhair Spleenwort having two established fronds and two fresh and tender new ones. I know this is a relatively common fern on old walls but it is only the third site that I know of within Havant Borough (one at Emsworth, one at Bedhampton and this one in the centre of the town). In my own garden I was pleased to find a patch of Field Wood-Rush (or Good Friday Grass) showing its yellow anthers today, but I see that Martin Rand has been finding this in flower for two weeks (see below).

John Goodspeed was the first to find one of my favourite woodland spring flowers when he came on Wood Sorrel in Sawyer's Copse by the Wallington River north of Portsdown today - also in that area he found Moschatel and Ramsons were out. In Crab Wood to the west of Winchester Martin Rand found the first Wood Sedge flowers, and in Emsworth Brian Fellows found a second plant of flowering Hedge Mustard near the marina and saw buds starting to open on Common Comfrey in Brook Meadow. In the village of Dean, near Sparsholt to the north west of Winchester, Martin saw >> Great Forget-me-not (*Brunnera macrophylla*) making a bid for freedom in a hedgebank << This is not a plant that I can recall having seen but it should be easy to pick out by its Forget-me-not like cymes of flowers (each 3 to 4 mm wide) on erect stems up to 50cm high - do not confuse it with another garden plant called Blue-eyed Mary (*Omphaloides verna*) which has much larger flowers (10-15 mm). Both plants can be persistent if thrown out in woods but neither gets a mention in the Hants Flora.

On Saturday (Mar 30) Sea Champion was flowering at Lepe on the Solent shore, seen there with Spring Beauty and Sea Mouse-ear by Martin Rand. The latter two plants were flowering on Hayling last Tuesday (though I see that I failed to report the Sea Mouse-ear) but this is the first Sea Champion I have heard of.

On Good Friday (Mar 29) Martin Rand was in the Hambledon/Soberton area east of the Meon Valley and found the floor of Madams Copse, on the south west fringe of Hambledon, covered with an excellent display of Lesser Periwinkle. Among the flowers some were brick-red, something I had never heard of but the variation is recorded in Stace. It seems that Lesser Periwinkle is having a good year and you may recall that I not only found very early flowers in Pitts Copse at Stansted on Feb 17, but when I re-visited that wood on Mar 15 I remarked that the show of flowers there was the best I could recall. While in that area Martin came on the first Bush Vetch flowers beside Ingoldfield Lane east of Soberton Heath and found his first Southern Wood-rush flowering in Huntbourn Wood, reminding him that both Hairy and Field Woodrush had been flowering for up to two weeks.

INSECTS:

SUN 07 APR

Butterflies continue to abound and many people have reported their first sightings of species, similar to the first Holly Blue that was in my garden yesterday and my first definite Small White, seen at rest today. Perhaps typical of the better lists recorded was that seen by Mark Litjens in the Whiteley Pastures area south of Botley Woods today. He saw 37 Peacock, 10 Brimstone. 5

Commas, 4 Orange Tip and 2 Small White.

I read on the Butterfly Conservation website that yet another Hummingbird Hawkmoth was in Brian Fletcher's Winchester garden on Friday (Apr 5) and someone else had seen another in Winchester on March 24. These follow sightings of one (probably hibernating) in a Cambridgeshire garden (at St Ives) in January, confirmation of one hibernating at Plymouth railway station, sightings of probable migrants at Selsey and Winchester on Mar 7, and one seen in a Southampton garden on Mar 27.

FRI 05 APR

The sight of more than 30 Small Tortoiseshell butterflies around one clump of nettles in mid-Hampshire goes a long way to restoring my faith in the continuing presence of this once common species. On Apr 3 Dave Unsworth found 20 Small Tortoiseshell together in the lower Itchen valley and today Jonathan Forsyth found more than 30 together >> engaged in courtship behaviour over the emergent nettle beds <<. Today's find was at Hunton Manor on the north bank of the River Dever half way between Micheldever and Sutton Scotney.

In Totton a second Large Red Damselfly (following the first seen at Farlington Marshes on Apr 3) appeared from Les Stride's garden pond, and both I (in Stansted Forest) and Mike Harris (in his Cosham garden) had our first Bee Flies. Mike and Nik Knight (at Langstone) had Holly Blues in their gardens, and I was lucky enough to see both male and female Orange Tip in the Emsworth area.

Lee Marshall today sent me a composite list of his moth sightings from Good Friday up to last night, listing 14 species that were new to him, all but two being firsts for the year as far as I know. On Mar 29 his Gosport trap had The Streamer; on Mar 31 he had *Caloptilia syringella*, *Emmelina monodactyla* and Dark Sword-grass (the last of these being a migrant that had figured elsewhere on the south coast in the mini-invasion of Mar 7); on Apr 1 he recorded *Agonopterix alstroemeriana* and Swallow Prominent; on Apr 3 he had Lunar Marbled Brown and Purple Thorn (the latter seen by Philip Hack at Nursling on Mar 23; and last night he listed Spruce Carpet, Shuttle-shaped Dart, Pine Beauty, Angle Shades, Oak Nycteoline and Nut-tree Tussock

An Iron Prominent moth was found by Philip Hack in his moth trap at Nursling (near the River Test on the north west fringe of Southampton) last night, and after being released it stayed through today on the wall of his house.

THU 04 APR

Lawrence Holloway went to the Ebernoe nature reserve north of Petworth today and writes >> Where the steep slope of the Meadow had broken into small 'cliffs', what looked like YELLOW-LEGGED MINING BEES (*Andrena flavipes*) were in attendance, buzzing to and fro. It was an ideal location, facing south and quite dry. << I see that Lawrence is not sure of their identity, and I remember that last July, when a mass of these insects appeared on the Pagham Harbour reserve, Sarah Patton commented that they had only just emerged (but that may well have been the emergence of the offspring of the generation that are currently active). Lawrence was also uncertain of the identity of some Bee Flies which he also saw at Ebernoe - he says >> Two species of BEE-FLIES were noted along a sunny bank - the large one and which we know from our garden, *BOMBYLIUS MAJOR*, and a much smaller and darker one, about half the size of *MAJOR*. <<

WED 03 APR

The most significant insect news today comes from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes where, on Good Friday (Mar 29), he found an extraordinarily early Large Red Damselfly near the spring in the north of the reserve. Also on Good Friday I see that David Parker was among those who saw Holly Blues in March with one in his garden at Forestside.

Peacock butterflies are certainly thriving this spring but I don't quite know what to make of Lawrence Holloway's report that they were 'innumerable' at Pagham Harbour today. Easier to appreciate was Dave Unsworth's numerical indication of what he saw in the Itchen Valley between the M27 and Bishopstoke where he yesterday saw 8 species, among them 16 Peacocks and 20 Small Tortoiseshell (all of the latter around what he calls 'Manor Farm' which I take to be Allington Manor Farm rather than the place which advertises itself by that name, as if it were the only Manor Farm in Hampshire, by the Hamble south of Botley). Also on Dave's

list were single Holly Blue and Orange Tip, probably different individuals to the examples of these species seen near the Itchen north of Brambridge by Richard Carpenter.

MON 01 APR

Adrian Martin was by the River Itchen near Brambridge today and saw a blue butterfly, which must have been a Holly Blue, as well as having a distant sighting through binoculars of what he thought was a Painted Lady, but was reluctant to record as such in view of the early date. In view of the report of a Painted Lady seen at Brighton last Saturday (and a half-remembered reading in some butterfly book of an invasion of Painted Ladies along the South Coast in March of 1938) I for one am prepared to give him the benefit of the doubt and hope this is confirmed by other sightings! (I cannot be certain that these sightings were today - Adrian's message was sent at 9:30am this morning and purports to record today's sightings but this seem early in the day to see seven species of butterflies and get home to send out the news!)

On Good Friday (Mar 29) Martin Rand walked the public path through the north of Huntbourn Wood, west of Denmead, and shared with Rob Edmunds the pleasure of seeing the first Orange Tips of the year. Among other butterflies he was pleased to see two female Brimstones in the Soberton area.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 06 APR

Brian Fellows saw a Water Vole in the River Ems at Brook Meadow today in a different place from his previous sighting and believes that there are at least two in his patch again this year.

THU 04 APR

The first Adder of the year was seen today in Botley Woods by Matt Rawlings when it was disturbed by a Speckled Wood butterfly (I know these butterflies are aggressive in the defence of their territories but this sounds like taking valour to the brink of fool-hardiness).

Later today Jason Crook saw what sounds like an impressive and uncommon sight of more than 50 Noctule Bats hunting at dusk over reed beds in the north of the Farlington Marshes reserve. I presume this is a large colony that has spent the winter hibernating in the area and has just decided to make their first appearance in the summer sky - I hope it is not a colony that has just been disposed of their home.

Speaking to Nik Knight today I was reminded that about a week ago he had told me of seeing a Water Vole at Langstone Pond. Similar sightings (including one of my own) have been made here every few months over the past couple of years and I am sure the creatures are resident but elusive. Nik's sighting was at dusk at the main 'duck feeding' point on the seawall, just east of the Mill buildings.

WED 03 APR

I have always understood that the main stronghold of Sika Deer in the New Forest is south of the railway west of Beaulieu Road so it was no great surprise to hear that Russell Wynn had seen 15 of them when birding in the Bishop's Dyke area, nor was I surprised to hear from Brian Fellows that there are now four dinner-plate sized Terrapin sunning themselves at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth today. More interesting to me was a sighting of a Water Vole in the Pagham Harbour area by Lawrence Holloway today - I hope there are quite a few in the ditches which drain the low-lying land in the Pagham/Selsey area but I was surprised that one was - as far as I can gather - seen from the seawall path north of Church Norton. Much more surprised was David Crespin, who lives in a built up area of Hurstpierpoint not far from the busy Brighton Road (A23) and Burgess Hill in Sussex, when he found that all the tadpoles from his tiny garden pond had vanished to be replaced by a single Great Crested Newt (easily identified by its size and contrast to a Smooth Newt in the same pond). The surprise is not that the newt had eaten the tadpoles but that it had appeared in this built up area with no large pond or known site for newts anywhere near. My own theory is that some 'dastardly developer' has just started building in the area and has evicted (knowingly or not) a colony of Great Crested Newts which have been sent off like Afghan refugees to find what food and shelter they can in a barren environment - perhaps we will learn more if, as I have suggested, David gets English Nature in on the case.

MON 01 APR

On Mar 25 I reported Colin Bates' sighting of an unwelcome Mink in the River Itchen near Brambridge, and I am pleased to hear from Colin today that the local river keeper has trapped 20 Mink during the past year and is probably close to ridding the river of these unwelcome animals - to prove it he (the river keeper) saw an otter in his car headlights the other night. I am not sure what area this river keeper covers but the prospects for the re-introduced Otters in the Itchen seem the brighter for his efforts.

WEEK 13 MAR 25 - 31

BIRDS:

SUN 31 MAR

Cloud and drizzle reduced the flow of bird news today but those observers who were out in Hampshire saw two more Swallows (Paul Winter had one at Lepe and Steve Mansfield the other at Winchester) while Gill Rooney reported at skyful of Sand Martins over Woolmer Pond where the pair of Garganey that arrived yesterday are still showing. By the A34 a little north of Winchester Ron Toft heard three late Fieldfare and a singing Corn Bunting near Sutton Scotney, and down at Stokes Bay, Gosport, Ian Calderwood watched a single Kittiwake and 83 Brent fly east. Here in Havant I heard Blackcap song twice during the day in my garden.

SAT 30 MAR

The first Sedge Warbler was heard singing at Farlington Marshes today by Jason Crook, who also found an adult Ring-billed Gull on the 'scrape' - almost certainly the one that has been at Broadmarsh and was last seen there by Jason on Mar 26. In the harbour 107 Merganser were on the water - Jason comments that this is probably the peak of the spring passage - and elsewhere in Langstone Harbour the single winter Whimbrel is still present as is one tatty Pale-bellied Brent and two Black-necked Grebe. On the reserve a Spotted Redshank and a Reeve were seen.

Steve Mansfield was the first to report a pair of Garganey on Woolmer Pond today with at least 6 Sand Martins, and second hand reports tell of an Osprey over Gilkicker Point at Gosport and a Purple Heron at the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood. At Titchfield Haven Will Walmsley found some 40 Black-tailed Godwit still present, along with 15 Wigeon, 10 Shoveler, 3 Pintail and a couple of Gadwall.

A large number of Common Scoter with a good number of Velvet Scoter have been seen off the Sussex coast (see below) and some have been seen from Hampshire. At Hurst today Simon Boswell saw 9 Velvet Scoter (and one Red-throated Diver) while Trevor Carpenter saw 3 Velvet among 70 Common Scoter passing Stokes Bay at Gosport. Inland Phil Lord found 14 Golden Plover still on the Highwood Lane fields east of Romsey and, on nearby Baddesley Common, his first Willow Warbler with more than 15 Redpoll.

Yesterday (Mar 29) the first Yellow Wagtail was heard by Bob Chapman as it flew north east over Farlington Marshes, where Jason Crook saw the first Swallow for the reserve and heard several Blackcap. An Osprey was over Keyhaven in the late afternoon, plus a summer plumage Water Pipit and two Little Ringed Plover, all seen there by Simon Boswell. At Budds Farm Will Walmsley found a Willow Warbler, and at the Oysterbeds came on a Pale-bellied Brent. He then saw 20 Med Gulls and 2 Black-tailed Godwit on the Northney shore just east of Langstone Bridge before going on to Church Norton where there were just 2 Bar- and 2 Black-tailed Godwit with 2 Knot. Back in Hampshire Trevor Carpenter was pleased to hear a Lesser Spotted Woodpecker 'singing' for around 5 minutes in the tree belt just north of Cams Bay - the first he has heard here despite his frequent visits. (I presume the singing was the 'pee-pee-pee' call though I tend to think of that as a call and the song to be the drumming).

In Sussex a Ring Ouzel was at Selsey (only the second I have heard of following one at Hastings on Mar 15) where a Little Egret flew in off the sea with a couple each of Swallow and Sand Martin. A Willow Warbler was at Pagham Lagoon and off the Bill 16 Velvet Scoter went east with 25 Shoveler and 1 Great Northern Diver. At Beachy Head the count of Velvet Scoter was

17 (same flock as at Selsey?) with 650 Common Scoter and 325 Brent plus 20 Sandwich Tern, 3 Avocet, 4 Pintail and a Scaup. From the Isle of Wight comes news of an immature Little Gull feeding in the wake of a slurry spreader on fields near Freshwater. Back with Sussex news, this time for Mar 28, I see that 6 Garganey flew in to Pulborough Brooks (3 of them males) and a male Hen Harrier was seen a little downstream at Waltham Brooks.

FRI 29 MAR

Hampshire's second Osprey of the spring passed over Titchfield Haven just after 9am this morning, heading east rather than north though so far no one has reported it over the eastern harbours. The first bird (at Eastleigh Lakeside on Mar 17) was also an early bird, seen at 8am, and also a 'one minute wonder' with no further sightings. For those who missed today's Osprey two male Garganey were also at Titchfield Haven and stayed a little longer, no doubt feeding up after a long journey. Single Garganey have also been seen recently at Pennington (Tony Hale had a male there on Wednesday Mar 27) and at Budds Farm pools where a male was seen by Mike Collins yesterday evening. Mike's visit to the Budds Farm area was triply rewarding as he found a Pale-bellied Brent on the shore with a flock of Dark-bellied birds, and watched a Merlin on the South Moors until it was disturbed by dog walkers. There has been a 'resident' Merlin in Langstone Harbour this winter but I have not heard of sightings at Farlington Marshes or on the islands recently so I guess this was a bird on passage that liked the look of the moors as a place to rest and possibly have a Skylark or Meadow Pipit snack before pressing on north or west.

In both autumn and spring the northern New Forest seems to be on a main route for migrant thrushes, and one of the best places to see them arriving and departing, so a report from Mike Jones, who was in the Pitts Wood area today, that he only saw 2 Fieldfare and 4 Redwing may well be an indication that the main passage of these birds out of our area is now over. Spring seawatching, however, is likely to flourish for at least another month and a taste of what is on offer came from St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight today - 120 Common Scoter, at least 8 Velvet Scoter, 18 Shoveler and singles of Red and Black-throated Divers, plus other birds, went east. From the mainland Richard Carpenter tells me that a Great Northern Diver could still be seen off Titchfield Haven and three Pintail were still at the reserve along with 80 Black-tailed Godwit, 4 Ruff and 2 Avocet. At least one Swallow and a number of Sand Martins went through the reserve this morning.

Here in Emsworth the Peter Pond Swan pair seem to have settled down to nesting - the first pair that I have definite news of so doing but I doubt they are alone. Brian Fellows saw the first egg in the nest two day ago so the clutch of five or six eggs unlikely to be complete until after the weekend when the five and a half week incubation period will start. While thinking of nests I see that Peter Morrison has seen juvenile Woodpigeons coming with their parents to feed on seed scattered for them on Peter's lawn at Warsash since Christmas, so we now have a response to Seve Keen's astonishment at seeing one out of the nest on Mar 12 - at the time I was surprised but perhaps I should not have been.

Another item of news from Peter Morrison that is likely to be of more general interest is that the charge for visiting Titchfield Haven is going up - Peter does not say when - to £2-90 per visit (or £36 for a season ticket). This was in answer to a question about opening times, which are from 9:30am to 5pm on Wednesdays to Sundays (not open Monday or Tuesday other than Bank Holidays). I think that the reserve is only open in certain months but Peter does not say this.

Making my second visit of the season to the Warblington Farm CBC plot I was not surprised that there were no Egrets with the cattle (19 were with them on my first visit on Mar 17), but 7 Snipe and 3 Teal were still there as a small reminder of winter (plus four Merganser offshore, though these were two displaying pairs). One smart male Wheatear was in one of the fields and a Blackcap sang briefly, as did two or three Chiffchaff, while Meadow Pipit could be heard several times. Most of the regular birds were present though I did not hear a Song Thrush and the Rooks continue to be absent, nor did I come across a single Pied Wagtail, but at least three Mediterranean Gulls could be heard overhead on more than one occasion (they are new this year as regulars on the plot) and a skein of 8 Canada Geese flew over, heading north east - perhaps to Aldsworth Pond - and luckily they did not stop. When Tony Gutteridge visited the plot earlier in the week he was surprised to find no Collared Doves anywhere but there was no

shortage of them today - at least five were singing and almost certainly have nests. Two other declining species are House Sparrow (I only encountered half a dozen where there are usually two dozen or more round the farm) and Starling (I saw just one group of 25 and not more than ten others) though Woodpigeon were present in unusually large numbers (50+ in one field and a couple of other smaller flocks). One male Sparrowhawk flew over though I did not see a Kestrel (a pair should nest somewhere on the site) but to end on a happier note one of the Little Owl pair was in full view perched outside what I assume to be the nest hole.

THU 28 MAR

Two more Swallows were seen today in the Bembridge area of the Isle of Wight and another two flew in over Brighton, but some winter birds are still with us. In particular one Brant was near Sturt Pond at Keyhaven, seen by Paul Winter and one Pale-bellied Brent was in Langstone Harbour, seen by Mike Collins (and already mentioned above). In the north of Hampshire Mike Wall found a flock of 58 Golden Plover, now coming into summer plumage, near Ibthorpe where big inch flocks can still be seen - among them more than 100 Linnet on stubble even though these birds have started to return to their nesting places along the coast.

In West Sussex Lawrence Holloway today heard Treecreeper song near Burton Mill Pond - by no means a first but as far as I am concerned a very rarely heard song which always delights me. Much commoner songsters now are Blackcap and I see that Brian Fellows heard at least five different birds when he was in the Hollybank Woods north of Emsworth today. Also in this local area Graham Osborne found 6 Sandwich Tern inside Chichester Harbour at Black Point (which reminds me that the count on the beach at Rye harbour was up to 75 back on Mar 24). Graham also visited Sidlesham Ferry where he saw one Little Ringed Plover and one Ruff, and yesterday there was a Little Ringed Plover at Yarmouth on the Isle of Wight where 40 Black-tailed Godwit are still present (as is a Short-eared Owl near Bembridge)

In Southampton Paul Winter found Siskin and Redpoll still present on Mar 24, and with them a Coal Tit with a very deformed bill. He says the >> Upper mandible was about twice as long as normal and downcurved, lower mandible about 1 1/3x normal and slightly upcurved. << This bird must have survived for the best part of a year and so must be able to feed, but Paul comments that its plumage looked tatty a result of difficulty in preening.

WED 27 MAR

Three more sightings of Red Kite are in the news - yesterday one came in off the sea at St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight - maybe from the continent but more likely perhaps one of the young birds from the Chilterns on its way back after having its first good look at the sea - and another was seen by Ron Toft in mid-Hants over the Dever valley which runs from Micheldever, north of Winchester, west via Egypt (that interestingly named place across the River Dever from Sutton Scotney), to join the Test near Wherwell). From Sussex comes a second hand report of 5 Kites over the West Dean Woods (but I have no detail of this sighting - could they have been a distantly seen group of Buzzards?)

I can understand the reluctance of those on e.g. the British Birds Rarities Committee to accept every observation that is sent in to them even if backed by lots of detail (was that actually observed, or thought to have been observed after later reading up on the rarity?), and I see that while one of the Hampshire Brant's regularly seen this winter has been accepted as genuine the committee still want more information in order to be convinced about the others. I mention this here as I have just received the following from Mike Collins, who writes >> Reading your bit about mistaking peregrines for sparrowhawks, did you see in the Portsmouth NEWS about a month ago they had a picture of an RSPCA man holding a sparrowhawk that had tangled itself in a bush in a school playground and later died. In the article this bird was reported to be a rare peregrine falcon! I wonder if this is the only bird of prey some people know of. Talking of mistakes I wonder if the lady who reported a hoopoe from the MoD site near Funtington may have seen one of the lapwing that were there most of the winter. << Watching the TV programme about Somerley House in the Avon Valley (on the west side of the river from the Blashford Lakes on the east) I did see a genuine Peregrine being flown over a landfill site on the estate to keep off the gulls and crows - here the reason was not to save the citizens of Ringwood from botulism but a perhaps more necessary one of preventing air-strikes between planes coming and going from 'Bournemouth International Airport' not far to the south.

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows could not find the young pair of Swans that had laid an egg on one of the rafts in the Slipper Mill Pond this week, but he did find one egg in the well established Peter Pond nest (let's hope the vandals who wrecked the nest last year after the first batch had been laid have grown up a bit). Yesterday Brian found the Baffins Pond Swans which nested last year are back on the island there but have not started on nest building, and in Eastney lake another pair are present but have no established nest site and show no signs of establishing one.

It sounds as if numbers of Black-tailed Godwit are building up along the Hampshire coast as the birds think of heading off to Iceland - maybe these are local birds just shuffling around, maybe they have come from wintering to the south or west. Just east of Lymington today Steve Keen noted 20 of them on the shore at Tanners Lane and another 10 in Sowley Marsh (between the pond and the shore). Yesterday 40 were seen across the water at Yarmouth Harbour on the Isle of Wight (with one Little Ringed Plover), plus 66 at the mouth of the Hamble and more in Langstone Harbour at Broadmarsh. Returning to my ongoing concern about the lack of Bar-tailed Godwit this winter I see that the only mention of these at the moment is of just three seen in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight.

TUE 26 MAR

Kevin Stouse was at Budds Farm yesterday in the late afternoon and had another good view of the Little Gull which has been showing their intermittently for the best part of a week.

Previously it has been described as an adult in winter plumage (with no black hood) but Kevin noted something that I was not aware of, namely that these gulls can have pink-flushed underparts in breeding plumage. Kevin writes that he had >> super views of Little Gull - looked like an adult in all but head pattern - lovely pink breast and dark underwings, grey wings << When I passed Sinah Lake on Hayling at about the same time of day I found Tim Lawman scanning for the (up to four) Little Gulls that have been present but not seeing any (they could have been at the far west end of the lake or resting from their constant patrol). Brian Fellows had a look at the Budds Farm Pools earlier in the day and did not see the Little Gull but did see a Common Sandpiper with a much reduced flock of Shoveler (only 6) with some Tufted Duck and Teal.

Trevor Carpenter had his first Willow Warbler at Hook today and was surprised to hear Stonechat song there - this is a song that I rarely hear, but I remember when a pair nested on the IBM North Harbour site many years ago that I likened the song to 'half a Dunnock's song' (i.e. brief and easily overlooked as that of a Dunnock). 11 Chiffchaff were in the Hook are, but more interestingly 31 Linnets were back on breeding territory (I found the same thing on Hayling today)

From his window overlooking the Alver Valley west of Gosport Lee Marshall recorded his first ever 'garden' Merlin as well as regular Kestrel and Sparrowhawk. A party of 10 Redwing were also seen taking off from the Wildgrounds and heading north east, which reminds me that Tony Gutteridge had a single Redwing on his list for the Warblington Farm CBC plot this morning - unfortunately the bird was seen scuttling into nettles and seemed to have a broken wing.

Another odd bird was reported today by Mike Jones who is pretty certain it was a wild Lesser White-front - he says it was 'eaily spooked' - but unfortunately I can't tell you where in Hampshire it was seen - Mike identifies the place as 'my local patch' (I think this is by the Test near Stockbridge but my memory is not all that reliable)

I did not start my regular Tuesday cycle trip to Hayling until mid-afternoon and so was surprised to find my first Wheatear at Gunner Point at 5pm (normally the migrants arrive in the late morning and move on north well before evening). Nearby in the gorse of Sinah Common a flock of around 15 Linnets were back - presumably ones that will soon nest here - and on Sinah Lake a small flock of around 20 Tufted Duck were present, I guess making a temporary stopover here as while we used to have large numbers of both Tufted Duck and Pochard here through the winter they have been almost absent in recent winters. Langstone Harbour was seemingly devoid of birds when I came down the Coastal Path at the very bottom of the tide, and there were hardly any on the way back when the sun was setting. Despite the fading light one of three Yellowhammer in the hedgerows was still singing, and - in better light on my way south earlier - one Little Owl was patiently doing his sentry duty near the presumed nest hole in the

Aston Villa field hedgerows. Passing Langstone Pond after sunset I could see neither of the Swans but the Cetti's Warbler was singing and there were at least 23 Egrets in the Wade Court trees showing that the bonfire and gardening last weekend had not driven them all away.

MON 25 MAR

Whinchat normally arrive in Hampshire in mid-April but I see that the 'earliest ever' date (leaving aside a couple of winter records) is 21 Mar 1968 so the sighting of two Whinchat on Ventnor Downs (Isle of Wight) yesterday (Mar 24) is exciting but not world shattering news - I wonder if we will see them in Hampshire this week? Tree Pipit are more normal March arrivals and we have already had a report of one at Sway (southern edge of the New Forest) on Mar 16 which equalled Hampshire's earliest ever date, but Kevin Stouse was very lucky to record two at Farlington Marshes on Saturday (Mar 23) - I say lucky as he admits that (like myself) he is not familiar with the call which these birds make when on passage and, having heard an unusual call, he tracked the birds down to bushes near the eastern (Chalk Dock) entrance to the reserve and confirmed their identity visually. During this visit to the Marshes Kevin was also impressed by the presence of at least 60 Shelduck in Langstone Harbour (also on Saturday Martin Hampton counted 58 Shelduck off the west shore of Hayling Island). Going back to Derek Hale's news from the Isle of Wight I see that today he saw a single Puffin on the sea off St Catherine's Point, reminding me that I know little about the current breeding status of these birds on the south coast. I know that they ceased to breed at Freshwater on the Isle of Wight in the 1960s but still nest on the Dorset coast, and I believe that the number of breeding pairs is now increasing - are they back as breeding birds on the Isle of Wight? Also seen off St Catherine's Point today were 3 Red-throated and 1 Great Northern Diver all heading east.

Other news of migrants includes sightings today at Sidlesham Ferry of both Common Sandpiper and Little Ringed Plover, and yesterday (Mar 24) a pair of Little Ringed Plover were seen displaying at one of the Chichester lakes. Several reports of Blackcap song, and my own observation in Stansted Forest, makes me think that our summer Blackcaps have started to arrive, and at the same time reports indicate that we have not yet seen the last of the winter thrushes. Evidence for the last item comes from the SOS website which reports a sighting of more than 100 Redwing at Crowborough making their Starling like subsong in the late afternoon last Thursday (Mar 21), and from Tony Gutteridge who today came on five Fieldfare in Stansted Forest where they were acting the part of stragglers to the main movement northwards which seems now to have passed. Another lone bird, though perhaps not the last we will hear of, was a Jack Snipe flushed from Pilsey Island as Barry Collins cleared litter from this section of the Chichester Harbour shore yesterday (Mar 24).

A walk around the southern part of Stansted Forest this afternoon produced a vociferous Buzzard which seemed to be making a high speed circuit of the area and letting everyone know it was there by its calls, and it also gave me a lot of chatter and song from a pair of Marsh Tits but the best song was heard briefly from a Blackcap which seemed to be moving through the woodland and may well have been a migrant. On my way home I took a brief look at Aldsworth Pond where the Swan was off her nest but the pair were still present, as were two pairs of Gadwall and a pair of Canada Geese. One of about a dozen Coot was sitting on a nest and two other pairs were confronting each other eye to eye but not actually fighting. Tufted Duck, Mallard and Little Grebe were also present.+++

Tony Gutteridge also visited Stansted today and found displaying Lapwing still present on a ploughed field (fairly close to the House) in the East Park where Martin Hampton had seen 12 displaying on Feb 28. Tony also noticed what may have been the trailing edge of the recent mass movement northward of winter thrushes - today there were just 5 Fieldfare, one group of 4 and one on its own which sounds like a lost tail-ender! In the main avenue he confirmed my thoughts about migrant Blackcap by hearing one singing loudly from a spot where he expects to hear one in summer, and he too saw the lone Buzzard (could it be that he is on his own with a mate already sitting?)

A Rough Legged Buzzard was said to be with many Common Buzzards over the southern stretch of the River Avon (where it enters Dorset below the village of Winkton) at lunch time today - this news from David Taylor - and two reports of wandering Red Kite over Hampshire, are in today's messages. One of the Kites was over the residential area of Fleet today, above Rob Edmunds

house, before it rose in a thermal and drifted away east, the other was seen yesterday over Waterlooville by Alan Cokes who watched it for about ten minutes as it too drifted east from the area of the Queens Enclosure, over the A3M and towards Havant Thicket. Switching from live to dead raptors I see that Graham Roberts shares my suspicion that the reported Peregrine that was killed by flying into a window in Cosham was in fact a Sparrowhawk and in the same vein Kevin Stouse tells me that when he followed up a report of a dead Goshawk at Petersfield that too turned out to be a Sparrowhawk. There was little doubt about the identity of a corpse found by Graham Roberts alongside the A27 just west of Chichester this evening - it was a Barn Owl which he had ringed in a nest at West Dean last July, one of five chicks so there is hope that the other four are still alive. At lunch time today Graham had more encouraging sightings of raptors in the centre of Chichester - in just half an hour he saw a regular male Peregrine on the cathedral, another high overhead, a female Sparrowhawk, and a Buzzard soaring high over the city and drifting south west, perhaps in search of pastures new...

Yesterday Kevin Stouse led a walk around the farmland east of Petersfield, starting from Burton Pond where the party watched a male Grey Wagtail give a female a gift of food before mating with her. Kevin also tells me of a more public copulation when two Canada Geese were at it this morning right outside the main reception of IBM at Portsmouth North Harbour, and (if he will forgive me for putting my own interpretation on his news) I must in this context quote a message from Peter Raby which he put on HOSLIST today after visiting Hook Park near Warsash, saying >> A Sand Martin seen along with a Starling sitting on eggs at SU983275 under the guttering of number 22. You can't miss it as I chalked a huge "X" on the wall. << I wonder how long that intimate relationship with the two birds sitting on one nest will last? All the more convincing as both species are hole nesters.

More 'silly season' news comes from Martin Rand who was walking in the Sherfield English area north west of Romsey over the weekend when, near Gambledown Farm, his wife spotted a Little Owl on the ground looking down a rabbit hole. I know that Little Owls pick up most of their food (worms, beetles and the like) on the ground and I doubt the owl was thinking of the hole as a residence but I was amused when checking out the location of this farm on the map to see a place marked 'Owls Lodge' only a few hundred yards west of the farm. I suppose the ideal home for a Little Owl would be a hole in an ancient oak with a fresh dungheap below it for food supplies, and a cattle drinking trough fitted with an escape ladder for drinking and bathing. News of a really silly bird comes from Brian Fellows concerning an inexperienced young pair of Swans which have just taken up residence on the Slipper Millpond at Emsworth, immediately down stream from the experienced pair which nest on Peter Pond. From my own observations in the past I know that Mute Swans are born with no innate knowledge of the facts of life, and Brian's observation of this young pair bears out my own experience - the birds have been trampling about in a small reedbed by the pond, presumably wondering how they should set about constructing the sort of nest that they can remember being hatched in, but not connecting this with the sudden urge on the female's part to lay an egg, so the egg can be seen lying on one of the bare wooden rafts in the pond far from the tentative nest site. As to whether the egg was fertile I very much doubt that the pair have yet connected their thoughts and bodies to that aspect of the process of procreation...

Last Saturday, when in my garden, I several times heard sounds that could have been the squawks of juvenile Magpies but never got a glimpse of the birds making the sounds and dismissed the thought that young Magpies could already be out of their nests. Today, however, John Goodspeed tells me that he suspects that a group of four Magpies seen in his garden this weekend were a family group - if they were the tails of the young birds should be noticeably shorter than those of the parents but John does not mention this though he does report the clever technique which the birds have developed for getting seed from his 'caged in' bird table - they hammer at the structure until sufficient seed has been sent over the edge of the table, and onto the ground, in response to the vibration caused by their hammering the outside of the structure. Also to be seen in John's garden recently have been Jackdaws collecting twigs for their nest - luckily not jamming them down his chimney but carrying them away elsewhere.

Brian Fellows has just spent a few days in Kent birding at Stodmarsh on the River Stour east of Canterbury and at Reculver on the coast north of the city (both spots that I remember from my

schooldays at Canterbury in the late 1940s). I also remember a story told by Penny Raynor (one time organiser of HOS walks) of a birding holiday somewhere in Europe where the enjoyment of new birds was marred by one member of the party who, whenever a new bird was pointed out by the guide, always responded with the remark 'Oh, we have those in Kent'. Having just reported the wonder of seeing two Bittern take off from Rye Harbour in Sussex on their long journey to their breeding quarters I see that when at Stodmarsh Brian was confronted with an item on the notice board reporting the recent departure flight of not just two but seven Bitterns! To prove this was not an isolated instance of Kentish one upmanship Brian tells us that our excitement over one Garganey at Sidlesham yesterday was outdone by three Garganey (at an earlier date) at the Oare Marshes.

PLANTS:

SUN 31 MAR

I found my first unsheathed spathe of Lords and Ladies (Arum) today and remembered that I had left one significant new flower out of my list for Friday - along with Wood Avens and Nipplewort I had seen two full flowers on Common Vetch.

FRI 29 MAR

A walk from home in Havant to Warblington Farm and back gave me two good new flowers for the year, both Shining Cranesbill and Herb Robert were out in the 'twitchel' between Wade Court Road and Pook Lane and I found still sheathed spikes of Arum in a couple of places. In the marshy areas of the farm fields tight flowerheads of Greater Pond Sedge could be seen and in sunny places Cuckooflower, Kingcup, Ground Ivy, Greater Stitchwort and Common Dog Violet gave a feeling of April rather than March. Both Hogweed and Cowparsley were in flower but the banks of Celandine are now looking rather tatty and will soon go over, as have the catkins on Alder. Several roadside planted trees of Norway Maple gave a dash of bright yellow colour and I passed one yellow flower on Wood Avens and several on a plant of Nipplewort. Also open today were flowers on Bay Trees - I saw the first open yesterday.

Messages from John Goodspeed and Lynn Fomison tell me that Toothwort is flourishing in Lowtons Copse north of Clanfield and in the southern parts of Ropley. John walked through Lowtons Copse and found Toothwort at the west entrance (from Little Hyden Lane) and in an area on the east of the copse, by the southern path, where I have not seen it before (I normally look for it on my left as I enter the northern path, and see more along the side of North Lane near this entrance). In Ropley Lynn tells me that my guess at the location of the first Toothwort she reported was slightly wrong - it was not on the southern fringe of Ropley Wood but to the east of the wood, about half way from where the bridle path leaves Staply Lane to where it meets the wood. More Toothwort can now be seen where the unmade track called Webb Lane comes south past a thin strip of wood on its east side (approx SU 6431-42 at the northern end of the wood).

To the east of Winchester there promises to be a great display of Cowslips on Magdalen Hill Down next month. Some are already out and if you wish to see them (plus the butterflies and other plants on this Butterfly Conservation reserve) Lynn Fomison suggests that you use the B3404 road running due east from Winchester along the ridge of the down and park in the carpark opposite the big cemetery at No Man's Land (about half way from the bridge over the M3 to the roundabout where the B3404 joins the A31) and then reach the reserve along the bridleway skirting the west edge of the cemetery.

THU 28 MAR

Richard Carpenter found Greater Pond Sedge already in flower at Titchfield Haven today though I suspect it will be a week or so before it is on general release!

WED 27 MAR

Richard Carpenter was walking the old Meon Valley railway near Mislingford, a little north of Wickham, today and found the first Moschatel flowers of the year (known to some as the Town Hall clock flower on account of its four faces -plus a fifth to be seen from the air). Over in Emsworth Brian Fellows made his annual count of the flowering spikes of Butterbur by the River Ems at Brook Meadow. Last year they numbered 412 but he could only find 240 today - probably just a variation in the weather. Brian tells me that the Meadow Foxtail grass in the

meadow is genuinely flowering (apologies for my doubts!) and that Grape Hyacinths are in flower (I find it difficult to think of this as a wild plant in Britain but it is certainly a very attractive one and to be seen in a good many places at the present time)

TUE 26 MAR

Last Sunday (Mar 24) Barry Collins found Early Forget-me-not flowering on Pilsey Island and this reminded me to have a look today in the only public access site (i.e. other than within the Sandy Point reserve) which I know for it in the Havant area, and this could not be more public as it is in the centre of the bus turning roundabout close to the Ferry Inn on Hayling. Sure enough there was a mass of minute blue flowers, though I could not detect them until they were within the reach of my arm. If you want to see them go to the south west part of this roundabout and stand on the grating of a road drain, look towards the back of the big notice board in the centre of this 'flower bed' and then, still facing in the same direction look at the ground about two feet in front of you (just within the ring of wooden posts) and there you will begin to see the flowers as you get your eye in. Earlier I had been to check the progress of the Green Winged Orchids south of the Golf Course (equally difficult for most people to spot at this moment if they do not know where to search for the leaf rosettes in the grass, but soon to be an unmissable display of thousands of flowering orchids) and I can report that the purple colour of the flowers could already be detected on a couple of plants if you parted the shielding leaves. To the east of the orchids the Shepherd's Cress is flowering in greater numbers than last week (but only in one small patch) and to the west, near the Ferry Sailing Club, I found a few flowers open on Spring Beauty. North of the Sinah Lake four flowers were open on the Tartarian Honeysuckle (below which one plant of wild Bluebell had a white flowerhead) but as yet I have not seen flowers on the Bur Chervil plants.

Jim Berry took a walk today in Inholmes Wood (north of Kingley Vale and east of the source of the Ems near Stoughton) and found a great display of Wild Daffodils somewhere in the square SU 8012, visible from one of the paths heading south east towards Stoughton (I suspect it was the more easterly of the two main paths). Bluebells and Wood Anemones were also flowering well, and both Cuckooflower and a mass of Coltsfoot were seen.

MON 25 MAR

My own first find of wild Bluebells today (see below) is echoed by reports from the Test Valley, Botley Wood, Petersfield and Langstone. Martin Rand was out in the Lockerley/Sherfield English area of the Test valley to the north west of Romsey on both Saturday and Sunday and found them in several places; Martin Hampton saw them, with the first flowering Ramsons, in the Petersfield area; Richard Carpenter found them in the Botley Woods and in Langstone John Goodspeed noticed a white bluebell (maybe a Spanish one?) as well as the leaf rosette of a Bee orchid in a place where I have never seen them - on the side of the main road through Langstone (probably it will be mown before flowering). Martin Rand's list included Greater Stichwort, a single flower on wild Yellow Archangel, the dead heads of Wild Daffodils that are already going over, and fresh flower buds on Corn Marigold plants near Manor Farm, Sherfield English - I wonder if the farmer here has, like David Uren at Idsworth, been investing in wild flower seed on a grand scale? Richard Carpenter's finds included Hogweed by the roadside south of Titchfield but I doubt that there will soon be a general flowering of this plant, unlike the Cow Parsley which should soon line every lane. Brian Fellows tells me it is not only the Wild Daffodils that are already going over - he has already found Dandelion clocks which reminds me of another unusual feature of this spring, namely the lateness of the Coltfoot flowers which are usually the first species to produce notable seed heads.

My walk through the south of Stansted Forest this afternoon found many Bluebells already in flower and the best display of Primroses that I can recall. Wood Anemones were abundant and other flowers included Wood Spurge, Ground Ivy, Common and Early Dog Violets and a great mass of flowering Strawberry plants with larger than usual flowers and green rather than grey leaves, but when I checked the terminal tooth of the leaf I found it was short and the plants must be Barren. In one spot a few Cuckooflower were out. Coming back to the main avenue carpark along the 'ornamental drive' I was pleased to see a good show of flowers on young Wild Cherry trees planted in the thin belt between the avenue and the drive as it nears the road and carpark area - nearby catkins were opening on Silver Birch. Calling at Aldsworth Pond on my way

home I walked to the viewpoint where the water runs out over the sluice and then under the road, and on the bank here a mass of Greater Stitchwort was in flower.

INSECTS:

SAT 30 MAR

Theo Roberts and Andrew Brookes were in the Huntbourne Woods west of Denmead today and saw one definite Large White, while in the New Forest Tony Wilson saw a probable Large White. Theo also saw his first male Orange Tip but he was not alone in doing so - Phil Lord had one on Baddesley Common. Yesterday, in addition to Rob Edmunds sighting of an Orange Tip in Fleet Steve Mansfield had another on St Catherine's Hill at Winchester and Andrew Howard had one at Petworth.

Yesterday I reported a total of nine different species of butterfly on the wing - the Large White makes the count for the week 10, but I had forgotten that the SOS website had reported a single Painted Lady at Brighton on Mar 26, making 11 species for a week in March.

FRI 29 MAR

Rob Edmunds today had the honour and great pleasure of seeing this year's first Orange Tip butterfly, a male, when he was in the Greywell area just south of the M3 Hook junction, and down on the coast Barry Collins had his first two Holly Blues on Thorney Island. Including these two there were nine species of butterfly on the wing today, mostly reported by Mark Litjens who visited Bentley Wood (on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border near Salisbury) and Whiteley Pastures at Fareham. At Bentley Wood Mark counted 22 Brimstones (including one female), 6 Commas, 5 Peacock, 2 Small Tortoiseshell and 1 Red Admiral, and at Whiteley Pastures he added 3 Green Veined White (also seeing 14 Peacock, 9 Commas and 9 Brimstone). The ninth species for the day was Small White seen by Barry Collins on Thorney Island and almost certainly by myself in Havant.

Not the first I have seen this year, but the first I have seen in full strength, were the crowds of Yellow Dung Flies on cowpats in Warblington Farm fields this morning. Also seen there was a female Brimstone, two Peacocks, and my first Comma of the year - the fourth species was almost certainly Small White but flying too high for certainty while negotiating an overgrown garden hedge on my way home. At one point what I am sure was a Plume Moth of some sort flew hesitantly above my head to vanish among the flower buds on a cherry tree, and when I got home another Peacock was sunning itself on my garden path.

THU 28 MAR

I am really pleased to hear of the increasing numbers of Small Tortoiseshell seen this spring - today Mark Litjens had four of them at Hursley, south west of Winchester, and Rob Edmunds had three in Fleet. The other expected butterflies were out, including a Small White seen in Hollybank Woods at Emsworth by Brian Fellows, and in the late afternoon Derek Mills saw an Early Thorn moth in his Farnham garden. Single Holly Blues were seen yesterday (by Mark Litjens at Hursley) and on Tuesday Mar 26 by Lawrence Holloway at Bognor (where he also saw a female Small White and a Small Tortoiseshell, plus another Small White and several Bee Flies on Mar 25).+++

Yesterday several experts were assembled at Magdalen Hill Down near Winchester for a Butterfly Conservation committee meeting, and Lynn Fomison says they saw 'lots' of Small Tortoiseshell with Brimstones and Peacocks. Phil Budd was with them and found not only a furry Drinker moth caterpillar but also caterpillars of the Scarlet Tiger Moth feeding on Comfrey (the report says Rough Comfrey but I suspect it was Russian as the Hampshire Flora lists Rough Comfrey as probably extinct in the county - no records since 1988)

WED 27 MAR

A Hummingbird Hawkmoth was today feeding from Pansies and Polyanthus plants in Philip Hack's garden in the north west fringe of Southampton at Nursling. In a normal year this would have been an incredibly early sighting (and still is) but we have already heard from Steve Nash of two earlier sightings on Mar 7 (at Winchester and Selsey) when there was a mini-invasion of continental moths

Also seen today in Brook Meadow at Emsworth by Brian Fellows were two Small Tortoiseshell, four Peacock, one Small White and two Brimstone

TUE 26 MAR

A Holly Blue seen by Trevor Carpenter in his Fareham garden was top of today's list of butterfly sightings in my estimation, but only beating by a whisker the news from Rob Edmunds that he had seen four Small Tortoiseshell together in Calthorpe Park at Fleet in north Hampshire. Elsewhere in the county Small Tortoiseshell were seen at Ropley, Bentley Station Meadow south of Farnham, and on the Solent shore in the Chilling area. Both Speckled Wood and Small White were at Hook near Warsash and Peacock, Comma and Brimstone sightings were widespread.

MON 25 MAR

Richard Carpenter had a great list of butterflies when he visited Whiteley Pastures on the southern edge of the Botley Woods today. Best of the butterflies was the first Green-Veined White of the year, but with it were 21 Brimstone, 5 Peacock, 5 Comma, 1 Red Admiral and 1 Small Tortoiseshell. Another first for the year was the furry bottomed Bee-fly, with at least ten of them poking their long rigid probosci into a variety of spring flowers. Another minor first was seen in my own garden here in Havant - a tiny spider called Salticus scenicus creeping about on the warm brickwork of the house in search of even smaller prey on which it will leap like a cross between a tiger and a flea (no fussing with webs for this spider) - this is one of the more easily identifiable of spiders, not only by its habitat and habits but also by the black and white chevrons on the top of its abdomen.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 28 MAR

Mike Wall was in the north Hampshire downs near Ibthorpe (close to Hurstbourne Tarrant to the north of Andover) today and came on a bunch of 11 Fallow Deer which are uncommon in this part of the county - perhaps on the move between Faccombe Wood and Blagdon Copse to the south?

WED 27 MAR

Plenty of small Trout were seen in the River Ems at Emsworth today by Brian Fellows and yesterday at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth he had the less welcome sight of a Terrapin sunning itself on the island

MON 25 MAR

The December 2000 issue of British Wildlife magazine had a fascinating article on Wall Lizard colonies in Britain, telling us that this Mediterranean species is now established in at least seven counties. Breeding colonies can be found in two gardens of south west Hampshire, at Ventnor on the Isle of Wight, Shoreham in Sussex, Farnham in Surrey and at a number of places including Portland on the Dorset coast. Further afield they are found in Shropshire and in London. The reason for mentioning them today is that Ken Hearne tells me that the Shoreham colony has already emerged from hibernation and the lizards can once more be seen basking in the sun on a south facing brick and flint wall close to the sea - he counted 14 of them today. They have been present here since 1975 and recently had a narrow escape from losing their favoured habitat when the wall was repaired -luckily a local herpetologist heard about the repairs before they were started and persuaded the people doing the work to leave the necessary cracks and crevices for the lizards to hide in when not basking on the wall surface. I think that most of these reptiles were brought into the country to be sold as pets, and it seems that those at Shoreham probably came from the north of Italy as they have the bright green backs of a sub-species only found there. These creatures are not much bigger than our Common Lizards but have bigger heads and longer legs - if you go looking for them don't forget that they will climb high to find the best sun bathing spots - even onto the rooves of houses.

A couple of other items today are news of fresh Frogspawn in Waterlooville - Alan Cokes has just seen some newly deposited in a neighbour's garden pond in the Cowplain area - and less welcome news of Mink in the River Itchen at Bishopstoke. Colin Bates watched a Mink swim around a Mallard on the water, then climb out to look cute on the bank. At a guess it was trying to entice the Mallard out onto the bank where the Mink could kill it a lot more easily than in the water...

WEEK 12 MAR 18 - 24

BIRDS:

SUN 24 MAR

For me today's most exciting news is of a Garganey at Sidlesham Ferry Pool with two Avocet, a Ruff and a Greenshank. Across Pagham Harbour the Bonaparte's Gull was still playing to packed houses in the morning but not seen in the afternoon.

Mike Collins saw an adult winter Little Gull and a Common Sandpiper at Budds Farm pools today - the gull is presumably the same one which Heather Mills saw there last Thursday (Mar 21) and the Sandpiper may be a wintering bird, though it is not too early to expect a migrant and the last sightings in Langstone Harbour that I know of were on Feb 10, 14 and 17 (On Feb 10 Paul Norris saw one on Budds, on Feb 14 Will Walmsley had one at the Farlington Marshes lake and one Feb 17 Paul Winter had one on the Hermitage Stream). Yesterday there were still three Little Gulls on Sinah Lake, seen by both Will Walmsley and Mark Litjens who also heard a Blackcap singing somewhere on Hayling and this could be a first migrant as I have not heard of wintering Blackcap on Hayling (though no doubt there were some!).

Another odd bird in Langstone Harbour today was a drake Gadwall which Ian Thirlwell saw fly in from Langstone Harbour to land on Duck Lake at Milton Common in Portsmouth - I know that Gadwall do sometimes land on the sea but this bird sounds rather like the drake which Brian Fellows saw on the harbour here on Mar 12, again on its own. Could it possibly have a mate on a nest somewhere along the shore and be idling the time away until it becomes a proud father?

The BTO Breeding Bird Survey requires its surveyors to visit their 1 km squares at least once before starting to record the birds there - the purpose of these recce visits is to measure and mark out the ten 200 metre long sections of the transect to be used when recording the birds, and to evaluate the habitat through which each section passes. This morning I made my first visit for these purposes to the square SU 7917 which lies immediately south east of Harting Down to find little had changed since before the F&M year, leaving me time to check on the birds for my own purposes. Skylarks and Meadow Pipits were singing over open downland, Jackdaws and Nuthatches were noisy in woodland, and the first migrant Chiff Chaff had arrived (later I hope to hear Turtle Dove once more in the downland scrub). At least two Marsh Tit were vociferous as they fed on ivy berries, and near the end of the visit a lone Kestrel flew over, half-heartedly looking for food but never stopping to hover seriously. Right at the end of the visit I found the shell of a Song Thrush egg in the middle of a downland path - sadly not a used one removed from the nest by the parent after hatching a chick, but a very fresh one still sticky and dripping with the last remains of the contents which, by the very open and bare surroundings where I found it, had been a Magpie's breakfast rather than the leftovers of something like a stoat, weasel or rat.

This evening the tide and weather were suitable for getting a good view of the Egrets coming to roost at Wade Court and when I arrived there at sunset I was not surprised to see none in the normal trees, expecting them to rush in at the last moment before dark. Scanning round I could see five waiting out on the Northney saltings, and then I spotted seven in trees by the Lymbourne stream. A few minutes later the trees where they normally roost were enveloped in huge clouds of bonfire smoke which was still very evident when the birds began to arrive from elsewhere. The smoke was then not enough to prevent them approaching the roost but they were clearly put off by it - circling high above the trees, some perching on the very top of a big cedar tree, above the smoke but exposed to the chill wind and not a place to remain for the night. Maybe the 'gardening' activities leading to the bonfire have been going on before today and have already driven off some of the birds, but this is the time at which numbers are expected to plummet as the birds head off to nesting places. Whatever the reasons tonight's total count was only 26 (rather than 50+) birds, and two of those which arrived at this site did not stop but flew on south east heading for the Tournurbury Woods on Hayling. Other news from this area is that the Cetti's Warbler is still singing at Langstone Pond, on which only one Swan could be seen (presumably the other is on a hidden nest which I cannot spot). Out on the harbour there were still some 30 Brent with just three Shelduck and two Teal.

SAT 23 MAR

I cannot recall hearing of a Curlew Sandpiper on the Hampshire or Sussex coast since last

October so the presence of one at Church Norton today sounds like a spring passage bird (very uncommon in spring though we see plenty of them on the return journey). 9 Wheatear and 1 Swallow flew in to the Selsey area today and one Long-tailed Duck paused briefly on the sea but more interesting than these to me was the news of an albino Common Gull on the River Adur (could this be the one seen in the Budds Farm area of Langstone Harbour in January?) and a report from Hastings of large noisy flocks of Common Gulls flying high east over Hastings - sounds as if these birds are at last leaving us.+++

Another surprise came from the Isle of Wight where Derek Hale tells us that a Shorelark was seen again today on Tennyson Down - could this be the bird that appeared briefly on Feb 19 (and has not been heard of since then?). Another report is of an Alpine Swift flying north over Ventnor. More prosaic news from the Island is that at least 4 Guillemot are back on their cliff ledge nests, while in the Bembridge area two Short-eared Owls can still be seen and have been joined by 14 Sand Martins. Not on Derek's website, but on HOSLIST from Colin Bates, is news of another single Swallow coming in from the sea to the Isle of Wight near Freshwater. Another item from HOSLIST today comes from John Shillitoe and passes on third hand news of a raptor being killed when it hit a window in East Cosham a month ago - the person telling John about this said the bird was a Peregrine but I think it much more likely that it was a Sparrowhawk - has anyone ever heard of a Peregrine being killed in this way?

Martin Hampton had a good day's birding in the Hayling/Langstone area today, starting at Sandy Point where a Buzzard flew in from the sea, presumably on passage though where it came from and where it was going is anybody's guess. With it came a Peregrine which may well have been a local bird living up to its name of 'Wanderer'. At Black Point three Sandwich Tern were in Chichester Harbour (possibly the first to enter the harbours rather than carry on along the coast?). Moving to the Oysterbeds Martin saw another Peregrine go over and found the male Stonechat still in the 'Brick Field', while on the water 22 Merganser, 58 Shelduck and 49 Wigeon (the latter off the Langstone South Moors) could still be seen. Going on to Budds Farm on the mainland Martin found Shoveler numbers down to 26 with a similar number of Teal, only 13 Tufted Duck and the now resident pair of Shelduck (though not the Swan pair - they have not been there for some time and today I could see no Swans at all from Broadmarsh slipway. To end the day Martin had a marvellous sight of 30 Pintail, flying high in V formation, going east over Langstone Bridge just before dusk - the last we will see of that contingent for several months.

Simon Woolley was in the New Forest today and enjoyed the sight and sound of displaying Curlew. While in the Beaulieu Road area he was very surprised when 6 Greylang and 2 Canada Geese landed in one of the bogs - hopefully not intending to stay and pollute the Forest with their noise and droppings! Later Simon stopped at Cheesefoot Head to the east of Winchester and saw five raptor species - 1 Peregrine, 1 Sparrowhawk, 4 Kestrel, 10+ Buzzard and a single Short-eared Owl not normally seen in this area and presumably heading north to breed. 6 Grey Partridge were also in the area.+++

Much more acceptable breeding birds than feral geese were hard at work in Theo Roberts' garden at Cosham today - a pair of Long-tailed Tits seen together, each with a feather in its beak as they jointly work to complete their nest (said to be lined with 2,000 feathers!). Four Buzzard soared over the garden, in which wintering Blackcap are still present and singing. Incidentally Theo tells me that I misquoted him when I said recently that even the experts could not distinguish between the full song of a winter and a summer Blackcap - he says it is difficult to do so but there are subtle differences, and one simple test is whether the bird remains in one place or can be heard from a series of different places as it continues to move north, singing as it goes.

I was not entirely serious when I wrote recently of the possibility that the Brant might stay for the summer at Hook/Warsash after the Brent had left us, and today Trevor Carpenter put the record straight when he was there and found 200+ Brent with no Brant in sight. Another bit of miscellaneous info comes from Robert Watson in Basingstoke where he found at least 418 Pied Wagtail coming to roost again in shrubs on and around the IBM building in the centre of the town - despite an unsuccessful but frightening raid by a Sparrowhawk as the Wagtails were settling down.

The Havant Wildlife Group this morning walked from Emsworth to the west end of the Thorney Deeps and back, finding little of special interest in the birds, though a lone Pochard was on the Little Deeps and by implication (since they were not mentioned) there was no pair of Swans to be seen nesting there, but there was also no mention of the Peter Pond Swans whose nest the party must have been close to when they heard a Blackcap singing in Brook Meadow, nor the two Kingfisher which have been fairly often seen in the marina/Slipper Mill pond recently. The two best birds may have been a couple of Greenshank seen in Emsworth Harbour. In giving me some of this info Jim Berry also told me that Rowlands Castle has not missed out on the late epidemic of Siskin that has infected much of the south coast recently (in March rather than the more traditional February). Having had virtually no birds in his Rowlands Castle garden this winter two Siskin arrived on Mar 21 this week, and now there are 8 present.

FRI 22 MAR

One short but clear burst of Willow Warbler song greeted me from the scrub at Broadmarsh in mid-morning. A Chiffchaff was singing continuously but I heard no more of the Willow Warbler and never saw it. On the water at low tide were some 120 Brent, 25 Black-tailed Godwit and three or four Wigeon. Plenty of Curlew and Redshank were present with one small party of not more than fifty Dunlin and a few Oystercatcher, and only two Swans plus several hundred Black-headed Gulls. Out in the harbour I glimpsed one Merganser.+++

At least one more Willow Warbler reached our local Havant area today - Barry Collins had one, with 6 Chiffchaff, on Thorney Island. Three Buzzards were over the island (on Mar 2 Kevin Stouse saw a group of three soaring over Havant and maybe these are the same, possibly a family group from Stansted Forest though I would have thought that the parents would have disassociated themselves from last year's young by now and be busy with a new nest), and four adult summer Med Gulls were in Emsworth Harbour.

Over in the Meon valley John Shillitoe saw three Sand Martin heading north over his home area at Hundred Acres, east of Wickham.+++

Another migrant arriving at the west end of the Hampshire coast today was a single Swallow seen by Simon Boswell in the Hurst area (only the second I have heard of in Hampshire after one at Titchfield Haven on Mar 15). Simon also saw a single Sandwich Tern and three winter plumage Little Gulls (giving him close views down to 10 metres as they rested on grass near Sturt Pond), with 13 Meadow Pipits going north overhead. The two Slavonian Grebe are still on the water off Pennington with 13 Eider.+++

At Cams Bay this morning Trevor Carpenter noticed a dozen or more Meadow Pipits moving north, saw a newly arrived Wheatear and heard 4 singing Chiffchaff. At the same time nearly all the winter bird species were still represented on the water - 20 Brent, 14 Merganser, 6 Wigeon, 5 Goldeneye and 3 Great Crested Grebes could be seen as well as four Black-tailed Godwit. A Greenshank might have been an early passage bird and a Kingfisher is hopefully a resident. The same mixture of winter and summer birds was seen at Titchfield Haven by Richard Carpenter - 130 Black-tailed Godwit, 120 Brent, 110 Wigeon and 77 Teal were higher numbers than I might have expected (most of the Teal and Wigeon seem to have left the Langstone area), while singing Blackcap and Yellowhammer suggested summer (though the Blackcap was not necessarily a new arrival). A winter plumage adult Little Gull was still present (arrived on Mar 20) but its transient status was emphasised by the presence of two other Little Gulls there yesterday - they have now moved on.

Lee Marshall, in the Alver Valley this morning, also commented on a continuing light northward passage of Meadow Pipits after hearing more of these birds passing over his home during last night (plus Redwing on the move). He was lucky enough to see a female Lesser Spotted Woodpecker this morning, but nothing else of much significance.

THU 21 MAR

The Southsea seafront by the Pyramids leisure centre (between the Castle and the South Parade Pier) is not typical Stonechat habitat so one seen there this morning by Ian Thirlwell had presumably flown in from the continent overnight along with Chiffchaff that were singing nearby.

At Awbridge in the Test Valley just north of Romsey John Firth reckoned that 10 Chiffchaff there were part of an overnight fall but whether the 5 heard singing at Hook by Bob Marchant were

new arrivals is less certain (though a male Wheatear there probably was new). 9 Sandwich Tern off Titchfield Haven, reported today by Richard Carpenter, were also new arrivals.

Despite so many birds being on the move the Brant at Hook is still present (interestingly Bob Marchant who reported it does not mention any Brent with it - I suspect that they are still there but it would make a change to have a summering Brant stay on when the Brent have gone!).

Other birds still in situ are the Bonaparte's Gull at Pagham, the Ruddy Shelduck at Widewater (Lancing), and six Purple Sandpiper at Newhaven (not quite so sure of their status). Here in Hampshire Richard Watson was quite surprised to find some 494 Pied Wagtail still using their communal roost in the centre of Basingstoke, and overnight (Mar 21/22) Lee Marshall's keen ears heard Meadow Pipit and Redwing moving north. In Sussex it seems that many more Redwing had flown north from the continent on the previous night as 130 were found in the Hastings area on the morning of Mar 20 and there were at least two other reports of large numbers on the move north from Richard Ives at Worthing in West Sussex and Cliff Dean in East Sussex. In the Hastings area a male Firecrest may have flown north with the Redwing to be heard singing in the Bourne Valley yesterday morning.

Two other intriguing sightings today were of a Peregrine flying south out to sea from Southsea, seen by Ian Thirlwell, - could this be an Isle of Wight resident on a regular circuit that includes the mainland? - and what was almost certainly an adult winter Little Gull at Budds Farm Pools, seen by Heather Mills. The intriguing thing about the Little Gull was that Heather described it as 'diving like a Tern' by which I assume she means the normal constant dipping to the surface of the water. If it was actually diving into the water to take fish from below the surface this would be a new facet of Little Gull behaviour for me (though I have very limited knowledge of them)

For the third time in the past couple of weeks a Blackcap sang strongly but briefly from thick laurel cover in my front garden this morning. Presumably this is a winter bird and has probably been not much more than a couple of hundred yards from the house all winter though I have not seen it for a couple of months and could not see it today despite the song coming from bushes only a few yards from me. Blackbirds are now singing frequently and today both Song and Mistle Thrush could be heard clearly along with the Chiffchaff who sings on and off all day from the Hayling Billy line behind the house. In the evening, when the sun came out, I made a short trip to Langstone Mill where the Cetti's Warbler sang and around 25 Egrets could be seen - it was nowhere near their roost time but the tide was high. On Langstone pond both Swans were on the water and I do not think they have started sitting yet, though I may be wrong (when only one is in sight I cannot spot the other on a nest in the reeds as I have done in past years - though last year they managed to produce young without my ever detecting their nest or even presence on the pond). Around 30 Brent were on the harbour with 6 Shelduck (where there have been fifty or more recently) and half a dozen Teal were in the Wade Court wet meadow. Among the many Black-headed Gulls I saw only one Common but I did notice three Lesser Blackbacks (an adult and two immatures) which are not regular here as they are at Emsworth, and I was reminded of Bob Chapman's recent comment that numbers on Farlington Marsh are high at the moment as passage birds move through. In previous winter's the Wade Court wet meadow has usually had regular visits from a Green Sandpiper but none have been seen here this winter, however I heard today that one was seen by Tony Gutteridge on the Warblington Farm cressbed last Monday morning (Mar 18) so maybe they have been using that site this winter in preference to Wade Court.

Recent news just in from Sussex records three Great Northern Divers off Selsey Bill yesterday (Mar 20), plus a Scandinavian Rock Pipit and singles of Little Gull and Sandwich Tern.+++

Going back to Mar 17 I see that a redhead Smew was still at Rye Harbour, and on that Sunday evening birders there had the magnificent sight of two Bitterns circling high into the sky, calling to each other, before setting course East-North-East towards the southern part of the North Sea. I have always thought of Bittern as silent birds other than their booming in the breeding season but I see that my Collins Bird Guide gives a flight call described as >> a single or repeated, deep and hoarse 'graoh', somewhat recalling a fox or large gull << (so we await reports of 'flying foxes' over Kent!). By Mar 19 there were 12 Sandwich Tern to be seen at Rye, along with 55 Golden Plover, an Avocet and one Bar-tailed Godwit. Returning to the image of

flying foxes in the English sky I see that Mike Wall got near to seeing one in north Hampshire recently when a ringtail Hen Harrier, which he had been watching perched on a bush, dropped to the ground, then - having missed its prey first time - made a couple of awkward hops before it flew off very heavily laden with what might have been a rabbit.

WED 20 MAR

Within the past few days Martin Baggs has found a Great Tit already sitting on eggs in one of his nest boxes sited in the Watergate area (just north of Walderton in the continuation of the Ems valley) and at Petersfield today he watched a Wren carrying nest material into a bramble bush that was presumably covering the crevice in which it was building a nest - maybe the one in which eggs will soon be laid or maybe just another 'cock nest'. This news came via Brian Fellows who today found the Emsworth Peter Pond Swan pair back at their recently flooded nest site, close to the A259 road, with the cob working away at nest preparation with the pen looking on approvingly. Across the water a Coot was sitting on a nest atop a great pile of sticks in anticipation of the water rising considerably if more heavy rain flows down the Ems - her mate was showing his attachment to her by making aggressive sallies against the Swans. (This is the second Coot sitting hereabouts, with one already using a raft nest box on the Slipper Mill pond just down stream).

At Hook/Warsash Bob Marchant found the Brant still present both today (with 65 Brent) and yesterday (with 70 Brent - does the decrease of 5 geese indicate their departure? or is this a flock that will all move together when the time comes?). Undoubtedly on the move today was a single Sand Martin seen by Bob near Hook Lake where two Water Rails were calling from the reeds (these may well stay here but at this time of year these birds manage long distance journeys with their tiny wings and trailing legs). Offshore today a single Slavonian Grebe was coming into summer plumage, and yesterday a Firecrest in Hook Park and a flock of 300+ Starlings could all have been passing through. The mention of 300 Starlings together brings home to me the very great decline in their numbers - when at Warblington for the CBC visit last Sunday I was quite surprised to see 7 of them in four hours!+++

More birds on the move are the Little Gulls that are now appearing in a number of places along the coast. Tim Lawman tells me that today the first winter bird at Sinah Lake on Hayling was joined by two more adults and I see from the SOS website that there were four at Selsey Bill yesterday plus the two still at Westhampnett. Among Tim's other birds at Sinah were 12 Redwing and 6 singing Chiffchaff. Two Black Redstart at Culver Down on the Isle of Wight may also be on the move, as may be some of the Woodcock that are flushed from unexpected places at this time of year - the SOS website specifically describes three that were seen in the Bourne valley (I think this is in the Bexhill area associated with Glyndebourne??) as migrants but whether the one flushed by Martin Baggs in Watergate Hanger was resident or migrant I cannot tell.

TUE 19 MAR

Jess Pain had an impressive list of birds seen in the Totton area (the Lower Test Marshes and Testwood Lakes which both come under his wardenship) to announce on the HWT website today. On the lakes he had both a Red-throated Diver and a Bittern, and at the marshes there was another Bittern (same one on the move?) with a Red Kite and a Marsh Harrier. Other than the Marsh Harrier I think these are three new ticks for this winter at these two reserves.

The Bonaparte's Gull at Pagham has become a regular feature and must by now be well authenticated. It seems to spend long periods in in the area of the Pagham lagoon but the SOS website tells us that it can often be seen hanging out round the local shops! Also at Pagham today a single Wheatear and three Black Redstart were seen, while at Selsey the list included a Black-necked Grebe, two Great Northern Divers, a Sandwich Tern and a flock of 53 Brent flying east. Three Firecrest and two more Black Redstart were at Beachy Head and the two Little Gulls were still at Chichester's Westhampnett lake.+++

On the Isle of Wight Derek Hale tells us of a gathering of 28 Med Gulls in Newtown Harbour, possibly getting ready to nest at the mouth of the Beaulieu River (where the first pair nested as long ago as 1968) or maybe at some site on the Island. Also in the Newtown area were one Short-eared Owl, a Sandwich Tern, 45 Knot and singles of Spotted Redshank and Bar-tailed Godwit.

An interesting and very unusual observation by Mike Wall today was of two Kestrels feeding on a

dead Rabbit on a roadside near Ewhurst Lake to the north west of Basingstoke. Presumably the rabbit had been killed by a car, and presumably the Kestrels were a pair looking for any boost to their diet as they get ready for mating and egg-laying. The only person so far to say they have ever seen Kestrels feeding in this way is Lee Marshall who once saw the same thing in Hertfordshire a good few years ago.

On the subject of raptors Graham Roberts tells us that the famous pair of Peregrines using the nest box which he put up for them four years ago (?) on the Sussex Heights tower block in central Brighton can once more be viewed live on the internet during daylight hours at www.peregrinefalcons.co.uk. No eggs have been laid to date but the first is expected any day now (24th March was the date last year). This year there should be even more to be seen as two cameras have been installed where there was only one - the new one is outside the box, the old one within it.

The first Hampshire Willow Warbler was found last Sunday (Mar 17) in Set Thorns inclosure (extreme southern edge of the New Forest adjacent to Sway village near Lymington). This date equals the 'earliest ever' for the county back in 1992. The same unnamed observer also told John Clark of a Tree Pipit seen making its display flight (and presumably song) in the village of Sway on Mar 16 which is also the same date as Hampshire's earliest ever (again in 1992).

More news for last Sunday comes from both Hampshire and Sussex - in Hampshire Simon Boswell was at Hurst on both days at the weekend and saw a Sandwich Tern on Sunday and a Sand Martin plus a Fulmar on Saturday. In Sussex, at Amberley Wild Brooks on Sunday a female Hen Harrier was seen with, perhaps more interestingly, two Egrets behaving like a courting couple - said to have been present all afternoon, chasing and feeding together .. now those damp thickety copses would make an ideal Egrettry, but one thing we have learnt is that Egrets never do the obvious thing!

MON 18 MAR

Another status report from Bob Chapman on what's happening at Farlington Marshes appeared today on the HWT website, telling us of a major departure of Brent from Langstone Harbour on the night of Mar 9/10 (though there are still plenty to be seen in the harbour). Curlew also seem to have started moving, with a few seen going north west over Portsdown. Numbers of Lesser Blackback gulls have increased noticeably as these move east along the channel coast, and both Wheatear and Stonechat are now coming through the reserve from the south. Some 14 or 15 Black-necked Grebe can still be seen in the harbour, most approaching summer plumage. On the reserve as many as 7 Cetti's Warblers have been heard but are not expected to stay, and on the main marsh Lapwings can be seen making their nest scrapes but none are yet sitting. In the reeds alongside the stream Bearded Tits have spread out in pairs in their breeding territories

Reports of Brent passing east along the coast continue - 315 went past Beachy Head today and 245 had arrived in the Milford area. I was particularly interested to see that there was a single Pale-bellied Brent in one flock of 35 Dark-bellied (out of a total of 191) passing Newhaven on Saturday (Mar 16). Perhaps more impressive than the Brents were the Divers that are now starting to fly east, the biggest count being of 118 passing Seaford on Saturday. Of the identified divers 10 Red-throated, 1 Black-throated and 1 Great Northern were seen from Beachy Head today, and on Saturday (Mar 16) 35 Red-throated were off Newhaven. Also at Newhaven on Saturday was a total of 18 Black-necked Grebe of which four (two pairs) were in full and startling summer plumage. 200 Common Gulls, 91 Common Scoter, 17 Eider, 10 Shoveler, 3 unidentified Auks and 1 Sandwich Tern were among the mixed bag that attracts the seawatchers and will hold their attention over the coming weeks.

Last Wednesday I suggested that the Little Gulls then at Sinah Lake and West Wittering might be the two that had been at Chichester's Westhampnett lake but I now see that one is still reported there today (two yesterday) and several have been seen in widely separated places so there is clearly an increase in the number now along the south coast. Today two were at Beachy Head, and yesterday there was one at West Wittering and two at Westhampnett. These Little Gulls are presumably passage migrants, loitering on their way north east towards the Baltic and Siberia where they will nest. Also probably passage migrants are the Black Redstarts which

are being seen in rapidly increasing numbers now - but there is no reason why many of them should not decide to nest in England rather than on the continent (watch this space!).

Wherever they may end up I see that as many as 10 were in Pagham Harbour on Saturday (Mar 16), with another 4 at Beachy Head that day, while yesterday singles were reported from a garden in the Ferring area of Worthing, and from Pagham and Beachy Head.

At Alresford this evening a flock of 32 Little Egret were seen by Charles Cuthbert actively feeding on open grassland - probably rich in juicy worms driven to the surface by heavy rain. The birds were seen at dusk and must still have a local night roost but so far Charles has not had the time to locate it. Earlier in the afternoon (16:20) and on the A272 south of Alresford Geoff Culbertson had yet another sighting of the Red Kite that seems to have taken an interest in this area since Mar 5

From his experience in Andover Brian Rickwood has the impression that numbers of wintering Chiffchaff and Blackcap have been lower than usual during the past winter, but my own opinion is that this is an unanswerable question. Even with birds that should be easy to count, such as the waders in their high tide roost, or obvious birds such as Swans, our official counts are at the mercy of the weather (think of the big RSPB garden count at the end of January), the skill and concentration of the observers (e.g. when counting large flocks of mixed waders flying to or from a major roost), and the whims of the birds themselves (think of the Egrets that suddenly decide one night not to go into their usual roost but to spend the night at a new location). I would hazard a guess that with birds like Chiffchaff and Blackcap which are spread out over the county as a whole the number which get counted and reported is statistically insignificant in relation to the total number - hence my opinion that it is impossible to answer Brian's question. One other factor to take into account in answering his question is that of mobility of the birds during the winter - unlike the summer birds which are tied to their nests for a month or two the winter visitors are free to come and go at a day's notice in response to the weather and food supplies - I am reminded of this by his comment that there are a lot of Siskin about at the moment, but I am sure that these have not all spent the winter in Hampshire, or even in the UK, but are a reflection of the current state of a tide of birds washing across north western Europe during the winter.

Brian Fellows' regular Monday check on the waterfowl of Emsworth today showed a total of 74 Swans (but no Black Swan), 56 Mallard and 23 Coot. Interestingly he found that the heavy rain has so swollen the River Ems that the Swans nest in Peter Pond was overtopped by the water, showing how wise they were not to have settled down to nesting yet

Kevin Stouse paid a quick visit to the Chichester lakes this morning and was surprised to see what he concluded (from the pale brown of its breast and belly) was a young Shag sitting on one of the rafts in the New Lake nature reserve (at least once I have seen this referred to as the 'SOS pit', because it is managed by them as a nature reserve, but that could sound like 'cespit', which this lake is not!). Other birds noted by Kevin were very smartly plumaged Great Crested Grebe, four Gadwall, six Pochard, and a pair of Greylag geese.

The first Osprey of the spring which I have heard of passed low over the Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park just before 8am yesterday (Mar 17) when Simon Ingram was already out patrolling his Lakeside patch, but to Simon's great frustration the only (?) person to see the bird was another birder just happening to look out of his bedroom window - Simon was behind some trees which obscured his view of the bird! I can understand his frustration but I am very grateful to him for giving us all the news.

On Sunday the Bonaparte's Gull at Pagham seems to have given good views at the lagoon until it flew off into the centre of the harbour after lunch. It was not the only cause for excitement at Pagham on Sunday as a Great White Egret was seen by a number of birders in the Church Norton and Severals area. At the other end of Sussex another good bird was a Spotted Crake reported from Robertsbridge (by the A21 Hastings to London road).

Still with Sunday's news I see that Steve Mansfield went to check on a Sand Martin nest site at Kingsley and found the first three birds already present. I see that the Hampshire Sand Martin survey lists two sites at Kingsley, one at Lode Farm, which I can see on my map, and the other at Frith End, which is not marked but is I guess within the large area of sand pits between Lode Farm and Kingsley village. In the same message Steve reports the sighting of the first

Moorhen sitting on its nest beside the Caker Stream which flows into Alton from the direction of Selborne to the south east of Alton.

On Saturday (Mar 16) Paghams was the place where the first two House Martins were seen, along with a Red-necked Grebe, 14 Slavonian Grebe, and three Scandinavian Rock Pipits as well as the ten Black Redstart reported above.

Here in Hampshire Richard Jacobs, also on Saturday Mar 16, staked a claim to a county record for the number of Buzzard seen in the air at one time with a count of 27 in the Morestead/Longwood area east of Winchester where he saw two groups (of 9 and 18 Buzzards) in the air simultaneously. Back on 7 Mar 2000 he had seen 20 together over Mottisfont in the Test valley but thought that was not a record as he had heard of a count of 25 reported from Breamore in the Avon valley. I am not aware of any higher count though a total of 35, maybe 40, Buzzards seen in a walk made by Russell Wynn up the lower Test from Nursling to Romsey on 4 March 2000 suggests that it might well be possible to exceed the '27 simultaneously' record.

A couple of miscellaneous reports reaching me today may well be of interest to garden bird watchers. The first comes from Ken Hearne in Worthing and concerns the food of Blackcaps - this has been discussed at length in the past and while I have not got a list of all the items people have seen to be eaten by Blackcaps I have the impression that they are nearly omnivorous (though I have not yet heard of them eating flesh!). Nevertheless Ken's observation of one eating black sunflower seed in his garden brings out a point which had not previously crossed my mind. Ken points out that, unlike the Greenfinch feeding on the same food, Blackcaps do not have the mechanism or skill by which finches first crack a seed, then rotate it in their mouths so that the upper mandible strips the hard husk of the seed from the edible kernel which is left inside the bill to be swallowed by the finch - the blackcaps have to swallow these relatively large seeds whole, limiting their intake and giving them a serious digestive problem. The second item comes from Giles Darvill who I think lives in Sway - he has an owl box in a tree in his garden and fears it will not be used this year as a pair of Crows are currently building their own nest a few feet above the box in the same tree, and this reminded me that yesterday, when Theo Roberts rang me from Cosham to report a couple of butterfly sightings he also bemoaned the likely loss of nesting tawny owls for a similar reason (noisy and aggressive neighbours) but in Theo's case the disturbance comes not from Crows but from children. The box in which the owls regularly nested is in a garden that used to be a haven of calm but has recently become a kindergarten school!

A couple of reminders have just been issued concerning the broadcasting of news of nest sites which could be of interest to egg collectors or stealers of juvenile raptors to sell to Arab sheiks. Especially on the internet anyone can trawl for information and we are strongly advised not to make ourselves responsible for any damage to our native bird populations, so I am heeding these warnings and hope not to pass on any such information - if your news does not appear in my notes please do not take it as a slur on the reliability of your reports (or laziness on my part). I mention this in connection with some information from the New Forest, but hardly think that the embargo relates to news of Fieldfare and Redwing which can still be seen in the northern part of the Forest though not in such large numbers as the flock of 100+ reported from the Itchen Valley Country Park yesterday by Ben Darvill (who also stumbled on more than one Woodcock there). Mention of Woodcock reminds me that when Richard Ford recently flushed two Woodcock from the ground (see Mar 12) he mentioned that they called as they took off and I wondered what sort of call he heard - Richard has just told me that only one of the two made a sound and that was the 'whistling Wissick' call, not a special alarm call which I have not yet heard.

PLANTS:

SUN 24 MAR

Until a couple of years ago the roadside grass at the foot of the wall of Stansted House's Middle Lodge (the building where the private road to the house meets the public road through the Forest where the main Avenue crosses the road) was a great mass of delicate mauve Cuckooflower at this time of year, but suddenly one year the plants did not appear. I have

heard that this plant is hardly ever successful in setting seed, and only survives by some sort of vegetative persistence, so after a couple of years in which none could be seen I was pleased to see a reasonable display there today. As the Middle Lodge is having extensive done to it, and is presumably not currently occupied, I wonder if the resurrection is attributable to the absence of someone more concerned with mowing the grass year than allowing these lovely plants to flower?

SAT 23 MAR

A brief afternoon circuit of the Bedhampton and Brockhampton areas of Havant on my bike this afternoon confirmed my comment, made yesterday when reporting the first find of Greater Stitchwort, that it would not be long before we saw the first Bluebell. Before I had left central Havant I came on a cluster of Spanish Bluebells, albeit in a garden, almost in full flower. More genuine wildflowers seen later in the trip were three white flowers on the Water Crowfoot (*R. penicillatus*) fed by the clean water overflowing from the Water Company springs into the Hermitage Stream at Bedhampton, and one bush of Kingcups in full flower at the edge of the pool where another spring feeds the Brockhampton stream beside Brockhampton Road. Pot Marigolds were flowering beside the busy A27 under the footbridge over it alongside the Hermitage Stream and a fresh plant of Oxford Ragwort was covered in flowers (but I have seen this intermittently earlier in the year).

Another plant that is already on my flowering list is Common Whitlowgrass but today I found an excellent example of it for anyone who does not recognize this tiny beauty - following the Brockhampton stream down beside Budds Farm I had crossed the stone bridge at the head of the corn wharf and come to the second concrete bridge (not part of the path's route) and on the grass where it abuts the east end of this bridge there was a great mass of Whitlowgrass in flower, forming a bright white patch some two feet across that no one could miss.

Both John Shillitoe and Martin Hampton today enjoyed the sight of Cowslips flowering on Portsdown. John's were at the west end of the hill in the fenced off area of the MoD research establishment (if I use any of the many names this organisation has had in the past few years it will have a new one by the time you read this - but among the staff there are still plenty interested in wildlife and conservation - John noted many little marker pegs in the grass, almost certainly indicating the rosettes of Bee orchid leaves). You may have seen one aspect of the work of this organisation on TV recently when we were shown how they have discovered the mechanism by which certain beetles can survive in apparently totally arid deserts by using hairs growing around tiny depressions in the outer casing of the beetle to collect water from air cooled overnight (similar hairs and dents are now being put in the tin helmets of our gallant SAS men so that they can survive in the desert without water - well, maybe!!). Martin Hampton found his Cowslips, along with Hairy Violets, growing around the Fort Purbrook area at the east end of the hill.

In the Emsworth/Thorney area today the Havant Wildlife Group came on one impressive new flowering for the year - Spotted Medick. I see that last spring I did not find this in flower until April 22 and thought that was early!

FRI 22 MAR

Greater Stitchwort was flowering at Titchfield Haven today, seen by Richard Carpenter. For me this marks the start of a second wave of spring flowers and brings thoughts of imminent finds of colour in woodland as Red Campion and the first Bluebell should be not far behind the Stitchwort.

Skirting the big puddle to the left of the slipway at Broadmarsh, intending to walk upstream, I found a mass of Common Storks-bill in flower right at the edge of the seawall path as soon as I reached it this morning. Several of the plants were small bushes some 30cm tall and one had a set of long 'Stork's Bill' seeds already developed so they must have been flowering for some time.

THU 21 MAR

Walking to the shops in Havant through the East Pallant today I found the first tiny white stars of flowers on the Rue-leaved Saxifrage (*Saxifraga tridactylites*) already staring up at me from a tiny crack between the pavement and base of a brick wall. This is where I discovered them last year and went on to find hundreds of the tiny plants growing on top of the brick wall that

separates the public carpark here from that of the Bear Hotel, but I think I will have to wait a bit before I discover the full extent of this year's crop. These early plants had many more 'three fingered' leaves than those which I found later in the season last year. Going to Langstone in the evening I found the Cow Parsley starting its mass flowering in Wade Lane, and in Wade Court Road at least one flower was open in the variegated form of Yellow Archangel normally grown in gardens (though these roadside specimens have been looking after themselves for several years!)

Toothwort was flourishing in the Ropley area today when Lynn Fomison was out riding on the parish boundary between Ropley and West Tisted (probably along the southern edge of Ropley Wood) and saw several clumps of it - this is the first I have heard of for the year.

Yesterday I reported my first find of Hairy Violet on Portsdown but was not surprised to get a note from John Goodspeed saying that it had been flowering in other places on the south face of Portsdown Hill since the beginning of March. Hairy is normally one of the first violets to be found each year, and by the time of my find yesterday I had already seen Sweet Violets in the purple, white and pink forms, plus both Early and Common Dog Violets

WED 20 MAR

Filling in time during a visit to the Q A Hospital in Cosham I walked up Portsdown from the hospital to Fort Widley on top of the hill, finding a lovely patch of Hairy Violets flowering on the southern slopes almost as soon as I got on the grassy hillside. On the 'nature trail' around the back of the fort the only things of interest were fresh Coltsfoot and much Blackthorn now coming into mass flowering. Returning to the hospital via the old A3 I could see the leaves of Cowslips (but no hint of flowers) on the bank opposite 'The George' pub - and on the grass of the hill top I passed one rosette of Bee Orchid leaves that will hardly escape the close mowing of that area around the viewpoint carpark. Beside the London Road masses of Alexanders are in full flower and a single plant of Meadow Buttercup was flowering. Earlier in the morning I had a short walk around Havant to Wade Court Road, finding my first Hedge Mustard in flower and (alongside the Wheelwright's Arms pub) a big bush of Wild Carrot covered with unopen flower umbels. Shawford Road had a magnificent Hornbeam covered with beautiful catkins and in gardens Flowering Currant (*Ribes*) and Forget-me-nots are in full flower

TUE 19 MAR

The first flowers of Shepherd's Cress (*Teesdalia nudicaulis*) could be seen on Sinah Common today in the only site which I know of for this plant (though it is marked in the Hampshire Flora as also occurring in the Sandy Point area of Hayling and no doubt still does). If you want to see it at the Sinah site which is open to the public head for the western carparks at Beachlands and stop at the loos just before you reach the Inn on the Beach. From here walk west along the southern edge of the mini-golf course until the bushes on your left peter out and at this point you should find the tiny white flowers of the cress among the short grass and moss on mounds to your right, within a yard of the path. To the east of the Beachlands funfair Meadow Buttercups had started to flower, and north of Sinah Lake the Tartarian Honeysuckle bush is covered with buds that should be pink flowers by next week.

Over in Emsworth today Brian Fellows found Wood Avens in flower and Meadow Foxtail grass holding up its flower heads (though I doubt the colourful yellow or mauve anthers were yet showing), and the buds on Horse Chestnut were breaking to reveal the leaves and flowers which emerge together as they are now doing on Sycamores. Brian will soon be counting the hundreds of flower spikes of Butterbur, a plant which gained a new interest in my mind recently when I read that it is sometimes associated with a Brown Snail that I have never seen (I doubt it can be found at Brook Meadow as I read that it is one of those species that act as ancient woodland indicators as a result of their inability to adapt to change in their environment). The snail is 6mm high and 9mm wide when adult and has a slightly glossy, pale brown shell that is so thin that it is flexible.

MON 18 MAR

In Bob Chapman's latest report from Farlington Marshes published today on the HWT website I see that a Bullace tree is now flowering in the northern part of the reserve, and in Havant today I noted Sowthistle flowering plus buds ready to open on both Hawthorn and Kingcups beside the stream flowing from the Homewell Springs to join the Langbrook stream close to the Tesco

store. The first fresh flowering Sowthistle had been seen on Saturday (Mar 16) by the Havant Wildlife Group walking the Hayling Coastal Path, beside which they also found more Common Whitlowgrass.

On Mar 12 I passed on news of the first Cuckooflower, seen near East Meon on Mar 9, and I am glad to see that more of these lovely spring flowers were seen in mid-week (Mar 14) by an SOS walk party beside the River Adur between Shermanbury and Wineham (no Cuckoos heard as yet!)

INSECTS:

SAT 23 MAR

A couple of years ago a rare 'Picture Winged' Fly was found in Theo Roberts' garden at Cosham and identified by Martin Harvey who works for the Hampshire Wildlife Trust and has a great personal interest in insects. I think it's name is *Choelostera curvinerva* (I may not have the generic name right - can't read my own writing and the insect is too rare to appear in any books that I possess!), but what I do know from Theo Roberts is that it is found in association with Ivy, emerges early in the year, and has just re-appeared in his garden. This emerged when Theo rang me to report a good day for butterflies in his garden at the foot of Portsdown Hill, including a Red Admiral (not in yesterday's list of six species on the wing) and probably four different Speckled Wood making their spiral flights upwards to prevent a stranger coming through their territory.

By chance Martin Hampton took a walk through Theo's butterfly transect area around Fort Purbrook on Portsdown yesterday, seeing 10 Brimstones, 5 Peacocks, 2 Red Admirals and a Small Tortoiseshell between Cosham and Havant. Of particular interest was a pair (male and female) of Brimstones near Fort Purbrook, and Martin says that the one Small Tortoiseshell, early in the season, bodes well as last year he only saw one in the whole season.

FRI 22 MAR

Six different butterfly species were reported today, the best being the 'second for the year' reports of Speckled Wood (Barry Collins had two in the Thorney Island churchyard) and Small White (Steve Keen had one in a Barton on sea garden), while the list also included another single Small Tortoiseshell seen by Brian Fletcher in his north Winchester garden. More commonly seen butterflies so far this year were Brimstone, Peacock and Comma with one of the Commas being seen in the Bedhampton area of Havant. Despite the many Brimstone sightings already reported so far this year Derek Mills is only the second person to report one of the vital females - he saw one in the Bordon area of East Hampshire yesterday.

From Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter reported a mass emergence of the early hoverflies *Eristalis tenax* (called the Drone Fly as it resembles a bee when at rest), and in my garden I had my first sight of one of these in action hovering.

Other new insects today were the first of the small 'Daddy Longlegs' type Craneflies (probably *Tipula oleracea*) which was in Lee Marshall's moth trap this morning, so presumably on the wing last night, and near the moth trap was the first sight of a large, black female spider called *Segestria florentina* (common enough in the Rowner area of Gosport but unknown in most parts of England as the south coast seems to be the northern limit of its range, and there it is only found near ports at which it has arrived by ship). Females of this species can be over 2cm long (without counting the legs), and they are usually found in or around houses where they live in cracks in the brickwork, emerging to make forays to such fast food sources as Lee's moth trap. This spider is shiny black all over except for the chelicerae which are a glossy green colour (the chelicerae are a pair of 'external teeth' mounted at each side of the mouth to grab prey and direct it into the mouth - the spider's fangs, which inject fluid into the victim to calm and predigest it, are at the tip of the chelicerae). Dick Jones says that this spider gets its specific name ('florentina') from the green colour of the chelicerae - can anyone tell me more? is this reference to some form of early glass? In the moth trap, but found and released by Lee before becoming spider food, were two Oak Beauty moths - this is the moth which was first found by Lee's puppies on March 5.

About a week ago there was a report on HOSLIST of a 'large red dragonfly' which seemed so unlikely that I did not report it, but it now seems that for large we should have read small and

that the sighting may have been of a very early 'Large Red Damselfly' - much more likely as these are usually the first species to appear, though the first I have on record for 2001 was at Titchfield Haven on April 19, and in 2000 I did not hear of one until Apr 29 (and the first to appear take a day or so to acquire their red colour). Maybe there was one in north Hampshire a month or more early, but such a record needs a bit more detail to be taken seriously.

WED 20 MAR

On Monday Andrew Brookes told us of a Comma nectaring on Buddleia officinalis in his Portchester garden between Portsdown and Portsmouth Harbour. It seems that I was not the only person surprised to hear of any species of Buddleia flowering at this time of year, and today I have a note from Ken Hearne (who has a professional interest in garden design) telling me that the news spurred him to search his books and catalogues to find out more about the plant. He tells us that >> It originates from China, is tender and recommended for growing under glass. With the run of mild winters we have experienced someone seems to be successful in growing it outside, presumably in a sheltered spot. It is evergreen and its flowers, which are pale lilac with a yellow throat, are heavily scented and appear in winter. Grown outside it probably flowers slightly later. <<

MON 18 MAR

I think the time has come for me to cease noting all the Brimstone sightings that continue to pour in but other species of emerging butterflies will still get all the encouragement I can give them by reporting their appearances, so Peacock deserves two mentions for sightings yesterday in both West and East Sussex - the West Sussex observation probably in Tony Wilson's garden at Hangleton, Hove. Also on Sunday Andrew Brookes had his first garden butterfly of the year at Portchester near Fareham - a Comma nectaring on Buddleia officinalis (I did not know that any Buddleia species were flowering at this time of year). Also deserving a mention was a Small Tortoiseshell seen on Saturday by the Havant Wildlife Group when walking the Hayling Coastal Path - that insect was resting on Gorse, but whether Gorse flowers supply sustenance to butterflies I do not know.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 23 MAR

The first Grass Snakes that I have heard of this year were on the Pevensey Levels east of Eastbourne today according to the SOS website - three were seen there. Still no reports of Adder though today Theo Roberts had a Slow Worm in his garden, the first I have heard of since Tony Wilson found one (plus Common Lizard and Smooth Snake) at Ambersham Common on Mar 8.

WED 20 MAR

I have heard of people setting up the equivalent of bird tables just outside the windows of their house with the intention of a little cosy mammal watching after dark but I was surprised to read in Lawrence Holloway's website diary that today in broad daylight he was able to get good views of two Wood Mice making brief forays onto his garden patio (near Pagham Harbour) to feed on Sunflower hearts put out for birds (of which they still attract at least 15 Yellowhammers and a Brambling plus Chaffinches...)

MON 18 MAR

Roe bucks have now been growing their new antlers for a couple of months and today brings news of at least one buck shedding the velvet that has protected the antler growth. This news comes from Ben Darvill in the Itchen Valley Country Park from where on Sunday (Mar 17) he reports >> 10+ Roe deer in groups of up to 4, with bucks variously in velvet, out of velvet and one which had just rubbed it off and had red blood stained antlers. << The groups of up to four deer were, I guess, the normal family group with one buck in each (though I think at this time of year many of the bucks would normally be on their own). Further evidence of changing habits among the ever increasing Roe population, causing the deer to become herd animals rather than loners or family units, comes from Steve Mansfield who, in the Alton area on Saturday (Mar 16) noted two of three Roe seen together had antlers in velvet so at least two males were tolerating each other's company there.

From Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes comes news of the first baby Rabbits appearing above

ground, and from the Brook Meadow conservation group in Emsworth Brian Fellows passes on news of the second sighting of a Common Lizard this year (see Mar 8 for the first sighting)

WEEK 11 MAR 11 – 17 (Edited Version)

BIRDS:

SUN 17 MAR

The first Hampshire Little Ringed Plover of the year arrived at the Overton paper works filtration ponds today where it was seen by Mike Wall (who makes no special comment about it - have there been others, arriving even earlier, that I have missed?). Mike seemed to be more excited about a count of 42 Tufted Duck (apparently a record for this site) and a drop in numbers of Gadwall to only 21, and about the arrival of a Chiffchaff in his garden. I can understand the enthusiasm for a new bird in the garden (Mike says he has only once had a spring Chiffchaff in the garden in previous years) but widespread reports of both Chiffchaff and Wheatear now make them less newsworthy as far as these notes are concerned - though as most of the early Wheatear are males I suppose that a female (with five males) on Castle Hill between Brighton and Lewes today is of some interest.

Also in the Basingstoke area Robert Watson today found 300 Golden Plover at Cliddesden (just south of the town) - maybe the flock that is usually based west of Basingstoke has moved here (as Mike Wall says he has not seen 'his birds' since Feb 12) but my guess would be that this is a flock on the way through from the south and will not stay to be seen again. It could be the flock of 330 recently seen in the Halterworth area of Romsey where John Firth could find no Golden Plover today).

In his home area just east of Wickham in the Meon Valley John Shillitoe had what may have been the first 'general upsurge of Buzzards' to welcome the spring - nine were in sight at one time by looking in three different directions - but so far others have not joined in with similar county wide sightings. In the same area John had a possible male White Wagtail on the ground before he went north to the Hambledon/Soberton area to see more Buzzards and a flock of 18 Golden Plover (I guess these were on the move as I have not heard of a flock based in this area). Surprisingly there was also a flock of 240+ Common Gulls which I would have expected to have left us by now (and Trevor Carpenter was quite surprised to have 79 at Fareham Creek today). Less surprising were 5 Little Egrets still by the Meon at Soberton.

Graham Osborne spent today touring our area, starting on Hayling where he found the Little Gull still over the Sinah Lake (plus a Shag at the Hayling Ferry and two Med Gulls on the south shore of the island). Coming back onto the mainland he found a record flock of 110 Shoveler on the Budds Farm Pools (I thought most of these ducks had left by now) but could only detect one Chiffchaff at this sewage works which used to be a magnet for both winter birds and new arrivals. There were more than 6 Chiffchaff at his next stop (the Titchfield Canal path) and further up the Meon (at Drayton, just west of East Meon) the regular two Little Egrets were still present with a Grey Heron.

News from the Isle of Wight for today may indicate the arrival of a second wave of Sand Martins as 2 were in the Bembridge area today along with a Sandwich Tern, 2 Wheatear, and 5+ Chiffchaff. Four Greenshank were presumably wintering rather than passage birds and the same may be true of 10 Purple Sandpiper in the Bembridge Foreland area (they have been reported several times during the winter but always vanish when Derek Hale goes to look for them!). Yesterday two Ravens were seen over Culver Down and a male White Wagtail was in the Brading area.

Tony Gutteridge began recording the breeding birds on Warblington Castle Farm in 1977 and, bar last year, has done so ever since for the BTO Common Bird Census. I can't remember which year I joined him but it was in the mid-1980s, and this morning I was down at the farm at 7:30 to cover my southern section of the patch for the first of the ten visits required in each breeding season (covering the whole farm, hedgerow by hedgerow, each visit takes some 5 hours so some time ago we split the job, each doing half). Highlights of what I saw today start with the Little Owl pair with a nest hole close to the Old Rectory in Pook Lane - today I saw one of them

looking at me from within the nest hole - but probably the best birds of the day were some 4 Med Gulls among a flock of 50 Black-headed. This is the first time I have recorded them on the farm, and would have missed them if it had not been for their very distinctive calls, quite different from the harsh calls of the Black-headed. The Med Gulls call has been described as 'cat like' and sounds like a cat in the sense of being a 'Me-aouw' sound, lower pitched than the Black-headed, but I could never mistake it for an actual cat! Not unusual on the farm in winter, but not expected in the breeding season, were 19 Egrets clustered round cattle, and also remnants of winter were ten Snipe in the marshy SSSI field, 17 Brent on one shoreline grass field and 9 Curlew flying over the fields. . One Chiffchaff singing was the only real spring sound, though a Reed Bunting singing from the small nearby reedbed, and three singing Blackbirds were seasonable. Just three Skylark were singing (when Tony started the census up to 30 pairs nested here). Looking out over the shoreline I could see another 46 Brent still with us, plus 8 Knot, 6 Merganser and 15 Shelduck with (I think) one Bar-tailed Godwit and a single Greenshank (heard only). As usual a flock of more than 20 Crows were present (and Jackdaw were around the Castle tower) but I did not see a single Rook, neither on the fields where they usually come to feed from the rookery in west Emsworth, nor at the three nests which still look perfectly serviceable in a tree above Pook Lane (is this another species in retreat?)+++

Before leaving home I twice heard short bursts of full Blackcap song from my garden and assumed this was a new arrival, but later in the day when speaking to Theo Roberts I was told that there is no certain way of telling a summer from a winter Blackcap by the volume of its song - he has in the past heard the full, loud, explosive song (which I thought distinguished a summer bird) coming from a bird wearing one of the rings he had fitted to it in the winter. Another reason for assuming this morning's Blackcap was a migrant was the arrival yesterday of a singing Chiffchaff in the Hayling Billy line behind my garden (where I have not heard the calls of a wintering bird recently). The Chiffchaff sang at regular intervals both yesterday and today.

SAT 16 MAR

The earliest ever Grasshopper Warbler in Hampshire, according to the 1999 report, was on 1 April 1997 so the sighting of one in the Point Field at Farlington Marshes today by Ed Griffiths was noteworthy (in telling me he says he will be sending a record to John Clark). Ed says >> I have no doubts about the id since it was only 10ft away on top of a bramble, but it threw me at first due to the early date and because it was not reeling, but producing a sort of quiet squeaky trill - a bit like a muffled alarm clock ring. Is this some sort of subsong ? I can't find this noise referred to... <<. Another good bird seen today at Pagham Harbour was a Bonaparte's Gull, reported on the SOS website as being an adult winter bird and seen for just over an hour near the Pagham Lagoon, but I would guess that it would be difficult to persuade the experts of its identity without a lot more detail than is given in this factual statement. An earlier report of a Bonaparte's gull at Pagham was on the SOS website for Feb 15 this year - that one only stayed for 5 minutes.

Trevor Carpenter did not have Ed Griffith's certainty in trying to identify a bird he saw today near Hambledon, and is completely at a loss as to what it was. Trevor says >> After a long walk on Saturday I was approaching Hambledon when one of the strangest birds I have ever seen flew over. It had a large bull head so some sort of parrot came to mind. Unlike a parrot it had as much in front of the wings as behind and had no apparent long tail. So jizz was like a jackdaw size auk but with more prominent wings. To confuse matters even more it appeared to be dark and had no obvious colouration. It called consistently with a strong monosyllabic peep like a very loud wader. For those of you who know them an ani without the tail is the closest thing that comes to mind. I have never been so baffled. << ..and so am I (ani to me sounds like the plural of anus, and without a tail that sounds like barefaced cheek). Other birds were easier to identify - several flocks of winter thrushes still around, with perhaps 50 Fieldfare and 20 Redwing (though maybe many more as Trevor describes one flock as uncountable - presumably not seen well rather than too many to count).

Martin Hampton made an extensive tour of the Langstone and north Hayling areas today, getting a good list of observations among which two stick out for me - the first Meadow Pipit song on Langstone South Moors and the presence of a smart male Stonechat in the 'Brickfield' across

the Hayling Coastal Path from the Oysterbeds - a pair nested here last spring and I hope this means they are back in business there again. During his outing Martin came on Chiffchaff singing at both Wade Court and Budds Farm, where he saw 72 Shoveler but only 3 Tufted Duck and very few Teal, though there were still 61 Wigeon and 4 Goldeneye off the South Moors (and 220 Brent flying east, though Martin does not comment on them climbing high into the air to do so - I think that is what the departing migrants generally do on leaving Langstone Harbour, presumably to get their bearings and see the sea across Hayling). A female Sparrowhawk was hunting in the Budds Farm area and another female was seen at Northney. In the Gutner Point/Verner Common area there was a good show of waders including Black and Bar-tailed Godwit (disturbed by noisy model aircraft before Martin could get a good look) and a few Fieldfare and Redwing+++

Yesterday Martin used the train from Havant to Petersfield, managing to spot a Green Sandpiper in the wetlands just south of the Whichers Gate (Emsworth to Rowlands Castle) Road. In Petersfield there were still 26 Shoveler on the Heath Pond, and towards dusk he watched at least 120 Pied Wagtail coming to roost on the roof of Waitrose store, alongside which flows a canalised stream (a combination of water and warmth in the shelter of buildings seem to be essential ingredients of a Wagtail roost)

Still with today's news I see that, when walking the south east shore of Pagham Harbour from the North Walls to the lagoon, Lawrence Holloway enjoyed two smart male Black Redstarts. Other birds there were around 80 Golden Plover, over 100 Teal (mostly paired), 150+ Wigeon, 150+ Knot, 40 Turnstone and 40+ Black-tailed Godwit. The Lapwing have left the harbour but seemingly quite a lot of Linnet have come back to nest and both Skylark and Meadow pipit were singing. Lawrence saw one Avocet and one Egret.

Yesterday Brian Fellows was in Hollybank Woods and heard two Blackbirds singing in the daytime, and in Emsworth Harbour he found three Med Gulls, 26 Lesser and 24 Greater Blackback gulls (despite Jason Crook's recent observation that the Greaters had all left Langstone Harbour some time ago)

Sussex news for yesterday has the first Ring Ouzel as it's highlight - seen in the Hastings area. Nearer us a Scandinavian Rock Pipit was in Pagham Harbour with one Ruff, and off Widewater (near the mouth of the River Adur at Shoreham) another flock of 150 Brent flew east

FRI 15 MAR

The first definite report of a Hampshire Swallow (leaving aside Colin Allen's 'possible' at Dibden Bay on Mar 2) was at Titchfield Haven today - this news from Richard Carpenter who was at the reserve today but did not, I think, see the Swallow himself. Other news from the Haven for today is that both the Bittern and the young male Marsh Harrier are still present, there are still around 130 Black-tailed Godwit (some in summer plumage), one of 8 Siskin was singing and a Dartford Warbler was seen. Recent sightings at Titchfield include a Glaucous Gull on Mar 11, four Med Gulls present since Mar 13, and regular evening sightings of Barn Owl over the reserve.

News from Jason Crook today puts back the date of the first Hampshire Wheatear to Mar 8 when one was seen at Sandy Point by one of the rangers there - that puts Hampshire on level pegging with Sussex where their first Wheatear arrived at Beachy Head on Mar 8, though neither county can compete with the Feb 26 date recorded in Devon, nor (in respect of numbers) with the count of 110 Wheatear at Portland Bill today. More reports of Sand Martin also appeared today - from the Blashford Lakes Elaine Harrison (the HWT warden) tells us that they were there on March 9, and a report from Pulborough Brooks gives the same date (equalling Charles Cuthbert's sighting at Alresford Pond). The Blashford Bittern has apparently not been seen since Mar 8.

If anyone still doubts that Brent are on the move then a count of 1600 flying east past Rye Harbour in 2.5 hours this morning (a site record count) should convince them. With them were 485 Common Scoter and a drake Pintail. Ten Avocet on the shore were also resting on passage, which reminds me that Richard Bonser's comment, that 8 Avocet passing Portland Bill today indicated the start of their passage, would be disputed by some - Paul Troake's report for

February at Rye Harbour includes the sentence >> Three early Avocets alighted on Camber Sands mid month and another spent the day at Wader Pool (27th) << and it is a good while since we heard of the winter flocks at Pagham and in the Thorney Channel (I have assumed that sporadic sightings at Pagham recently are all of passing birds). The arrival of an Avocet at the Eastleigh Lakeside park today was very unexpected and gave Simon Ingram and several others much pleasure.

At least two Fieldfare could be heard in the trees at Stansted Groves this afternoon, their winter sound contrasting with the spring whistling of Nuthatch and one brief burst of Chiffchaff song (and, having recently said that Blackbirds are only singing at dawn and dusk, at least one was singing here in mid-afternoon). On Alresford Pond one of the Swans was already sitting on her island nest, with her mate patiently pottering among the other wildfowl which included three pairs of Gadwall, a lone male Shoveler, at least one pair of Little Grebe and two pairs of Mallard plus a dozen each of Coot and Moorhen. Of the seven Tufted Duck present three were female, one of them causing me to look twice on account of its large white undertail patch. Although it was sleeping and I could not get a good view of the head and eye I am certain it was not a Ferruginous by the colour of the body and breast feathers, and by the fact that the white could not be seen in a side view, only from the stern.. A Grey Heron was hunting in the smaller pond next to the road to Sindles Farm and there were no Canada Geese visible (at least one was on Brick-kiln pond and I could hear others in the vicinity, but could not see them on Aldsworth Pond nor the grass field west of it).+++

Five minutes after sunset (which was obscured by dark clouds) the first Egrets flew in to the Wade Court trees at Langstone, and 15 minutes later I had counted 53 flying in (plus, very unusually, a Grey Heron). My count may not have been exact (some fly in quickly when you are not looking, others may get double counted as they shift position after first arrival) but indicates that the birds have not yet started to disperse from this roost. In the half-hour I was present the Cetti's Warbler on Langstone Pond sang twice, and before it got dark I counted 49 Shelduck on the harbour mud at very low tide (a similar number of Brent were on what water was left, but very little else - I only saw two Curlew). On the large puddle of water in the pony field behind the pond there were still a dozen Teal so we have not seen the last of them yet.

The results of the March 2 WeBS count in Portsmouth Harbour has just arrived as I write these notes, and a first glance at the spreadsheet and Dennis Bill's comments tells me that Curlew were present in very high numbers (546, second only to a massive count of 747 in Jan 1995) while Merganser had their third highest count, at 125 this was little short of the two higher counts (126 in Mar 95 and 142 in Jan 90). A count of only 62 Shelduck was worryingly low, not out of line with the diminishing numbers in Chichester and Langstone harbours in recent years (though the national trend shows an increasing population). Lapwing, Black-tailed and Bar-tailed Godwit were all totally absent but there was one Goosander in Haslar Lake and a crowd of 63 Mute Swan on the Gosport Cackle Pond.

Finally today I must apologize to Cris Little for saying, in what I wrote last Wednesday in connection with Red Kite movements, that his opinion differed from the accepted view. All he was doing was pointing out that, while the great majority of the adult breeding pairs among the introduced population do stay remarkably close to the release point there are a few adventurous spirits among them which are moving away to pioneer new sites. Cris tells me >> It is very true that the vast majority of ADULT kites nest extremely close to all the original release sites. I live 5 miles away from the Yorkshire one and I've NEVER seen a kite yet in my area. Yet every time I go to the area of the release site I see plenty. However, a small minority of adult kites from each of the release sites have settled away from the release sites and can be considered as pioneers. The story with first year birds is very different. They tend to wander far and wide from their natal sites. English Nature have published a booklet on the radio tracked Midlands kites that shows substantial juvenile wanderings (to far as the south coast, East Anglia and Wales), yet most of these juveniles returned to a tiny area of the Midlands to breed. <<

THU 14 MAR

Indications of the retreat of winter birds today come from Tony Blunden, Phil Lord and Jason Crook. In the extreme north of Hampshire at Ecchinswell (near the Newbury road from

Basingstoke north west of Kingsclere) Tony today day a Peregrine harrassing a mighty flock of 1100 Fieldfare and hastening their departure from Hampshire, while at Romsey Phil found a flock of 330 Golden Plover on the Highwood Lane/Halterworth fields where they have just appeared, again presumably on their way north. From Farlington Marshes Jason reports that the first Wheatear to reach the reserve (on Mar 12) was accompanied by a couple of new Stonechats (presumed migrants from the continent), which were in addition to those that have been present through the winter and which will no doubt very soon depart. Another interesting observation from Jason is that the gales today had brought back at least ten Great Blackback Gulls which had not been seen on the reserve for a couple of weeks and which were not expected back until after the breeding season (a few immature birds do stay in Langstone Harbour when the others have gone to nest elsewhere, and very occasionally a single pair nests in the harbour area)

A count of 30 Ruff at Pulborough Brooks today caused me to check through previous reports from the Arun Valley for the past couple of months to see if this was a record - in fact there were 36 there on Jan 20 but the other reported counts have varied between 10 and 23. I wonder if this sudden increase today implies that the winter birds at Pulborough have just been joined by those from West Wittering, already on their way home? Also at Pulborough another dodgy duck has shown up - this one is described as a hybrid between an American Wigeon and one of our Wigeon. I wonder which side of the Atlantic it considers to be 'home' (or if it will be so torn between the two that it becomes a sea-duck and gives rise to a mid-Atlantic race - not much grass out there for the race to survive!)

News of two Merganser on Ivy Lake at Chichester today is I think rather unusual (I can't recall hearing of them there before) but two Sandwich Tern off Selsey Bill is not so unusual for this date. Another slightly unexpected bird was a Greenshank seen today by Martin Hampton in the Long Pool at Pagham Harbour, where a flock of 62 Turnstone (many coming into summer plumage) made a pretty sight, especially as they allowed Martin to walk within a few yards of them. Very unexpected is a report of a Hoopoe seen in the MoD site just west of Funtington at the end of January - this comes from Jim Berry who heard it from a lady in Rowlands Castle who, being familiar with Hoopoe in Spain, swears that she saw one here when she was a passenger in a car driving past the MoD site. Can anyone back up this claim? (I know Hoopoe do occasionally winter here, and recall one being at the Frensham ponds within the last few years).

Now that it seems that any Bewick's Swans that were at Ibsley have left Hampshire it is perhaps of interest to see them leave Sussex, and a count of 12 at Pulborough on Mar 8 may well be the last there. 5 Whitefront Geese were still at Pulborough yesterday (and no doubt there is still a big flock at Rye) but I am sure they too will soon be gone...

WED 13 MAR

Yesterday when Ros Norton told me she had just seen a Wheatear on the Hayling side of the Langstone Harbour entrance I thought that was the first to arrive in Hampshire but today Tim Lawman tells me that he saw one at Sandy Point on Monday (Mar 11), along with a couple of Firecrest there and three newly arrived Chiffchaff singing around Sinah Lake, over which a first winter Little Gull was patrolling (it had been there since Saturday Mar 9). Other early Wheatear sightings along the south coast have been at Beachy Head on Mar 8, and at both Church Norton in Sussex and Tennyson Down in the Isle of Wight on Mar 9. Singing Chiffchaff are now being heard in many places but the only Willow Warbler I have so far heard of was singing in the Broadwater district of Worthing yesterday, Mar 12. (On Monday Mar 11 I was told of what might have been a Willow Warbler singing on Portsdown over the weekend but the report was too uncertain to be quoted). Going back to the Little Gull I wonder if it is one of the two that were on the Westhampnett Lake at Chichester last Friday and Saturday - I have not heard of them since Saturday, on which day one turned up at Sinah Lake and one on the Portfield Pit at Chichester (just south of Westhampnett).

Colin Bates today saw a Red Kite over the A272 about a mile west of Cheesefoot Head, towards Winchester - he was delighted with his first sighting of a Kite in Hampshire but this may well have been the same bird that has been reported three or four times in the Cheesefoot

Head/Gander Down area since Mar 5. Yesterday two more Red Kite sightings were made in Sussex - Mike Collins saw one heading northwest over the Kingley Vale area north of Chichester at 07:50 and Barry Collins saw one over the south of Thorney Island, also going north west towards Hayling Island. at 11am. If those two birds kept to their northwesterly headings the times given indicate that they were different birds, making me wonder if they had come from the continent. That thought would also tie in with two observations made on Mar 7 when Simon Boswell (as already reported here) saw one going north from the Isle of Wight around 4pm and (in the latest news from Derek Hale on the Isle of Wight) there is a new report of one over Gore Cliff (St Catherine's Point) at an unspecified time on that day (Mar 7). Of course these might all be birds that had flown south from the over-pouulated M40 triangle in search of a new home but had turned back north on seeing the sea in front of them, but they might just as well have come over the channel. If you are interested in learning more factual information about the kites in the UK Cris Little tells me that it is well worth visiting the website at www.gigrin.co.uk/w/outsidewales/chilterns.html Contrary to the opinion that the kites are very reluctant to move away from their release area, voiced in the British Wildlife magazine and supported by Ed Griffiths, Cris says that the Welsh Kite Trust newsletter on the website indicates that there has been some substantial movement of kites away from the release area, and he has observed the same thing happening in Yorkshire where he lives only five miles from the latest release point.

Along the Titchfield Haven canal path today Richard Carpenter came on six Water Pipits, all with nicely pink flushed breasts, though when Brian Fellows was at Southsea Castle yesterday he saw what he took to be a Water Pipit (on account of its light colouring, well defined supercilium, and black legs) but he does not mention a pink breast which would have picked it out more definitely. Also at Titchfield Haven Richard heard Chiffchaff song, and other news for today comes from Martin Hampton who found 28 Shoveler (as far as he could see without his bins) still on Petersfield Heath lake, and from Sussex where an Avocet can still be seen at Sidlesham ferry.

TUE 12 MAR

We have already heard from Bob Chapman of 20 or more Med Gulls over the Langstone Harbour islands last Sunday and further proof of their arrival in breeding quarters today comes from Barry Collins who found 14 of them in Emsworth Harbour - a long way from the islands on which they will nest, but a regular place for them to congregate before settling down to nest. My theory as to why they come here is that they want to look their best during the courtship period and find the clean fresh water of the River Ems is the best for washing their feathers (I would certainly choose it in preference to the water coming out of the much nearer Hermitage Stream!). Last spring a good place to look for Med Gulls was on the West Hayling fields where spring ploughing attracted big flocks of gulls, but this year all the fields alongside the Coastal Path were sown in the autumn and are unlikely to attract gulls this spring, so Emsworth Harbour may be the best place to get close views of them in their stunning plumage.

There have been plenty of reports of Siskin in Hampshire over the past few weeks but I have not heard of them starting to sing until this week. Today this caught my eye in a report from Richard Ford at Woolmer Forest where he says one of some 15 birds was singing, and in Sussex Colin Brand (at Lindfield on the northern edge of Haywards Heath) offers a good description of Siskin in his garden, writing yesterday in the SOS website >> For the last 6 weeks have had several Siskins joining (our) charm of up to 30 Goldfinches on Niger and Sunflower Hearts feeders and also using Peanut feeders (not red bags) in the garden. During last 2 weeks a cock has had singing post in Crab Apple, with (his) hen seeing off any other hen. To-day at least 16 Siskins in garden trees with several cocks singing and the rest calling incessantly. Almost deafening !! << In Hampshire Steve Keen says that >> Siskins are literally everywhere in the Sway/New Milton area. I see/hear them in every garden I work in (averaging about 15 gardens per day I suppose), some seemingly settled, some flying through. Never big flocks and not really able to count them, but basically EVERYWHERE. <<+++

Another interesting item from Richard Ford is his encounter with three Woodcock which he flushed during the day from the Cranmer Bog (south east edge of Whitehill bordering on Woolmer). Not only was he delighted with the richness of their plumage but he says that two

which he flushed together were vocal in their objections to being disturbed (no doubt rightly if they had reached a critical moment in their courtship!). I have occasionally flushed Woodcock by day and been surprised with the explosive noise of their wings during the 'emergency take off' but never heard them call in these circumstances and I hope Richard will tell us more about what he heard (neither the 'Wissick' nor the frog-like croaking calls that I have heard during roding seem appropriate to the circumstances, so what noise did they make?)

More interesting news from Steve Keen in the extreme south west of Hampshire includes what seems an extraordinarily early juvenile Woodpigeon already out of the nest and, more seasonably, Blackcap song heard at Highcliffe just over the Dorset border. Steve does not say whether this was the quiet and continuous subsong of a wintering bird or the explosive, loud declamation that a migrant has arrived but I assume it to be the latter. In his home village of Hordle two Ravens flew over.

Trevor Carpenter was at Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley today, where 50+ Common Gulls were still present along with a crowd of 35 Collared Doves and flocks of 250 Chaffinch and 20 Yellowhammer with 2 Kestrels (a pair?) hunting overhead, but the star of the day was a cock Brambling in his full summer plumage. Down at the coast Richard Bonser was at Hook in Trevor's absence and found 95 Wigeon still present while at Eastleigh Lakeside Simon Ingram still had 25 Redpoll and 15 Siskin with one singing Chiffchaff/

News from Brian Fellows for today starts with a whole hour of Blackbird song well before dawn from 5:15 to 6:15 when the local Song Thrush took over. I'm pretty sure that I am not alone in having heard Blackbird song around dawn since Jan 10 this year and still they have not become proper daytime singers - for the past month or so they have been singing strongly at dusk but never in broad daylight. Later in the day Brian found two Med Gulls on the Slipper Mill pond (probably in addition to the 14 Barry Collins saw in the harbour), and yesterday he counted a total of 89 Swans back in the Emsworth area, including the Peter Pond pair which have still not settled in at their nest but excluding the Black Swan which was having another away day.. The most significant item of Brian's Monday walk around the Emsworth ponds was the sight of the first Coot on its nest in one of the Slipper Mill raft nest boxes. Today Brian made his usual visit to Portsmouth, finding three pairs of Swans on the Milton Common lakes (one pair to each pond - normally just one pair nest there). A male Gadwall on Langstone Harbour was rather unusual, and there were plenty of Brent still around both on land at Portsmouth College and on the water with 25 Merganser. Baffin Pond was very quiet with no Swan pair and only 2 Tufted Duck (though it takes more than spring time urges to separate the 33 Canada Geese and the Baffins gang of Barnacles from their bread rations and they were still present). Walking round Eastney beach in front of Fort Cumberland in search of Wheatear (none seen) Brian came on two Ringed Plover which I suppose could well be planning to nest there.

Other miscellaneous news is that the Ring-billed Gull is still at Broadmarsh today and prepared to give close views (down to 10 metres or less) when the tide is low and sometimes comes to feed the ducks with bread, and three or four Hawfinch could still be found in Romsey. News from Sussex for yesterday includes an intriguing report of ten Song Thrushes in one garden at Rusper (north of Horsham and west of Crawley) and of 310 Whitefront Geese still at Rye last Sunday, plus 3 Purple Sandpiper still at Newhaven yesterday. Last Saturday a Glaucous Gull was following a fishing boat off Brighton - could the Pagham bird roam that far (some 50 km) on its daily outings?

MON 11 MAR

Two good stories have just appeared on HOSLIST to start the week with a smile - one from Portsmouth featuring Magpies and the other from South Africa featuring the less well known Subantarctic Skua. Starting in an office overlooking Victoria Park in Portsmouth, Martin Gillingham describes how he watched a Sparrowhawk, which regularly visits the park, land on a branch for a brief respite from hunting, only to be hunted and driven away by a team of seven Magpies. The noisy Magpies were at first ignored by the hawk (which has no doubt suffered similar verbal abuse on many occasions) but when one of them perched above it and started dropping twigs directly on to the hawk, it decided there were more restful places to have its after-lunch nap. As a grandparent occasionally subjected to similar annoyance from active and vocal youngsters I sympathize with the Sparrowhawk, but I must say that, for the children, this

is a good variation on the old game of Pooh sticks. (First catch your hawk and place it on a suitable branch, then climb to the top of the tree and start hurling down branches, the winner being the last to reach hospital after falling ...)+++

The second story is more gruesome and not to be imitated by the children at home. It comes from Keith Betton who got it from a South African website devoted to birds (visit <http://www.zestforbirds.co.za> to find out more) and describes how a Subantarctic Skua thought it had caught a good dinner in the shape of a large squid (not too big to swallow whole) but much regretted the choice of menu when the squid, still alive, used its 'beak' to hack a way out again, leaving the Skua with more than punctured pride (in the short period before it died!).

Back to more normal topics starting with the apparent northward movement of Little Egrets.

Today Ed Griffiths tells me that more Egrets have arrived in Buckinghamshire since the seven seen at Chenies last week. Another one at Chenies in mid-week brought the count there to 8, and yesterday (Mar 10) 12 were seen together at a site near Denham in the same area (maybe in addition to the 8, maybe not). Other recent news of Egrets indicates an apparent restlessness among our Hampshire birds - Barry Collins recently told us that the 47 roosting on Thorney Island recently moved their roost site from one side of the island to another for no obvious reason, and Charles Cuthbert now tells me that the 20+ birds which are still in the Alresford area had, on Saturday night (Mar 9), also moved their roost from the main Pond to an unknown local spot, probably in Arlebury Park but not at the Borough farm site which they went to after the duck shoot incident. So the natives are getting restless and the more adventurous among them are forming a queue near Denham in the hope of becoming film stars (??) - what next? Our Langstone birds are still here as far as I know.

I learnt something about Cetti's Warblers from this weekend's messages on HOSLIST - a comment from Ben Darvill about a Cetti's in the Itchen Valley park which had an unusual variation on the 'normal' song brought a response from Trevor Carpenter saying that he understood that wardens at Titchfield Haven could recognize most of the individual birds there by differences in their songs (implying that each bird has an individual song of its own). I have often wondered how it was possible to make such accurate counts of the number of pairs (well over 40 of them) breeding there, and maybe these variants help in that process (but do these elusive birds each have a repertoire of several songs which they use from different places in order to keep the figures up?). The individuality of bird songs and calls was recently emphasised for us by the talk given to HWT members in Havant by Richard Ranft when he spoke of the ability of Sandwich Tern chicks to recognize the calls of their own parents bringing them food - soon after the chicks hatch they leave their individual nests to form a single mass group of hundreds of chicks (probably to save them from some predators which are deterred by the mass), but when a parent arrives overhead with a mouthful of fish it's own chick is able to recognise it's individual call (despite the mouthful and the clamour of many others) and the chick moves out from the mass to enable the parent to land and feed it. To do this the parent also has to recognize the individual call of of it's chick ...+++

The season for seeing 'White Wagtails' (the continental variation of our Pied Wagtail) has now started as some of the continental birds wander briefly across the channel before realising their mistake and returning to the continent to nest, and I see that Richard Carpenter spotted one of them at Hook/Warsash today. This reminded me to get out my bird books once more to check on the distinctions between the races - I know that an adult male is easy (a British bird has a jet black back from head to tail while the continental has a pale grey back sharply demarcated from black head and tail) and an adult female is less easy though the presence of an all pale grey back picks out the continental from a British female whose back is darker grey and has a variable amount of black in it. The trouble seems to come with first winter birds which are indistinguishable between races but can be separated from adults by having no black on their heads. Anyone want to disagree or offer better tips for picking out the occasional continental invader?+++

Another out of place bird was seen today by Mike Wall in his garden (which I think is in a residential area of Basingstoke rather than out in the country). The bird was a Red-legged Partridge which he noticed standing on his garden compost heap for up to an hour before it leapt to the top of the garden fence and flopped down on the other side to surprise another

householder. Also in Mike's garden was a Siskin, this one in full smart male spring dress - very pretty.

News for yesterday not included in the bulletin which I sent out last night starts with a note from Dave Pearson saying that the Ring-billed Gull was still to be seen from the Broadmarsh slipway yesterday (Mar 10), as usual only showing at low tide. Dave then went to look in the Budds Farm pools and found the Shoveler flock down to just 57 birds, but they all flew off when disturbed by a noisy motor cycle - probably some of them returned but it cannot be long now before they leave. More exciting news from Dave was of the first Golden Plover in their glorious summer plumage among a flock of 18 seen yesterday in the Meon Valley near Warneford.

Today's big news is of the arrival of Hampshire's first Sand Martins of the year, two of which were seen by Charles Cuthbert at Alresford Pond on Saturday evening (Mar 9) when he was checking out the Egret roost and found, as noted above, that the birds had moved elsewhere. Two Egrets were present when he arrived, but as dusk approached they flew off. Whatever has disturbed the Egrets has not deterred the two ringtail Hen Harriers that have been roosting in the reeds around the pond this winter - they both arrived as usual.

Not far south of Alresford Richard Carpenter was in the Bramdean/Cheriton area on Saturday, finding 4 Fieldfare and a flock of around 50 Chaffinch still present, as were some 200 Common Gulls following the plough. Birds likely to stay in that area included 3 Buzzards, a Sparrowhawk and four Yellowhammer, while Lapwing were making their display flights over fields near Mislingford on the Meon just north of Wickham as he drove past.

The Shoveler flock on Petersfield Heath Lake was down to just over 20 birds when Martin Hampton was there on Saturday and also on the water were 2 Great Crested Grebe and some 5 Cormorant. To the east of Petersfield along the banks of the River Rother Martin heard Chiffchaff song, maybe from new arrivals, and Yellowhammer song from residents despite the chill wind which made a small flock of Siskin in the alders seem more in keeping with the season than the sound of summer migrants.

Other sightings on Saturday included the Warsash/Hook Brant seen close to the hide on the new scrape north of Hook Lake and both Hen Harrier and Merlin in the north of the New Forest. The Iceland Gull was still at Weston Shore, and further up Southampton Water 40+ Siskin invaded a Marchwood garden, presumably on their way north - the same garden has had a single Brambling since last Friday so the Siskin may stay a few days. I am not sure if Martin Gillingham was among the party accompanying Kevin Stouse round Farlington Marshes in the chill wind on Saturday but Martin was at the marshes and found the winter Whimbrel and at least one Pale-bellied Brent still there, plus the Short-eared Owl on North Binness. Bearded Tit were heard and one of the Black-tailed Godwit was in summer plumage.

PLANTS:

SUN 17 MAR

One Norway Maple was just putting out its first leaves and lovely yellow flowers at Warblington this morning and yesterday I found Thale Cress in flower here in Havant. Two other welcome sights in this morning's sunshine (though not wild flowers) were yellow Mimosa (another sign of global warming that this is an increasingly successful garden shrub here in southern England?) and the first flowering currant (albeit in a garden). Bright yellow Celandines are now to be seen in large golden carpets, and the Ivy Leaved Speedwell is flowering everywhere for those who bother to look for these tiny flowers.

FRI 15 MAR

With so many flowers ahead of schedule I thought I would check on the Early Purple orchids in Stansted Forest - a month ago, on Feb 17, the leaf rosettes were well developed. No sign of

flowers on them yet but the Lesser Periwinkle in Pits Copse, which had its first few flowers open on Feb 17, now has the best display that I can recall. In the Stansted Groves the Primroses were excellent and there were lots of the pale Early Dog Violets plus at least two flowers on Ground Ivy (my first of the year). Another first was the catkins on a Hornbeam tree, though they must have been open for business for some time by the look of them.

WED 13 MAR

Just two minor newcomers on the scene today. One flower appeared on Ivy Leaved Toadflax whose leaves have been growing strongly for some time on walls everywhere and two or three fertile spikes of Field Horsetail had shot up in very damp ground alongside the Hayling Billy trail behind my house here in Havant.

TUE 12 MAR

My own surprise find today was off the first Common Whitlowgrass in flower on Sinah Common, Hayling Island but this was outshone by Christoph Harwood's find, near East Meon last Saturday (Mar 9), of the first flower on Cuckooflower/Milkmaids/Lady's Smock or whatever you may call it (*Cardamine pratensis*). A more expected find by Richard Carpenter today was of flowering Wood Spurge at the Swanwick nature reserve by the River Hamble, and Brian Fellows commented on the real effusion of yellow flowers now covering many Goat Willow trees.

MON 11 MAR

Brian Fellows weekly newsletter for the Emsworth Brook Meadow conservation group tells me that many flowering spikes of Butterbur appeared during the week and when the majority are visible he will make a count to see how they are faring this year. This reminded me that I forgot to mention one thing that I saw in Mill Lane at Langstone last Saturday - my first pure white Sweet Violets.

In Cheriton Wood just south of Tichborne and Alresford, also on Saturday Mar 9, Richard Carpenter found Early Dog Violets and commented that Wood Spurge would soon open its flowers, while Martin Hampton, near the River Rother just east of Petersfield, found his first Wood Anemones and what he is convinced are Wild Daffodils. Richard Carpenter still holds the record for the first Wood Anemone flower of the year with the single that he found at Curbridge by the River Hamble on Feb 23, and I see this beats the first reported on the Isle of Wight according to the HWT website - their claim is for one at Swanpond Copse on the Island on Mar 3.

INSECTS:

SUN 17 MAR

Theo Roberts rang me up this afternoon to tell me that the first Speckled Wood and Small White had been seen today in his garden, in Cosham at the southern foot of Portsdown - the Speckled Wood earlier than expected but the Small White a little late in a year when many butterflies have been early. Commas have been seen almost daily in his garden March 8th, along with Brimstones (Tony Gutteridge had a Brimstone in his Havant garden yesterday (Mar 16)

In the Fareham area Trevor Carpenter saw a Small Tortoiseshell and four Brimstone today, and yesterday he noted a Comma and two Brimstone near Hambledon.

SAT 16 MAR

More moths are now coming to Lee Marshall's trap in the Gosport area - this evening he had 20 moths of 5 species, among them his first Early Grey, a week earlier than his first of last year on Mar 23. A couple of earlier firsts, found on Mar 11, were the Twin-spot Quaker and something called *Diurnea fagella* about which I know nothing (its name sounds as if it were a day flying moth - but that's just a guess)

FRI 15 MAR

Steve Nash, who receives national reports of moth observations, has heard of some very early migrant moths arriving on the night of Mar 7 (the day when all our butterflies came out!). Most spectacular were two observations of Hummingbird Hawkmoth, one at Winchester and the other at Selsey, but with them were The Gem and Pearly Underwing moths (all three species)

which we do not normally see until May) plus Dark Sword-grass moth which is more normal in March. These arrivals at coastal sites, plus coastal sightings of Red Admiral butterflies, persuade Steve that this was a genuine influx across the channel, not just moths emerging from (equally unexpected) hibernation. Another butterfly observation comes from Elaine Harrison, the HWT warden at the Blashford Lakes, Ringwood, where Small Tortoiseshell has been seen (no date or number).

TUE 12 MAR

Very good news today from the Lewes area of Sussex is a sighting of two Small Tortoiseshell trying to mate on the ground - hopefully they succeeded in the end but I believe some overkeen males make advances to other males if they cannot find a female, getting a chilly reception, and it would be bad news if there are no females around (though as with most species of insect, plant or bird there are often a profusion of males around long before the first females appear). Also at Lewes two Brimstone and two Red Admiral were seen, while in Hampshire Richard Carpenter saw a single Small Tortoiseshell by the River Hamble at Swanwick (with the first Pond Skater practising on one of the ponds). Lawrence Holloway also watched a Red Admiral high up among trees in his garden near Pagham.

MON 11 MAR

Today's news includes two reports of Holly Blue sightings. The HWT website records one seen emerging last Friday (Mar 8) at Eaglehead Copse on the Isle of Wight, and the Butterfly conservation website carries an extraordinarily early sighting of one seen on Feb 26 by several people at Dibden Bottom out in the New Forest heathland west of Dibden Bay (an unusual location, but maybe wind blown?). Looking through the recent Hampshire Butterfly reports the earliest sighting of a Holly Blue I can see was on 10 March 1997.

Other news today is of the first Clouded Drab moth found by Lee Marshall on Saturday night (Mar 9), and - going back to the butterflies - a fresh and lively Red Admiral was seen by Charles Cuthbert at Tichborne, east of Winchester, on Saturday. Charles comments about the butterfly's freshness made me wonder if it could just have emerged from a pupa, rather than from hibernation, but I see that the butterfly would normally emerge within two months of egg-laying and I doubt any of our Red Admirals seen in early January actually mated or laid eggs. It could however have emerged in early winter from an egg laid in the autumn and gone straight into hibernation ... Any comments ? (any day now I expect to hear of fresh Clouded Yellows emerging from the Bournemouth undercliffs, judging by last year's reports)

Another news item is a sighting of the first female Brimstone that I have heard of this year - this was seen on Mar 3 by Paul Fomison in the unlikely surroundings of a Micheldever pig field, far from any normal butterfly habitat!

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 16 MAR

Some years ago I remember that when you entered Farlington Marshes from the west, and then turned right to get onto the seawall, you could wait at the fence gate letting you onto the seawall in the hope of seeing a Weasel run across the gateway almost at your feet. That was in the summer when the Weasel was coming frequently to its nest hole with food for hungry youngsters, but at this time of year I am as surprised as was Ed Griffiths to hear how he, waiting just inside the height barrier at the entrance to the track leading to the reserve, right on the edge of the very busy A27/Eastern Road roundabout, today saw a Weasel showing openly only ten feet from the main road. I hope the Weasel survives, unlike one which was so determined to cross Southmoor Lane (near Budds Farm) carrying a hefty Bank Vole in its mouth that it ran straight into the front wheel of my car as I was driving by - that was my only chance to get a closeup picture of a Weasel, and the slide is still in my collection.

I am rapidly coming to the conclusion that Roe Deer are becoming herd animals like the bigger species of deer - more proof of this comes today with a sighting by Trevor Carpenter of 12 Roe in a field just north of Fareham.

MON 11 MAR

The weekly newsletter of the Brook Meadow conservation group at Emsworth tells me that, up to the end of last week, only one Water Vole has been seen in that area since the unfortunate demise, killed by a terrier dog, of the first Vole to re-appear. The one that was killed was accompanied by a mate which got away, and it looks as if it is the only one left.

I am not sure if bats have already emerged from hibernation or if the occasional sightings are the regular brief waking moments which I understand all bats have during the hibernation period to allow them to get rid of poisons that would otherwise build up in their bodies as a result of the minimal metabolism that goes on throughout their 'sleep'. Anyway, two more bats were seen at Upper Crabbick Lane (between Denmead and Worlds End) on March 3. Thanks to Lynn Fomison for forwarding me this observation made by Jean Hadwen.

WEEK 10 MAR 4 - 10

BIRDS:

SUN 10 MAR

John Shillitoe visited the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood today and found 1 redhead Smew still on Mockbeggar Lake (John Clark comments that this is a late date for a Smew in Hampshire). 10 Goosander were also on the lake with at least 3 Ruddy Duck of which two were males. Across the main A338 there were no Bewick's Swans to be seen at Ibsley meadows - unlike the Smew they probably have left. In the lower Test valley today Paul Winter also found winter birds still with us - 150 Fieldfare and 70 Redwing at Nursling (just south of the M27), but as I have not heard of such a large flock in the area I can only guess that this was a travelling party stopping off briefly on its way north to recuperate after flying the channel. Resident birds of the area were a Kingfisher and 2 Buzzards

SAT 09 MAR

A Wheater landed at Church Norton today and a Sandwich Tern flew past Selsey Bil, giving a strong hint that we should see both species in Hampshire at any day now. A Great Northern Diver was still off Selsey and two unidentified Shearwater flew past (we are getting a lot of early Shearwater in the English Channel this year). Inland near Chichester the two Little Gulls which arrived yesterday could still be seen over the Westhampnett Pool - one is an adult, the other a first winter. From East Sussex comes further proof of departing Brent - a flock of 60 flew east past Pett in the Hastings area - and two immature Spoonbill flew over the same area but left in a north east direction away from us..

Paul Winter found more than 10 Water Pipit still at the Lower Test marshes, several of them already showing a pink flush on their breasts, and in the north east of Hampshire David Broadley was lucky enough to see a Bittern in flight over Fleer Pond at 9:45 in the morning (perhaps fleeing a prowling Fox? or even worse a Mink?). Near Winchester the Cheesefoot Head Red Kite was seen again, this time from the A272 just east of the high point at Cheesefoot Head, the Kite flying north towards Gander Down. This is at least the third sighting of a Kite in this area (on Mar 3, 7 and now 9). Another Hampshire Kite sighting came from Totton, flying south west at around 12:45pm yesterday (Mar 8) - this was seen by at least two people.

Between Hambledon and the River Meon at Soberton John Shillitoe found the two Corn Bunting at Hoe Cross but at Green Lane just north of Hambledon he could only see two separate individuals where he had seen four Corn Bunting last week but their lack of numbers was compensated for (!!) by a flock of over 2000 Woodpigeons (winter birds on their way back to Germany?) In the same area he saw two separate Stonechat and by the Meon found six Egrets near Soberton church and another further south at Misingford. A couple of miles east of the river he again saw two Egrets in cattle fields near North Boarhunt which he claims is miles from a watercourse, but my map indicates a stream rising at SU 604106 and flowing south to join the Wallington River at SU 602093, which they may have followed to the area where John saw them (though I have no doubt that the Egrets fly long distances over land and will come down anywhere that food is on offer).

Walking to the shops here in Havant today I heard what must have been Blackcap subsong coming from a dense conifer in a garden, and later heard the same sound coming from another

garden as I was walking beside the Langbrook stream. The sound was nothing like the loud warbling of a Blackcap's full song and when I first heard it I thought I was listening to some exotic cage bird singing in the house and heard through an open window but when I got closer I could be sure the bird was in the tree within a few feet of me (but with no chance of seeing it in the dense foliage). After looking from every angle I left the bird still singing its quiet and apparently endless song. Since writing this I have heard that Judith Chawner heard one singing in the Itchen water meadows at Winchester today, and saw two others eating Ivy Berries (fattening up for the flight to Europe?). Another Blackcap was seen at Lewes in Sussex yesterday, also eating ivy berries.+++

My afternoon walk took me to Budds Farm where the Teal population was down to around 20 birds but there were still 75 or more Shoveler engaged in their never ending sifting of the water for minute food particles. On the shore Brent were strung out for most of the way from the Hermitage to the Langbrook stream - probably no more than 300 birds in a very thin line along the tide's edge. 30 or so Wigeon were near the outfall and a similar number of Oystercatcher were near them - otherwise the waders were limited to a few Curlew and a couple of Turnstone, but the tide was rising and the sun setting ..

Bob Chapman's announcement yesterday of the first two migrant Chiffchaff at Farlington Marshes was matched today by a message from Mark Litjens of one, almost certainly a migrant, in the Hedge End area near Southampton, also heard yesterday. Also yesterday Mark was lucky enough to come on two Willow Tits (which he feels confident was a pair) in the Whiteley Pastures on the southern fringe of Botley Woods. They could well be setting up home there and if so I expect several people would like directions to the spot in order to get a year tick of this now rare species.

FRI 08 MAR

The latest news from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes appeared on the HWT website today to tell us that two migrant Chiffchaff had appeared in 'The Bushes' today - another bird heard yesterday in the copse north of the A27 was probably a wintering bird. Lapwing on the main marsh are expected to start egg-laying any day now and the number of Med Gulls is increasing (last Sunday, Mar 3, more than 20 could be seen over the islands). There are still plenty of winter wildfowl - some 3000 Brent (with two or three Pale-bellied birds), 200+ Wigeon and around 50 each of Pintail and Shoveler, while the wintering Whimbrel is still present and single Slavonian Grebe and Common Scoter can usually be seen from the Point. Bearded Tits and Cetti's Warblers can still be seen and heard.+++

The Brent at Farlington may not be there for much longer as around 400 of their kind were heading east in small flocks along the Solent shore when Richard Carpenter was in the Brownwich/Chilling area this morning (following the sighting of 5 off the coast east of Brighton on Mar 5). Hopefully staying to nest were a pair of Grey Wagtail at Brownwich pond.

From Sussex comes news of a Wheatear at Beachy Head today and in Brighton a Black Redstart was singing while there were 2 Little Gulls over the Westhampnett lake at Chichester. Inland at Ambersham Common a Jack Snipe was seen along with the more expected Crossbill (12 of them), a Dartford Warbler and (at nearby Coates Common) two Woodlark.

Another Woodlark was a surprise to John Eyre and John Collman when they found it near the shore at Hook today while looking for the Brant (not seen). They did see the odd Barnacle Goose still there, though John Clark has heard of what may be the same bird being seen on the other side of Southampton Water at Calshot recently. They also went to Weston shore and found the second winter Iceland Gull still there.

Along with all the good news of spring Les Stride tells us the sad story of how he today found the remnants of a Robins' nest pulled out of its low bank site in his Totton garden today - two dead chicks lay on the ground and the cat culprit had presumably taken at least two other chicks. In my own garden this morning a Song Thrush was tearing something from the soft ground of my lawn, probably some of the abundant moss! Yesterday a Magpie was doing the same but that bird may have been wanting soil as well (last year the Magpies dug a noticeable crater in the damp lawn)

This evening I cycled down to the Wade Court Egret roost, not arriving until after 6pm on a dark evening. Although the great majority of the Egrets had already arrived I was able to count 47 of

them (there were probably more) and later saw another 4 or 5 fly in so well over 50 must have roosted. While there I again heard definite Cetti's Warbler song from the reeds around the Langstone Mil Pond. News from Barry Collins confirms that the Egrets have not abandoned Thorney Island though they do seem to have deserted the Great Deeps site for one which the public cannot view on the east side of the island where there were 47 birds last night (Mar 7). While Barry was on Thorney yesterday he saw 186 Knot in the Thorney Channel off Stanbury Point along with 2 Short-eared Owls hunting the Thornham Marshes (and had another sight of two Med Gulls heading for Emsworth). Going back to birds at Wade Court I realise that it is some time since I saw the regular winter 'siege' of Grey Herons there - these have all presumably returned to their Heronries. (And finally I am reminded by the thought of Herons that a Radio Solent listener rang in this morning to report a Stork on a Bournemouth rooftop - unfortunately no one asked him if he knew the difference between a Heron and a Stork)

THU 07 MAR

Just 2 weeks ago, on Feb 21, a Red Kite flew over the Hamble river, then on Feb 28 one was over the north of Basingstoke, followed by a third sighting at Cheesefoot Head near Winchester on Mar 5. These Hampshire sightings provoked a comment from Ed Griffiths in Buckinghamshire that the Kites seem to have set their own limits to the area in which they are prepared to operate and breed - he lives only 15km east of the main release site yet hardly ever sees a Kite overhead despite the very healthy growth in the population. Following the importation of 93 birds in the period 1989 to 1994, the birds have bred very successfully to reach a total of 113 pairs (plus young and non-breeding birds) in 2000, but the birds seem very reluctant to venture outside an area with a radius of at most 20 km. So, in a year when the Egrets that have been in England for exactly the same length of time (starting in 1989) are apparently expanding northwards and inland, it is not unreasonable to hope that the Kites will also reach the point at which they have to burst out of their self-appointed limits and start to establish territories in Hampshire.+++

Today brought two separate Kite sightings in Hampshire. The first nearly caused an accident on the A31 between Alresford and Winchester as it swept over the road in front of Charles Cuthbert's car, but luckily he was able to pull in and have a look at it disappearing southwards over Tichborne towards Gander Down, pursued by a Crow - this may well be the bird seen at Cheesefoot Head on Tuesday (Mar 5) by Bob Marchant. The second sighting was possibly even more interesting as it could mean that birds are coming from the continent to join our population - it was of a Kite flying north over Keyhaven (apparently from the Isle of Wight) where it was seen by Simon Boswell. All the above remarks of mine are of course pure speculation and the sightings are probably nothing more than evidence of a few Kites being encouraged by the better weather to take a day trip over the surrounding countryside with no real intention of leaving their established enclave in the M40 triangle.

When I was at the Hayling Oysterbeds last Tuesday and saw two Ringed Plover on the new shingle recently added to the Little Tern island in the lagoon I wondered if they were a pair on territory but thought it was probably too early. Today, however I read on the SOS website Paul Troake's regular monthly report for the Rye Harbour nature reserve in which he mentions Ringed Plover pairing and courtship in late February. Among much other detail in the report three other items attracted my attention. The first was that some of the Cormorants which breed there may well already be sitting on eggs, the second was that large numbers of Common Gulls were roosting on the shore as the birds come north from the continent to nest in northern parts of the British Isles or further north, and the third was confirmation that Avocets had started moving back to their breeding areas by mid February when the first three stopped off for a short stop at Rye.

Three Bar-headed Geese were with a group of Canadas at Aldsworth Pond when Mike Collins was there yesterday, though he and others have been past the pond many times without seeing any pale grey geese since Mike's first sightings of one Bar-head there in the week Feb 18-24. These birds, like the stray Barnacle seen at Hook and Calshot (and maybe previously on Thorney Island) and the even further travelled Emperor Goose of Aldsworth/SouthamptonWater/Andover fame, could originate from any one of hundreds of wildfowl collections around the country but one possible local source for these Bar-heads is the

trout farm at Nutbourne (immediately north of the railway line, halfway along the 'Ham Brook' from Hambrook to Nutbourne Bay). It is several years since I walked the footpath north from Nutbourne over the railway to Priors Leaxe Lane but there were then perhaps half a dozen Bar-heads present. The group now at Aldsworth should be identifiable as Mike says one of the three has an all white head with no bars (maybe a young bird, indicating a family group?). Mike also tells me that he has recently seen 7 Buzzards together in the sky over Goodwood but I bet someone will soon beat that total!

Peter Legg is a new contributor to HOSLIST from the Romsey area and the many enthusiastic garden birdwatchers might be interested in his recent observation, which I quote >> We had our first siskin feeding in our Whitenap, Romsey garden on a red container with mixed bird seed on 16 February, since when numbers have gradually increased until today we had a flock of at least 20. They now mainly ignore the red feeder and eat the sunflower hearts in another feeder and bird seed scattered on the ground. Just over a week ago it was nice to see a male siskin feeding on the ground next to a male blackcap.<<

A report on the Sussex Ornithological Society website of a walk at West Wittering last Sunday (Mar 3) caught my eye with the first mention of Black-tailed Godwit coming into summer plumage, but also reported sightings of the Black Brant and the two Water Rails that feed in the open behind Snow Hill. Other birds seen were two Little Stint still present, many Golden Plover, a Greenshank and a Chiffchaff (probably a winter bird). Other recent news from SOS pages, of observations on Mar 5, is of 28 Bewick's Swans still at Amberley plus 16 Ruff at Pulborough Brooks, and of two Peregrines which may have been prospecting for a nest site at Brighton University (no doubt wanting to upstage the pair on the Sussex Heights tower block by nesting on a University tower), with 355 Whitefront Geese still in the Rye Harbour area. Going back to last Saturday (Mar 2) the regular Peregrine pair which roost on Chichester Cathedral were still present at dusk that day (one of them having a go at, but not killing, a pigeon)

Also with news for last Saturday from the New Forest I welcome a new contributor to my news, Simon Curson, who was at Eyeworth Pond and saw several of the resident Mandarin that are probably now settling into their nest boxes (with or without the accompanying noises that were reported in my last entry for Tuesday!). In the nearby woods he saw one Hawfinch, and on Sunday he saw one at a more regular place for them near the Blackwater stream and Rhinefield ornamental drive (I may have got my locations mixed up but I think this is the area where someone recently reported extensive and noisy forestry work that they feared would drive some birds away).

WED 06 MAR

Two male Ruddy Ducks and a breeding plumage Great Crested Grebe were on Alresford Pond today when Charles Cuthbert was there - the Ruddy Ducks were the first he has seen there since last August. Other wildfowl numbers were low (only 14 Gadwall and 8 Shelduck) but parties of 100 or more Common Gulls are still regular (not for much longer!). In his own garden nearby Charles still sees more than 50 Reed Buntings daily and he has already heard the first Blackcap song of the year, presumably from a wintering bird but you can't be certain. I recall that when the subject of separating migrant from winter Blackcaps has come up in past springs several people have said that the migrants announce themselves with an 'explosive' loud song whereas the winter birds are quieter (in this case Charles says the song was 'intermittent')

John Collman was out in the Ashley Warren area of north Hampshire (just east of the A34 and north of Whitchurch) today where 160 Fieldfare and 20 Redwing could still be seen as well as at least 150 Chaffinch and 120 (maybe 200?) Yellowhammer. I hope the latter stay with us, though I think an increasing number of large fnch flocks seen recently indicate pre-departure gatherings (In Sussex last Sunday, Feb 3, 100+ Linnets were seen at Pulborough Brooks and on the same day someone saw a flock of 200 Chaffinch at Ambersham Common near Midhurst, followed by other flocks of 130 and 40 birds)

I recently commented that the current silence of the Song Thrushes that have been singing close to my garden might well indicate that they now have nests, and this morning I confirmed that the silence is not due to the absence of Thrushes - one was feeding on my lawn, so this strengthens my thoughts of a local nest. Another nest probably hidden somewhere near is that of a pair of Long-tailed Tits which I see in my garden most days - this morning they perched at

a safe distance, but in open view, as I put out seed and bread crumbs near the nut feeder (I have seen them at the nuts, on the bird table and feeding on the ground)

While thinking of nests I continue to be amused by the fact that for 70 years I have been using the word 'fledged' and 'fledgling' in a different sense to the majority of other people (at least those with an interest in birds). The first three people that I asked for their definitions of the word all said that it meant 'to leave the nest' and thought its derivation was from the word 'fled', whereas I have always thought that the word merely meant that the young bird had grown its feathers (usually, but not necessarily, leaving the nest at that time). I wonder if those who use the word to mean 'leave the nest' would say that a helpless, entirely featherless squab of a Woodpigeon or Collared Dove that has by accident fallen out of the nest has become a qualified fledgling through the act of leaving the nest?

TUE 05 MAR

Lawrence Holloway was out along the southwest shore of Pagham Harbour today, still finding 6 Avocet, 14 Pintail and 30 Golden Plover present though wildfowl numbers here have dropped off a lot. One Brant was with a good number of Brent and two Little Owls were suddenly vocal at midday (no doubt squabbling about the interior decor of the new nest as they have been elsewhere recently!). Lawrence had the subjective impression that one Spotted Redshank already had noticeably darker plumage than did a bird he saw last week but for me the best part of his internet diary entry for this outing was the following which I quote verbatim >> Idly looking across the set-aside field, I was startled to see a small falcon which rose up steeply out of the grasses and continued to climb at something like 70 degrees. Higher and ever higher it climbed, to a height where I would have lost it to view if I had not been following it with my glasses. Quite suddenly it stooped at speed, making an attempt to catch a passing MEADOW PIPIT. It was a MERLIN, and probably a female judging by its size. For the next few minutes I stood and followed the action. Time and time again the falcon stooped at the pipit, on many occasions just missing its intended victim by what looked like a few inches. Whether the falcon was merely having a kind of game or whether the pipit really was as agile as it seemed, I could not judge. Eventually, the MERLIN broke off the action and climbed away towards Church Norton, hotly pursued by the pipit which appeared to be mobbing its potential predator! Eventually, I lost both birds to view. <<

A note from Barry Collins today tells me that he has just returned from the Thorney Deeps Egret roost where he had gone to make one of his regular roost counts. On Feb 21 he counted 35 birds leaving the roost at dawn, and in my view there has not been a noticeable drop in the number of Egrets seen at their daytime feeding places, but this evening no birds at all turned up at the Deeps roost. They have in the past occasionally moved to other local roosts, perhaps following disturbance, and the birds may have been elsewhere on Thorney or perhaps Hayling but it is interesting that this nil return follows hard on Ed Griffiths news of a minor influx in Buckinghamshire which I reported yesterday. Although I did not stay to count the total roosting at Wade Court, Langstone, tonight you will see from the following entry that a one off count of 34 birds there as I went past at sunset led me to believe that the expected 50+ birds would be spending the night there.

I cycled to south Hayling today, hearing the 'bubbling' of a Curlew flying in to land at the Oysterbeds and two Yellowhamer singing alongside the coastal path, then, on my way home at around sunset (with the tide only just beginning to fall) seeing 30 Egrets on the Wade Court trees (plus four on pony fields north of Wade Court house). I usually reckon that when the Egrets are coming in to roost only about half the number that have arrived can be seen by scanning the trees (the others have perched out of sight) so it may be that the full complement of over 50 Egrets were present, having come in early as a result of the high tide curtailing their fishing, but I will have to make a proper count again soon to see if there has been an exodus.

At Titchfield Haven today the flock of Black-tailed Godwit had fallen to an estimated 80 birds when a complete count of what was on the reserve was made (this news from Richard Carpenter who implies that the count was made today but the figure may refer to the WeBS count scheduled for last Sunday). Other totals were of 310 Teal, 146 Wigeon, 63 Pochard, 31 Shoveler, 14 Gadwall and 11 Shelduck with only 39 Canada Geese. A flock of 190 Brent were on the shore and other birds in the area included 82 Lapwing, 39 Turnstone and the sound of 6

Cetti's Warblers and one singing Chiffchaff. I know it is difficult to judge the Cetti's population from the number of birds heard on one visit but the 1999 Hampshire Bird Report indicates 45 Cetti territories in that year and I wonder how that figure has changed in the intervening three years?

Richard Bonser visited the Lower Test marshes today but does not mention Cetti's Warblers though he did see 2 Green Sandpiper, 2 Egreta and 2 male Blackcap with 46 Canada Geese. Richard also visited Lepe, seeing 2 summer plumage Slavonian Grebe (at a guess two of those that have been in the Lymington marshes area which Richard also visited, seeing 2 winter plumage Slav Grebes off Normandy with one Little Stint, one Greenshank and ten Pintail still there)

More reports of Med Gulls are now coming in as the breeding season approaches and we expect an increase on the 46 pairs which nested on the Langstone Harbour islands last year. At Lepe Richard Bonser saw three pairs today and over the Thorney Island Little Deeps Barry Collins saw two fly into the Emsworth Harbour area after being alerted to their presence by their catlike mewling calls. On South Hayling Alistair Martin saw another three on the beach south of Chichester Avenue (the next carpark east of the Beachlands centre) and one of the three was apparently a male by its efforts to display to a slightly smaller bird assumed to be a female - the male had a BTO ring on its left leg and a plastic green ring on its right leg, with the characters 31M in white, but it is uncertain what influence these gaudy ornaments had on the females opinion of the male. Brian Fellows was also out in the Portsmouth area on his regular Tuesday round and he found a magnificent summer plumage Med Gull among a small group of Black-headed and Common Gulls in Eastney Lake, then encountered another Med Gull on the nearby beach.+++

Also in Eastney Lake were 1600 Dunlin and 86 Knot along with Redshank, Curlew and Grey Plover plus 5 Shelduck and 50 Brent (another 200 Brent were in sight further north on the Milton shore). Driving north up the Eastern Road alongside Langstone Harbour Brian found an estimated 300 Brent still using the Portsmouth College playing fields which (on the basis of my own observations and what I have heard) is one of the few places where Brent have been feeding regularly on land this winter. At Baffins Pond the genuine wildfowl numbers were well down with only 66 Mallard and 36 Tufted Duck (no Shoveler left) but the 10 Barnacles, the Snow Goose and the hybrid Bar-head were all present (so a single Barnacle seen on the Hook Links near Warsash this morning by Bob Marchant and Trevor Carpenter was not from Baffins though I might possibly be the single bird that has spent the winter on Thorney Island, but not reported from there recently). Also at Baffins the Swan pair were back and 35 Canada Geese were present - at Hook the Brant was on parade with 350 Brent. Yesterday the Portsmouth Harbour Brant was seen again at Frater Lake with 135 Brent.

The SOS website today carries a summary of last Sunday's WeBS count in the Pulborough Brooks/Arun Valley area where 1703 Wigeon and 263 Pintail were still present along with 91 Shoveler and smaller numbers of other duck (16 Pochard and only 9 Gadwall). Two Avocet and 19 Ruff were there with only 42 Lapwing and just one Black-tailed Godwit but there were a few Corn Bunting over 100 Linnets. From further down the Arun Valley Nigel Voaden (who I think runs the Optics shop at the Arundel Wildfowl Reserve) tells us that the Southern ('Lucidus') race Cormorant reported to have been seen on the reserve (see my entry for Feb 24) was probably an incorrect identification as he understands that this race has never been recorded in the British Isles.

News from Sussex for last Sunday (Mar 3) tells us that 24 Bewick's Swans and a Short-eared Owl were still at Amberley Wild Brooks while at Seaford in East Sussex a Balearic Shearwater flew past Splash Point and many Kittiwake were already back at nests on the nearby cliffs. Offshore two Great Northern and four Red-throated Divers went past and 39 Gannet plus 23 Common Scoter were seen. Significantly 5 Brent Geese flew past - confirming in my mind that their journeying has started -with a couple of Wigeon and one Teal. More Sussex news comes from Ambersham Common, south east of Midhurst, where a pair of Crossbill were seen, one Woodlark was singing, and one of several Dartford Warbler sang from the top of a fifty foot tall Pine tree.

Interesting news coming via Derek Hale on the Isle of Wight is of a sighting reported to him of a

female Goshawk flying over the Spifire museum in Southampton on Sunday, and on the same day Robert Watson in Basingstoke saw at least 535 Pied Wagtail around the town centre roost. Going back to Saturday (Mar 2) Kevin Stouse tells me that he watched 3 Buzzards high over central Havant and probably right over my garden when I was not looking. More interestingly Kevin tells me that a chance conversation with his brother revealed that in some past winter his brother had once seen 27 Blackcaps together in his garden - I have suggested that Kevin get the details and publish them on HOSLIST as this must be a new county record (if the garden concerned was in Hampshire and the birds were Blackcaps)

Finally for today I like the entry on the SOS website describing the behaviour of three pairs of Mandarin Duck at the Powdermill Reservoir north of Hastings on Saturday (Mar 3). They were seen >> displaying in lakeside willow scrub, with a lot of huffing, puffing and whistling grunts.
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MON 04 MAR

Last Friday (Mar 1) Graham Roberts told us of a Blackbird's nest, found close to his office in Chichester, in which three young Blackbirds were nearly ready to fly, and when he got back to work today he found that they had made that great first step (!) towards adulthood. Graham says that this nest is exceptionally early - Blackbirds in his own garden have not yet finished building their nests. One thing that intrigued me was Graham's use of the word 'fledge' to mean the act of flying from the nest - I have always thought of it as meaning the completion of feather growth, enabling the bird to fly if it has the courage to do so (and sometimes they do not) whereas he uses it to signify the act of taking flight, and I would be interested to know if most other birders use the word in that sense leaving me once more as the odd one out!

A note from Ed Griffiths, living in Buckinghamshire, tells me that Little Egrets are very much in the news in that county at the moment, with what may be a mini-invasion of them taking place over the past week. Last year (Aug 10) Ed commented that 5 out of an all time total of 20 Egret sightings in Bucks had just occurred in the previous week, and that a similar noticeable increase in Egret sightings was occurring in other counties north of the Thames, and on Aug 23 Mike Wall told us of his surprise at finding three Egrets together by Ashe Park Lake at the source of the River Test west of Basingstoke. Now, at a time when we on the south coast are expecting our Egret numbers to drop off as birds disperse from winter quarters to breeding sites, Ed tells us that one site in Bucks (Chenies, close to the M25 between Amersham and Watford) three Egrets arrived about a week ago, a few days later five were present and now there are seven there (this in a county where over the winter the only Egrets had been singles at three or four sites). I have always assumed that when our local Egret population here in south east Hampshire drops off each spring (usually starting in April, but everything is early this year) most of the birds had flown south back to the continent with some moving sideways to the few breeding colonies on our south coast, but this year it may prove to be the case that a lot of them have flown north. Watch this space for further news ...

Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today and tells me that the male Marsh Harrier is still present, and that there were 67 Pochard in the reserve. I see that 74 Pochard were there on Jan 28 and assume that there has been a big flock present over the first two months of this year though I have not noticed people commenting on them and was quite surprised to see the figure of 67 there today. A single pair of Pintail and two Stonechat (also paired?) were also present today.

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows had a rewarding circuit of the local sites ending with a Kingfisher accompanying him as he cycled home through Brook Meadow beside the River Ems - he says the Kingfisher would let him get within 20 yards, then it would fly to the next perch upstream and repeat the process (a bit like a Wheatear). One adult Med Gull gave good views in the harbour among 3000 Black-headed with Common, Herring and 2 Lesser Blackbacks (but no Greaters - have they now left us?) and there was a good show of 15 other species of waders and wildfowl including 64 Swans and the amorous Black Swan (is that female Black Swan still present at Romsey, pining for his attentions?)

Dave Pearson found the second winter Iceland Gull still present on Southampton Water at Weston today but he could not see the Broadmarsh Ring-bill when he arrived there at high tide

- if Mike Collins recent observation of it flying off to the RSPB islands is indicative of its normal high tide habits maybe there is no point looking for it by the slipway except at low tide.

In view of my concern that Godwit numbers (especially Bar-tails) are very low this winter I noted that Russell Wynn's summary of his sightings at the Lymington marshes for February contained a peak count of only 35 Bar-tails - that would be a very low count for the Langstone/Chichester Harbours where the total in a normal winter normally exceeds 1000, but looking back through Hampshire bird reports I see that 35 is a normal count for February in the north west Solent.

News received today about week-end sightings shows me that there are still at least two Hen Harriers in the New Forest - one seen at Black Gutter in the north west on Sunday and one near Beaulieu Road station in the south east on Saturday (and probably a third just west of Brockenhurst, though on checking I see that the last report on that one came from Derek Radden on Feb 6). A rather vague report from Moira Doherty tells me that when she was at Farlington Marshes yesterday she had good views of 'the owl' which I guess means that at least one Short-eared Owl can still be seen there

John Clark was at the Blashford Lakes yesterday (Mar 3) but could only find two pairs of Bewick's Swans with a total of 5 young. Among his other sightings were 13 Goosander, 4 Ruddy Duck, 20+ Pintail and 19 Black-tailed Godwit plus 21 Curlew. On his way home John went via Petersfield Heath Lake and found 31 Shoveler where Martin Hampton had counted 26 on Mar 1.

Richard Carpenter's Sunday outing was to Pagham Harbour where his list included a Great Northern Diver and 4 Eider on the sea and 250+ Brent, 100+ Wigeon, 3 Spotted Redshank and 1 Avocet in the harbour. Probably at Sidlesham Ferry Pool were 200+ Lapwing, 40+ Shelduck and 30+ Shoveler. While there he also saw 3 Stonechat, 5 Linnet and a lone Redwing.

At Eastleigh Lakeside park Simon Ingram was out on both Saturday and Sunday finding two Kingfishers, two Great Crested Grebe and two Mistle thrush that will all hopefully stay and breed with 20 Siskin, 6 Redpoll and singles of Water Rail and Egret that will probably soon leave. Interestingly Simon had 3 Linnets at Lakeside, and taking this with my own recent observations of small parties of Linnet in potential breeding areas recently, plus Richard Carpenter's sighting of 5 at Pagham, it looks as if the large winter flocks of Linnet have broken up and the birds are heading back to nesting areas (though as colonial nesters it is sometimes difficult to distinguish a flock from breeding group).

PLANTS:

SAT 09 MAR

Walking by the Langbrook stream here in Havant I found several of the female Butterbur plants in full flower, and in town gardens the first Magnolia flowers were opening, as were Grape Hyacinths that had escaped (or been chucked) from gardens. Cherry Plum trees are at the peak of their flowering and will soon drop their petals as Blackthorn takes over from them. Also today I noticed that the masses of Chickweed which has carried unopen flower buds since January is now flowering freely.

The Havant Wildlife Group were in the West Walk woods today in search of wild Daffodils which they found in fair numbers - they also found some less genuine daffodils growing wild and it is foolish to assume the any daffodils found in woodland are the native species. Near West Marden one resident has sown normal garden daffodils over a large extent of woodland that borders their property, and perhaps in fifty years time they will still be there but looking much less like their cultivated ancestors. In several woods that I know it is clear that cottage gardens were once planted with a variety of flowers that still flourish long after the building have vanished, and this is particularly true on Catherington Lith where many residents of Portsmouth sought shelter in temporary shacks from the bombing in the 1940s. Which reminds me that a visit there in the near future will probably discover the plants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob which may well have been there a lot longer than 50 years.+++

More Wild Daffodils were seen today by Rosemary Webb who visited West Dean Woods and found the show of flowers there well worth the journey.

FRI 08 MAR

Ox-eye Daisy and Cowslip were both flowering near the Solent shore in the Chilling area today

but Richard Carpenter, who saw them, doubts that they indicate an imminent outburst of native flowers on our downland.

TUE 05 MAR

Danish Scurvygrass was flowering at the south end of Langstone Bridge, and along the southern fence of the Hayling Golf Course, when I cycled around the island today. In the Gunner Point area were many leaf rosettes where the Green Winged Orchids will soon flower - I could not detect any sheathed flower spikes.

MON 04 MAR

More than 30 Wood Anemones were flowering in small clusters scattered around Lowton's Copse and Little Hyden Lane just north of Clanfield when I visited it today in search of Toothwort (of which I found no sign). Also of interest to me in the wood was my first patch of Ramsons leaves with their strong garlic smell. Along the shore west of Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter found Cow Parsley starting to flower and many Primroses out in the Chilling area, and in Sussex Ken Hearne visited the West Dean Woods from where he reports that the Wild Daffodils are only just starting to flower, unlike those which he found in a much less shaded situation on Feb 11 at Washington Common near the A24 north of Worthing.

Yesterday (Mar 3) Richard Carpenter found his first Dog Violet flower when he was at Pagham Harbour. Also there lots of Alexanders was flowering, as I suspect it now is all along the coast, and Richard says that he found Germander Speedwell in flower though I will double check this with him as it would be a good month earlier than my first sightings in the past two years.

INSECTS:

SAT 09 MAR

Another Peacock butterfly was seen today in the Bassett area of Southampton according to the ButterflyConservation Hampshire website, and in Sussex two more Red Admirals were out in the Hangleton area of Hove+++

Further confirmation that March 7th was the real start of this year's butterfly season comes today from Mark Litjens, who saw four Brimstones in the Hursley area near Winchester and from the north of mid-Sussex where four more Brimstones, a Comma and a Red Admiral were all seen at Wakehurst place (south east of Crawley). On Mar 5, when the first Brimstone appeared in my own garden, another was seen in Southampton.

THU 07 MAR

Today's sunshine brought the first real mass emergence of butterflies, no doubt many more than I have heard of but the news that I have shows that Brimstone, Comma, Peacock, Small Tortoiseshell and of course Red Admiral were all on the wing. Unsurprisingly most of the reports were of Brimstones (6 sightings, all from coastal sites). Only one was of a Red Admiral (are they all dead after coming out too early?), but what interested me most was that Commas were seen in three places (Farlington Marshes had 2 and singles were at Totton and Pagham), while a single Small Tortoiseshell was seen at Basingstoke. The only Peacock reported was seen by Andrew Brookes and a Butterfly Conservation work party at the Gosport Defence Muntions site where they were planting Elm trees.

Lee Marshall now has a new form of moth trap which on Tuesday evening (Mar 5) brought him the first Oak Beauty moth of the year. Luckily the moth was still alive and hardly damaged by the soft mouths of two puppies which he is training (well, maybe!) to find and fetch rare moths that evade his more conventional trap.

WED 06 MAR

News received today indicates a broadening of insect news as spring advances, with a note from Richard Carpenter saying that the first Whirlygig Beetles could be seen in water at Titchfield Haven yesterday. From Sussex come four new butterfly sightings - two of Small Tortoiseshell at Amberley Village on Mar 3 and Sidlesham Village on Mar 2 (I think I have already reported the latter of these), and of a Red Admiral at Pulborough on Feb 16 and of 3 Brimstone at the same place on Feb 12.

Moths are also becoming more active and Lee Marshall's trap at Rowner, Gosport, on the night of Mar 4 yielded two new species for the year (two Small Quaker and one Hebrew Character) plus a Common Quaker and one *Depressaria daucella*.

TUE 05 MAR

A bright male Brimstone butterfly flew through my garden in this morning's sunshine - the first I have seen this year. (PS it was back again on Thursday morning as I finish writing notes for the current website update)

MON 04 MAR

Last Saturday (Mar 2) Graham Roberts watched yet another Red Admiral flying in his garden at the foot of Portsdown, and on Sunday he discovered a hibernating Peacock in his garden shed without disturbing its sleep.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 09 MAR

Following the sighting of a live Bottle-nosed Dolphin off Hastings on Mar 5 today brings news of 5 Dolphins (species unidentified) a little east of Hastings seen from Pett between Hastings and Rye.

FRI 08 MAR

Tony Wilson was at Ambersham Common near Midhurst today and thought he would check out some sheets of corrugated iron left in the heather on the ground, which in summer attract reptiles to their warmth and cover. I don't think he was expecting to find anything there today but to his surprise a Common Lizard was sitting on top of the first piece he came to, with a Slow-worm revealed when he lifted that sheet. Even more surprising, another sheet nearby yielded an active Smooth Snake. I did not know that they existed hereabouts but Tony tells me they were introduced here a few years ago, and he saw a Smooth Snake in this same place last summer.

THU 07 MAR

When checking out the Thorney Island Great Deeps Egret roost site this evening Barry Collins saw a Pipistrelle bat out hunting, and earlier in the day he noted four Common Seals off the west shore of Thorney Island.

Just three days before Pete Durnell officially moves in to Normandy Farmhouse as the successor to Eddie Wiseman in the job of guardian of the Lymington marshes area for the County Council two Mink (one of them an albino) were seen there by Simon Boswell who says >> They disappeared into a hole in a small wall near Keyhaven sluice gate suggesting they may well breed(?). << How will Pete deal with this first major challenge to his authority as guardian of the wildlife here?

And finally for today a report of a Bottle-nosed Dolphin (alive!) off the coast at Hastings on Tuesday (Mar 5)

WEEK 09 FEB 25 - MAR 3

BIRDS:

SUN 03 MAR

At the Budds Farm pools today the Shoveler flock seen by Mike Collins had increased to 90 birds (82 seen yesterday by the Havant Wildlife Group), and for those interested in the location of these Shoveler Martin Hampton tells me that there were 26 on the Petersfield Heath Lake when he was there on Mar 1. Today Mike Collins also saw the Ring-billed Gull, initially near the Budds Farm outfall but then flying out to the RSPB islands.

Trevor Carpenter wanted to walk round Thorney Island today but at the start of the footpath through Marina Farm to the seawall from the Thornham Lane junction he read a notice saying that the gates at the west end of the deeps were not working (again!) so he headed for Northney on Hayling and found 54 Knot on the mud north of the marina with 4 Bar-tailed Godwit. Before leaving a flock of 180 more birds flew in and pitched on the Warblington shore - Trevor says he is 90% sure they were Bar-tails but in view of the shortage of Bar-tails I have found in this area all winter (and in view of the number of birds and their destination) I just wonder if they might have been the Golden Plover that come from the Emsworth area to roost on the mud between Warblington and Langstone.

Steve Mansfield today found a Water Pipit in a damp field at Chawton near Alton and yesterday Ian Calderwood heard a report of 16 Water Pipits just west of the canal path at Titchfield Haven. Also west of Titchfield Paul Winter today found a White Wagtail (and 39 Golden Plover) in the Chilling area, plus the Great Northern Diver still present offshore.

This morning two Mistle Thrushes were singing at each other from trees on either side of my garden but no Song Thrushes were to be heard and I think this means that they are already nesting. Earlier this week I watched a Robin carrying nest material in my garden and this afternoon I found the Rooks back at their nests at Northney on Hayling Island. Continuing around north Hayling on my bike I heard two Little Owls calling in the 'Aston Villa' fields as I came out of the west end of Daw Lane (but could not see them from the Coastal Path), and at the Oysterbeds I found two Ringed Plover on the newly deposited gravel intended to provide safer nest sites for Little Terns - can the Ringed Plover be thinking of nesting already? In the Oysterbed pools I counted 42 Shelduck and saw just one female Goldeneye as well as a dozen Merganser and five Egrets. A total of less than 100 Brent in that area seemed low but the tide was only just falling and the birds which had presumably continued feeding on Farlington Marshes during the high tide were only just starting to return to saltier salad items. Passing Langstone Pond on my way home a cock Reed Bunting was singing strongly, and the wet meadow behind the pond had not a single Teal on it where I have come to expect around 100 at any time of day (have they departed?)

SAT 02 MAR

The Havant Wildlife Group spent this morning in the Budds Farm area and were disappointed not to see the hybrid Ferruginous Duck but they did find the Shoveler flock had risen to 82 birds, and when walking up the Brockhampton Stream they saw two Kingfisher (no doubt a pair intending to nest in the general area). More impressive to watch was an aerial battle between a Crow and a Sparrowhawk with the Crow getting the better of the hawk until the latter's mate arrived on the scene and the lumbering Crow thought discretion to be the better part of valour when attacks on it started coming from two different directions at once.

Brian Fellows left the Wildlife Group early to get to Black Point on Hayling for the WeBS count. He found a normal variety of species but noted that numbers were low, probably because some winter birds have already left - Brian found the Brent very jittery as if feeling the urge to fly off east. On Tournurbury marsh he found 14 Golden Plover which are not normally there (though there is normally a large winter flock of these on Verner Common a little to the north), and he was told that a Kingfisher had been seen recently at the Tournurbury farm pond which may well mean that a pair will breed somewhere in the Tournurbury area again this year as they have in the past.

News from the Isle of Wight for today includes a sighting of at least 25 Cormorants carrying nest material to the cliffs near Freshwater, and from Sussex comes a sighting of a Hooded Crow on the racecourse at Lewes. Other Sussex news is of a Short-eared Owl at Amberley Wild Brooks (where only 13 Bewick's Swans were to be seen), and of the continuing presence of the Brant at Pagham North Walls with 250 Black-tailed Godwit and 170 Knot in the harbour. Also outside Hampshire Derek Mills today had good views of the Great Grey Shrike at Thursley with an accompaniment of both Woodlark and Dartford Warbler song. Derek also tells me that the 3 or 4 Brambling have been regular in his Farnham garden all winter and are still there, while Bullfinch are present all day and every day feeding on Black Sunflower seed (I think feeding mainly on what has dropped to the ground) - he can often see four of these birds present together but in total there are more than that number.

At Dibden Bay today Colin Allen was looking through his telescope when a bird flew rapidly across his field of vision - he tried to pick it up again with his bins but failed and cannot be sure what it was but he feels pretty sure it was a hirundine. The date would make either Sand Martin or Swallow a possibility, and Paul Winter tells us that a Swallow has already been reported from the Yorkshire coast.

When Ian Calderwood was at Titchfield Haven today he was told of a possible sighting of a Goshawk seen in the Hill Head area, and in Pagham Harbour Lawrence Holloway saw a large accipiter which he describes as follows (making no claim for a Goshawk) >> Panic among the waders drew my attention to a very large ACCIPITER which came over the Harbour from my

left and continued across in front of me, albeit at some distance. It was large, and with a very broad wing from leading to trailing edges. Away it went, with infrequent beats of its wings and occasional attempts to gain height, only to drop down again. Twice it circled, showing a plumage predominantly brown and with a dark and well-marked bar on the end of the tail. The last I saw of it was as it beat away with deceptive speed over the bungalows on Pagham Spit. << While he was there Lawrence also found Meadow Pipits song flighting and Lapwing making their aerial displays.

John Shillitoe has been told by his wife of several recent sightings of Mandarin Duck on a farm pond in the Newtown area between Denmead and the Meon valley, and the most recent sighting was of a pair perched in trees as if looking for a nest site. John himself was out as usual on a Saturday, finding just one Woodlark in the area near his home (not far from Wickham in the Meon valley). In the Hambledon area he found four Corn Bunting back in fields by Green Lane (north of the village) and in that same area saw 20 Redwing and 100 Fieldfare. At the IBM Lake today for the WeBS count I was immediately impressed by the presence of at least 1000 Black-headed Gulls, no doubt the falconers were having a day off at the Paulsgrove tip just across the road. Looking south from the IBM site to the high mountain that has grown in recent years to conceal the rubbish I noticed that tipping activity was taking place on the north side of the mountain in full view of the lake and this may have contributed to the number taking time out from feeding for a wash and brush up. Strangely there were no Herring Gulls to be seen - other than the many Black-headed I only saw around 20 Common Gulls. Also on and around the lake were 44 Canada Geese divided into a group of 17 which seemed to be paired and probably had nest sites, and a flock of 29 in which many birds may have been paired but were still prepared to feed close to others with none of the noise and aggression shown by the territorial birds.+++

The best bird on the lake was a single Great Crested Grebe in breeding plumage (hopefully about to nest here again). Other than 49 Mallard there were few duck (4 Teal, 2 Shoveler, 6 Pochard and 13 Tufted Duck) with 20 Coot and 15 Moorhens but there were at least four Little Grebe in different areas, almost certainly representing a minimum of four breeding pairs, and I had a brief glimpse of what I think was a Water Rail having been attracted to the reeds where it was by Water Rail like noises.+++

Away from the water I watched a female Sparrowhawk spiral up into the sky over the east end of the site, but did not see either of the Kestrels that should be present. At least one Chiffchaff was calling, a distant Skylark was singing, and near the lake edge one Grey Wagtail showed. On Feb 27, according to Ian Calderwood, a Long-eared Owl was seen flying near the new bridge over the mouth of Forton Lake connecting Weevil Lane to Priddy's Hard in Gosport. He did not see the bird himself and gives no clue as to why it was thought to be a Long-eared rather than a Short-eared or even a Tawny, though since the bird was seen half an hour before midnight it is more likely to be Long-eared as Short-eared would probably be asleep (and I seem to remember that when we had a small flock of Long-eared in the bushes at Farlington they were said to go hunting at night by the light of the street lamps along the nearby roads)

News from yesterday is of a new Egret night roost discovered by David Thelwell close to the River Test just south of Stockbridge. It only had eight birds and is on private land at Marsh Court with no public viewing but it helps to confirm my personal hunch that there must be a number of small undiscovered night roosts to house the number of Egrets now widespread across Hampshire. David also saw a Barn Owl at the same place. Other miscellaneous news is of a Woodcock again seen by Richard Ford roding silently around Woolmer Pond last night and a report from the Isle of Wight of 4 Stonechat in the Bembridge area which is of interest as the observer thought these might be migrants that had come in from the continent. Back in Hampshire I see that nest boxes at the HWT Swanwick study centre on the banks of the Hamble river are already in active use

FRI 01 MAR

Last Tuesday (Feb 26) I reported 90 Brent flying east off Gosport, possibly a first indication of these Geese starting to leave us, and today I see two more hints of this movement. After visiting Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter writes >> As usual in March, Brent Geese are gathering on the shore, no doubt thinking about returning to Siberia, and, if the usual pattern is

followed, we will get some high counts in the coming weeks. << The second possible indication comes from Eastney, at the mouth of Langstone Harbour, where Brian Fellows noticed Brent flying in a large V-formation rather than than amorphous crowd in which they usually fly about the harbour - Brian did point out that the geese concerned were going west! Another of our winter bird species that may be thinking of leaving is the Blackcap. Graham Roberts prolonged study of these birds in his garden (written up in the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report) indicated that many of the wintering birds stay until well after the first summer migrants have arrived and do not leave until the end of March or early April, but several recent reports of a sudden increase in the number of Blackcaps seen in some gardens might mean that they are gathering into groups that will travel together and/or building up their fat reserves for long distance flight. This thought is prompted Simon Woolley who has a relatively small but sheltered garden in central Winchester in which there have been at least 8 Blackcap present during the past week with six being seen simultaneously coming from the shelter of a laurel hedge to feed on a fat ball.

I have already mentioned Richard Carpenter's news of Brent gathering on the shore at Titchfield Haven - other news from the reserve gathered from visitors observations over the past three days is that the Bittern is still present today while the Marsh Harrier was seen on Feb 27 and 28 but had not been seen today by the time Richard was there. Reed Bunting song is now regular in the reserve and today there were 20 Common Scoter and 1 Eider offshore. On the HWT website a brief report on Farlington Marshes from Bob Chapman tells us that the Merlin is still present. often sitting on the fence across the main marsh, and the Dartford Warbler is still in the Point field, often singing. Meadow Pipits are also singing as are Skylark and Reed Bunting, and if you stand outside the reserve building and look downstream you have a good chance of seeing Bearded Tit which are unusually active (probably getting excited in the process of pairing).

Other news for today comes from Graham Roberts in central Chchester where a Blackbird nest has three well grown young nearly ready to fly, and from Adrian Martin in Southampton who passes on an observation of a Kestrel taking an earthworm from a wet roadside verge. I once saw a juvenile Kestrel in the summer take a large worm, and then assumed that it was not yet skilled enough to hunt mice, but on reflection a juicy earthworm probably provides more protein than the average mouse and has none of the associated fur and bone to be disposed of so the only problem is that of finding a large worm on the surface by day - and that's where heavy rain helps by driving the worms up to avoid drowning.+++

More miscellaneous news is of 30 Siskin, 30 Goldfinch and 16 Redpoll at Eastleigh Lakeside Park where a Water Rail sighting was a first for Simon Ingram (probably a bird on its way from winter to breeding quarters, eager for food and not familiar with the local cover that would keep it invisible). Another Jack Snipe was seen in the Itchen Valley country park and there were three adult Med Gulls with the regular Iceland Gull and a Razorbill at Southampton's Weston shore. In Sussex a first winter Glaucous Gull and one adult Med Gull were at the Arundel wildfowl reserve, and finally Trevor Carpenter has heard of a garden near the shore in the Chilling area where 83 species were recorded during 2001, including Nightingale, Grasshopper Warbler, Tree Pipit and Whinchat (and in case you are thinking it must have been Pete Potts' garden I can tell you that the observer was an Andy Smith).

A check on the Wade Court Egret night roost at Langstone this evening gave me a count of 53 birds still using it. While there a single burst of Cetti's Warbler song came from the reeds around Langstone Pond just as it was becoming dark and nearby two or three Blackbirds were singing - I still have not heard them singing in daytime but clearly they are in full breeding mode as Graham Roberts tells me that a nest in the centre of Chichester has three well-feathered young almost ready to leave the nest.+++

Earlier in the day I was at Idsworth Farm where Chaffinches were singing everywhere there were trees and Skylark over each of the open fields. The most interesting sight was of a freshly killed Woodpigeon in a woodland ride - when I first saw it it had lost its head and the whole back had been plucked but not eaten from (leaving a large square patch of bare 'goose pimply flesh' as on a plucked chicken). When I returned to the spot later I glimpsed a raptor flying off low to the ground and assume it was a Sparrowhawk though it did not look big enough to be a female (and I have difficulty in imagining a male bringing down a bird as large as a Woodpigeon). By

this time the back was mostly devoured. Another interesting sight was of a young male Stonechat which has presumably just arrived in search of a mate and territory - I hope it will stay as I do not recall seeing this species on the farm before.

THU 28 FEB

Martin Hampton was out on his bike again here in the Havant area and among many good birds seen I am most excited by the dozen Lapwings which he saw making their glorious territorial displays over ploughed fields in Stansted East Park. He started his trip at Langstone, seeing a Kingfisher near themill pond (I thought the winter birds had left by now) and later seeing another Kingfisher over the River Ems by River Street in Westbourne as he headed for Aldsworth Pond on which he saw some Canada Geese but did not spot the Bar-head (also on the pond were 2 Gadwall, 2 Shoveler, 10 Teal and 12 Tufted Duck with a couple of Redwing seen nearby). In the fields by Sindles Farm just north of the pond were 8 Meadow Pipit, presumably birds on their way north (no one has yet commented on the large scale diurnal movement northward of these Pipits which should now be underway). Other birds moving north from the coast to breeding territories are Stonechat, and while it is very difficult to tell whether birds seen are still in their winter quarters, en route, or at their spring destination, an increase in the number of reports recently tells me that the birds are stirring. Bob Chapman still has three pairs at Farlington Marshes, but today's news also includes a pair in the Itchen Valley country park, three seen at Eelmoor (Aldershot) and two more at Ambersham Common near Pulborough in Sussex.

Having mentioned Sussex I see that there were still 19 Bewick's Swans at Amberley Wild Brooks today, along with 22 Ruff, a Short-eared Owl and a male Hen Harrier. At Ambersham Common 7 Crossbill and 2 Dartford Warbler were with the Stonechat mentioned above (and John Eyre also had a single Dartford at Eelmoor, along with 42 Snipe). On the coast Pagham Harbour still seems to be in winter mode with the Brant by the North Walls, the wintering Whimbrel, six Spotted Redshank, one Glaucous Gull and one Pale-bellied Brent, but a sighting of 6 Avocet at the Sidlesham Ferry (and no news of a flock in the harbour) may mean that the main flock have left and the six are newcomers on their way east.

Also from the SOS website I read that the Egret roost at Rye Harbour still has 26 birds each night, and here in Hampshire John Shillitoe noted, as he drove to work today, a group of three Egrets on fields feeding in churned up cattle fields at North Boarhunt a good two miles from the Meon and over a mile from the nearest water in the Wallington River. We still don't know what the Egrets are finding to feed on in these muddy patches, but the frequency with which groups of Egrets are found actively searching them shows that they do provide food and enable the birds to exist well away from water.

Probably a first for the year were four Balearic Shearwater seen passing Selsey Bill yesterday - Feb 27 (the sightings in the Solent on Jan 29 and early Feb were never identified as to species). These, with the Gosport sightings, seem to indicate a significant change in Shearwater appearances in the English channel being almost a month earlier than the first Manx Shearwater are expected and pretty well out of season for any other Shearwater species. Not so unexpected, but acting as a reminder of the significant changes in bird numbers seen, is the news that the flock of Whitefront geese at Scotney Court near Rye Harbour in East Sussex now numbers 370 (in a year when in Hampshire the Avon Valley has had none at all and two at Keyhaven are all that have wintered in the county).

A couple of items which I have not mentioned so far are a sighting of a Red Kite over Carpenters Wood, visible from offices in Basingstoke, and a count of 76 Snipe at Hook reported by Sue Morrison together with the calls of two Med Gulls passing over her home in Warsash. Also not mentioned so far is news from West Wittering for Feb 26 when the Brant and Pale-bellied Goose could still be seen at West Wittering, along with 7 Ruff and 1 Little Stint. Also in that area two Water Rail can frequently be seen feeding in the open with Moorhen near brambles in a boggy field at the back of Snow Hill- you can see them from the public path from the village to Snow Hill. Also on Feb 26 watchers at Selsey Bill logged 250 Kittiwake passing with 7 Fulmar, 1 Great Northern Diver and 2 Bonxies (presumably these were going east and mark a stepping up of spring passage).

WED 27 FEB

On Feb 16 I passed on news of a very early Wheatear rumoured to have been seen in East Meon during the preceding week but so far I have heard no confirmation of this report (the person said to have seen the bird is a very experienced naturalist, but now in their eighties, and the news of the sighting was second hand). Today my hopes of seeing a Wheatear in Hampshire were renewed by a message reporting that the first had been seen yesterday (Feb 26) in South Devon where a Cirl Bunting had started to sing.

Here in Hampshire Martin Hampton saw one Green Sandpiper near the source of the permanent part of the Lavant stream that flows through Leigh Park and Havant to become the Langbrook when it reaches Langstone. The Sandpiper was near the road bridge over the railway north of the Little Leigh farm pony fields to the north east of Leigh Park and I would not be surprised if there are more Sandpiper here (when the pony fields were flooded last winter there were at least 8 present, and the five seen near the Colt Factory in Leigh Park around New Year's Day were in the same stream a little south of the pony fields). A little to the east of this site Brian Fellows was in Stansted Forest today and saw some 20 Fieldfare on the eastern edge of the woods, a place where they can be seen in most winters but have been absent this winter, and this ties in with a remark by Martin that he has not seen any of the expected Redwing in the pony fields at Wade Court here in Havant this winter. Brian Fellows had a look at Aldsworth Pond on his way home and did not see the Bar-Headed Goose and Canadas that Mike Collins reported recently (they may have been in the fields to the west of the pond, out of view of the normal roadside viewing point by the stream carrying water south from the pond), but did find 6 Gadwall, 4 Shoveler and 10 Tufted Duck.

The regular Great Northern Diver was at the Hook end of its patrol line from Hill Head to the Hamble today (seen by Bob Marchant who also heard both Cetti's Warbler and Reed Bunting song at the Hook Links). Over on the Isle of Wight shore two more Great Northern Divers were seen today off Puckpool (south of the Portsmouth Harbour entrance) with three Slavonian Grebe in the same area.

Today email brought the results of the Portsmouth Harbour WeBS count made on Feb 9. That was a stormy day and the counts were no doubt low as a result of both birds and birders having to keep their heads low but some people may want to know the figures of which the main ones are as follows. Mute Swan 71 (46 on the Gosport Cackle Pond, the others scattered), Egret 15 (all around the Frater nesting area), Brent 1540 (plus 1 Pale-bellied - the Brant was probably inland and not counted), Wigeon 167, Teal 137, Shelduck 72, Merganser 36, Goldeneye 19 (plus 102 Mallard, 29 Tufted Duck and 29 Canada Geese - 21 of them on the Cackle Pond). Of the waders there were an estimated 1078 Dunlin and Redshank 671, Oystercatcher 305, Curlew 220, Lapwing 41, Snipe 17 (around Frater Lake), Turnstone 15, Greenshank 3 and Grey Plover 2. This last figure illustrates how the WeBS counts do not in some cases reflect the number of birds feeding in the harbour - Grey Plover and Dunlin regularly fly across Portsmouth to roost in Langstone Harbour, returning to feed as the tide falls. Prior to the reclamation of the Port Solent area in 1970 they had good undisturbed roost sites in Portsmouth Harbour - by 1988 when the construction of Port Solent began they lost their last safe haven in the harbour.+++

Dennis Bill, in his newsletter accompanying the count results, refers to forthcoming discussion this year of a new version of the Portsmouth Harbour Plan which will update the rules for new developments in the harbour, and points out that whatever good words may be written human pressure on the harbour and its shores will continue to erode wildlife habitat. We have recently seen that human pressure at work in the Priddy's Hard area (housing built on what was wildground, lots more people in the area, and even more being brought along the shoreline by the new bridge over the Forton Lake mouth to allow access to the Explosion museum tourist attraction), and now the RSPB comments on the proposed route of the monorail from Cosham to Portsmouth show that it will impinge on both Tipner Lake and the shore around Whale Island. If you want to have a chance to put the case for wildlife in the harbour Dennis is looking for someone with an interest in birds to join the Portsmouth Harbour Conservation Group which meets roughly once a quarter and which does get a hearing from the City Planners. If you are interested contact Dennis on Dennis.Bill@care4free.net

TUE 26 FEB

At Stokes Bay, Gosport, this morning Ian Calderwood recorded 88 Kittiwake and over 90 Brent all flying east - hardly proof of a mass exit of the Brent but worth noting at a time when the Brent must be thinking about their return journey. I will be looking with interest at the SOS website to see the first reports of Brent flying past Brighton marina and other areas where they are not regular in winter. Two more birds that may be on the move are two female Long-tailed Duck which dropped in at Titchfield Haven today where they were seen by Paul Winter's father.

Indications of other wildfowl on the move came from Baffins Pond in Portsmouth when Brian Fellows was there this morning - all the Shoveler had gone and other duck number were down. More exciting was a fight between the resident pair of Swans, intending to nest on the islands when the City Rangers have finished their work trimming the trees and bushes, and an intruding pair. The invaders were driven off, one of them ending up in the traffic on the nearby road but getting away without being run over. On his way home Brian called at Budds Farm and took another look at the Ferruginous Duck which he now admits is the regular 'Dodgey Fudge' - although it superficially looks very like a male Ferruginous Duck the eye is yellowish, not pure white, there is too much black on the bill tip, and not enough white under its stern.

Richard Carpenter was today at Kites Croft, a woodland 'nature reserve' between the busy A27 and the housing of the Park Gate area west of Fareham, lying at the northern end of a damp valley in which a stream runs south to Brownwich Pond on the Solent shore. The stream may have been the reason for the unexpected presence of a Kingfisher here, along with more expected woodland birds such as Siskin, Tree Creeper and Bullfinch. Another good bird seen today by Martin Hampton near the Oysterbeds on Hayling was the Barn Owl that was showing well in early January, giving many people good views even before sunset. Martin says this bird was flying as early as 3pm today, this time over the 'Brick Field' immediately east of the Hayling Coastal Path. It was seen at the south end of the field and disappeared through the trees where there are some large sheds that were presumably once used in the brick making process for which the field was the source of the clay. Pete Durnell told me that there is a Barn Owl box somewhere in this area, but I have no idea as to whether it has been occupied. Martin Hampton also tells me that at least one Reed Bunting is back at Langstone Pond where he first saw it on Feb 21 - each year a pair turns up here and presumably breeds, and for me its return is one of the regular signs of spring.

Christoph Harwood visited the Nutbourne area today and saw what were probably two Slavonian Grebe in the bay, along with six Goldeneye. Here in Hampshire Mike Rafter was at Hurst beach and saw just one Brant, along with a Great Skua and more than 30 Kittiwake, and at the Weston shore Richard Bonser found one Brant, the second winter Iceland Gull and the first winter Yellow-legged gull. A little inland in the Itchen Valley Country Park another three Jack Snipe were reported.

Last Sunday (Feb 24) was a day of great excitement for Simon Woolley in his Winchester garden as he found 6 different Blackcaps present at the same time, making him wonder if this was a garden record. It probably is for this winter but Derek Allnut from West Wellow has already staked his claim with a tally of 8 in the winter of 1995/96, and if you read Graham Roberts article in the 1995 Hampshire Bird Report (in which he reviews 27 consecutive winters of Blackcap watching - and ringing - in his garden at the foot of Portsdown) he records a day total of 16 different birds present on 27 Feb 1994, and a total of at least 37 different birds in the garden during one winter.

More Corn Bunting began to sing back on Sunday (Feb 24) beside the West Stoke to Lavant road just south of Kingley Vale and north of Chichester. Other news on the SOS website for Sunday is that there were still 20 Tree Sparrows to be seen at Icklesham near Rye in East Sussex. In Hampshire Simon Ingram had a singing Reed Bunting at the Eastleigh Lakeside Country Park on Sunday and over 100 Siskin (with 50+ Goldfinch and 20 Redpoll) on Saturday Feb 23.

MON 25 FEB

Wisely staying indoors at his home at Aldwick (Bognor) on this wet and windy day Lawrence Holloway recorded the following observation in his diary for today. >> Pre-lunch, there was a

commotion outside in the garden. Looking out, I saw a male SPARROWHAWK with a cock BLACKBIRD in its talons. As I watched, one of the local cats charged across the lawn at high speed whereupon the Sparrowhawk released its grip on its victim and flew off, as did the Blackbird! << It's not often that a Blackbird owes it's life to a cat .. Not all Sparrowhawks are as ready to give up their prey when disturbed as is shown by the following observation made yesterday by Tim Norris (who I assume to be our Hampshire Moth-man, now living in Woking and reporting his sighting to the Sussex Ornithological Soc website!). Tim writes, using the interesting abbreviation of Spar for Sparrowhawk, >> I came home at 1:30 to find a female Spar had just killed a Collared Dove on the back lawn and was busy feeding on it below the bird table fifteen feet from the window. After half an hour she was disturbed by the lad next door taking his bike round on the path. She stayed on the kill until the boy was about six feet away before flying off. Remarkably, while she was feeding, the local Dunnocks were flitting around wanting to continue feeding on the seed on the ground. Several times they sat on the fence only a few feet away and at one point one of them came down to feed for about half a minute on the grass only five feet from the Spar which stopped feeding and looked as if it might attack. When the Dunnock flew off it didn't skirt around as I thought it might but flew straight over the Spar's head at about three ft up. Seemed like an unnecessarily risky strategy to me but its knowledge of Sparrowhawk psychology was sound on that occasion at least! The Spar returned at 4.40 and continued feeding for a further twenty minutes before flying off with the remains of the carcass.

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In Emsworth today Brian Fellows found little change in the number of Swans and Mallard on the millponds but did make a couple of significant observations, the first of which was that the Swan nest site on the small island in Peter Pond showed signs that the Swans had started preparing it for this year's nest, reshaping the hollow and starting to line it with grass. The other significant item was the sound of Blackbird song heard in Brook Meadow, marking the start of daytime song rather than the twilight song I have heard for some time at first or last light. Other items of interest were the presence of four Little Grebes on the Slipper Pond where they may well nest, the absence of the Canada geese, and another sighting of a Kingfisher (yesterday Barry Collins saw the pair which Brian has seen recently - they were actively chasing each other around the Slipper Pond in what was probably a pair bonding exercise - Barry also saw the adult Med Gull again).

Rubbish tips are probably the best places to see gulls in winter, and with all the recent interest in gulls at Weston on Southampton Water I am surprised that Richard Bonser has only today decided to check out the local tip adjacent to West Wood at Netley, less than a mile from the Weston Shore. Richard found a field gate to pull in off the Woolston Road between the railway and West Wood, and from here spotted not only the second winter Iceland Gull and the first winter Yellow-legged Gull that appear at Weston Shore when the tip is inactive but was able to add a third winter Yellow-legged Gull to the local list.

Most of us are pleased enough to add Reed Bunting to our daylists - I still haven't got one on my current year list, and I see that I am not alone as Geoff Rogers thought the presence of one in his Harestock garden at Winchester yesterday was worth highlighting (and adding a note saying he usually only gets one per year in the garden). So what would you think if I told you that one garden in Alresford has recently had up to 50 Reed Bunting feeding on its lawn each day, and that yesterday 65 were present at one time. This astonishing news comes from Charles Cuthbert in whose garden the birds can be seen, and he tells me that the secret is first of all to have a garden close to habitat normally preferred by the species (he is close to the reedbeds at Alresford Pond in which the birds like to roost at night, and to farmland along the upper Itchen in which they have plenty of cover and normal feeding opportunities in the day), and secondly to coat the lawn with bucketfuls (I have no idea of the actual quantities!) of Best Budgie seed in addition to normal wild bird seed - Charles thinks the tiny millet seeds in the budgie food are just what these Buntings want. I remember hearing of a similar large flock at Titchfield Haven a few winters back (when they were in the news on account of a Little Bunting that joined the flock), and there again they were liberally fed and had ideal habitat around. Can anyone tell us if Charles has any current contenders for the crown of biggest Hampshire Reed Bunting flock this winter? I would be especially interested to hear of Reed Bunting flocks well

away from reedbeds and wetland as I understand the BTO classify them as a farmland rather than a wetland species, only using the reeds during the breeding season.

During the past week Brian Fellows found 142 Knot in Eastney Lake and Trevor Carpenter saw 54 off North Hayling (in both cases the birds seem to have been new arrivals), and news from the Isle of Wight for yesterday records a sighting of more than 100 Knot in Newtown Harbour where up to 400 have been seen recently (but not throughout the winter). I am not sure where they have come from but it does seem that some shorebird species are already on the move and turning up at new places in fair sized flocks (both Black and Bar-tailed Godwit seem to be in this category in the Langstone area). Newtown Harbour also held 300+ Golden Plover and a Common Sandpiper yesterday.

One of our local rookeries is in the Forestside area north east of Rowlands Castle. As with many rookeries it is not a single collection of nests but a series of groups of nests in suitable trees spread over a distance of a kilometre from the main group of nests in the village churchyard to an isolated group of half a dozen nests where the lane to Lodge Farm leaves the main road to West Marden. One of the main groups of nests is in trees across the road from the church and these are in sight of David Parker's home, and in normal years they would be a hive of activity by now (Valentine's Day being the traditional time for any rooks that have not yet started repairing their nests to do so or miss out on the breeding season). A note from David today tells me that he fears these rooks have abandoned the nests he can watch from his bedroom window as there has been no nest repair activity there to date, but he does say that the Rooks are still hanging around the area, and my guess would be that they will re-use the nests. David does not say that he has seen activity at other rookeries, and my impression is that Rooks everywhere have been aware of the coming of the gales which are now hitting the south of England and are sensibly waiting for them to die down before wasting time on nest re-building. So far this year I have not seen or heard of any general nest-rebuilding by Rooks anywhere - have you? Another bird mentioned by David is a Grey Wagtail which was still present yesterday at Forestside Farm - a pony stables on high ground miles from a pond, let alone a running stream. This ties in with many other observations of Grey Wagtails far from running water and it looks to me as if the presence of plentiful insect food around the horses, coupled with a growing population that has increased competition for waterside nest sites, my well have outweighed this bird's traditional habit of only nesting near streams

Miscellaneous news for today includes a sighting by Richard Ford of 44 Mandarin still present on Headley Mill Pond (between Farnham and Liss). On Saturday (Feb 23) at Curdrige on the River Hamble Richard Carpenter found 3 Greenshank, a Green Sandpiper and a Grey Wagtail as well as 39 Curlew, 23 Redshank, an Egret and one Buzzard. On Friday (Feb 22) Andrew Howard noted that all the winter thrushes seemed to have left the Petworth area just as the first Siskin reached his garden as they too push northwards.

Ed Griffiths, who lives in Buckinghamshire only 15 km east of the main release site for the Red Kites (about which I wrote last Thursday - Feb 21) confirms that there seems to be a well defined line beyond which the Kites (that were expected to spread widely in all directions from the central release site as numbers grew) refuse to travel. Ed says last year was first in which he saw a Kite over his home area despite being so close to the masss of birds still clustered around the release point. I am also reminded, by a current posting from Mike Wall reporting inland Egrets at Overton and Farnborough, of news from Ed last August when there was a sudden upsurge in the number of Egret sightings in his home county and neighbouring counties - I think the Egret frontier is now well to the north of Hampshire.

PLANTS:

SUN 03 MAR

News on the HWT website tells of Toothwort being found at Eaglehead Copse on the Isle of Wight on Feb 19 (could well be out at Lowtons Copse, Clanfield?) and of Cowslips at the Swanwick study centre by the Hamble river On Mar 1 (it does not say they were flowering, and if they were I wonder if they are native field flowers or garden cultivars?). Two reports for today come from Steve Mansfield who found one Early Dog Violet in flower at Selborne and just three flowers on a Broom bush when he was at the Moor Green reserve on the Berkshire border.

A phone call from Gwynne Johnson today told me of more Cow Parsley in flower on Hayling and of one Ground Ivy flower in here garden at Soberton - more Ground Ivy had been seen, it seems, by Fay Durrant in the Portsmouth area.

I cycled round North Hayling this afternoon and found Greater, Lesser and Intermediate Periwinkle all flowering alongside each other in Daw Lane where I saw them first last year - they are at the east end of the lane on the north side, and further west down the lane there are now many Primroses in flower.

FRI 01 MAR

Visiting Old Idsworth Farm this morning I found my first Barren Strawberry flowers and Early Dog Violets in the Huckswood copse. In one of the field hedges Blackthorn was just starting to flower and in a field edge one plant of Wild Parsnip with three umbels of yellow flowerbuds (none open) was an oddity for the time of year.

WED 27 FEB

More Primroses were flowering at Kites Croft (Titchfield Common area) when Richard Carpenter was there yesterday and today Brian Fellows found them out in Lyels Wood at Stansted Forest - now that the first Wood Anemone has been seen I will be checking for their appearance in Lyels as the most likely local site hereabouts.

MON 25 FEB

In a season when many plants are flowering well ahead of schedule I am still surprised to hear from Richard Carpenter that he found a Wood Anemone in flower last Saturday near the River Hamble at Curbridge, close to Botley - I wonder if the Wild Daffodils in the western fringe of the Botley woods at Curbridge are also flowering?

With so many plants flowering early I am quite surprised that Saturday brought only the third find (that I know of) of Coltsfoot in flower, and that in London seen by the Havant Wildlife Group who went to see the new wetland site in the Barnes area

INSECTS:

SAT 02 MAR

From the SOS website comes a terse report of a Small Tortoiseshell being seen in the Sidlesham area near Pagham Harbour today.

WED 27 FEB

The Sussex website today reports another Brimstone sighting, seen at Horsham back on Feb 22.

MON 25 FEB

Just a couple of belated items today to add to the list of early butterfly sightings. On the HWT website Michael Boxall reports the first Brimstone flying at Roydon Woods (near Lymington) on Feb 12, and on HOSLIST Dave Unsworth adds another Red Admiral sighting in the Bishopstoke area for Feb 16.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 01 MAR

Closely following on Brian Fellow's first sighting for this year of a Water Vole back in the River Ems at Brook Meadow comes news of a Water Vole being seen to be killed by a Jack Russell type dog at the same site (maybe the same animal on the same day!). The only good news is that at least one other Water Vole is thought to have escaped, and the owner of the dog has been made aware of the damage her uncontrolled dog has done.

An article in the Portsmouth NEWS earlier this week described an interesting project initiated by the conservation group at the MoD Defence Munitions site at Gosport. Concerned about the number of rabbits present, and the way in which their burrows are weakening the earth banks piled up over the bunkers in which explosives are handled (not to protect the workers inside from enemy attack but to save the citizens of Gosport from a repeat of the huge explosion that

occurred here in , I think, the 1920s), someone has come up with an ingenious possible solution. The idea is based on a premise that Hares and Rabbits will not live in each others company, and so they are proposing to bring in some Hares from another MoD site in a part of the country where Hares are numerous, and instal them near the bunkers "to drive the rabbits away". My own thoughts are somewhat sceptical. Assuming they can catch the Hares at the other site where they are common I wonder how they will keep them in the required area when they arrive at Gosport (in a wired enclosure?). And when they are in situ will they really drive the rabbits away? would have thought the fact they are not often seen together is because they have different habitat preferences ... It all sounds a little unfair to the Hares which will either end up in a cage, or killed on the roads when escaping from their new prison camp.

MON 25 FEB

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows had his first positive sighting of a Water Vole back in the River Ems at the edge of Brook Meadow

WEEK 08 FEB 18 - 24

BIRDS:

SUN 24 FEB

Is anyone currently missing a Bar-headed Goose and a flock of 18 Canada geese containing one with unusual face markings (the white of it's 'chin-strap' extends upwards to the eye and forwards around the base of the bill)? If so, then Mike Collins has found them on Aldsworth Pond north of Emsworth, and I for one would be interested to know where they come from.

These geese have been at the pond for the past week and were there today along with a total of 52 Coot (I don't think I have ever seen more than 20 there before)

Kevin Stouse led his annual walk to Amberley Wild Brooks on the River Arun today and it sounds as if the walkers were not disappointed, seeing a couple of Little Owls, Reed Bunting, three Stonechat, Fieldfare and some Yellowhammer (one of them singing) as well as 23 Bewick's Swans, but it sounds as if they might have done even better as the family group of three Whooper Swans that have been there for a week or so were seen by another birder still there today (news via the SOS website). Other news on the SOS pages is of more than 6 Dartford Warbler seen today on Iping Common near Midhurst, and of a southern race Cormorant showing well at the Arundel Wildfowl reserve - said to be a lucidus race bird which should have a prominent white throat and breast but (unlike a normal juvenile Cormorant) a smart black belly.

By the River Itchen near Bishopstoke today Colin Bates came on 10 Jack Snipe with 49 Common Snipe and is the envy of most Hampshire birders. I remember past reports of Jack Snipe from this section of the Itchen Valley and thought there was one of some 40 Jack Snipe but I think this is a memory of a report of one or two Jacks with 40 or more Common Snipe. Some of the messages I looked through were from John Eyre who comments that Jack Snipe can often be found in small flocks but I can't find anyone who has found as many as ten recently. Birds of Hampshire records half a dozen records of ten or more, but it seems that the most ever found together was a group of 17 at Farlington Marshes in the 1960s. Other birds seen by Colin were 40+ Siskin, 3 Stonechat, a Chiffchaff and a Green Sandpiper.

At Budds Farm Pools today the count of Shoveler was up to 76 with relatively little else and no Ferruginous Duck that I could make out. On the harbour nearby and at the mouth of the Langbrook stream the only numerous birds (other than Black-headed Gulls and Brent) were Wigeon but I only counted around 45 in total. My best bird of the day was an Egret which flew over my garden heading northwest towards Leigh Park, probably aiming for the Hermitage Stream.

Paul Winter was on the Chilling shore between Titchfield Haven and the mouth of the Hamble this morning and saw a Great Northern Diver once more heading for the Hamble area. He later visited Weston Shore on Southampton Water and was one of several people to see the second winter Iceland Gull still there along with 2 Med Gulls in the Woolston area. He also saw one Yellow -legged Gull at Weston and Andy Collins saw 2 Razorbills.

SAT 23 FEB

Four Corn Buntings were seen today by John Shillitoe at the Hoe Cross site west of Hambledon

where at least one has been present for some time. Also in that area six Skylark were singing. Other birders in luck today were Bob Marchant who found 7 Hawfinch still at the Romsey site, Richard Ford who had close views of 9 Sanderling feeding on the concrete apron below Southsea Castle, and Trevor Carpenter who was on north Hayling and found 54 Knot and 25 Bar-tailed Godwit off the Northney marina area. Trevor wonders where the flocks of 1000 or more Bar-tailed Godwit that frequented this area a couple of winters ago have gone to, and I wish I knew. I have not seen more than four Bar-tails here this winter, nor do I see them at the Kench where big flocks used to roost and feed but no one has as yet answered this question which I have put out a couple of times this winter. Trevor also found a Pale-bellied Brent on the Portchester shore of Portsmouth harbour, plus Linnets and Fieldfare at the west end of Portsdown. Another lucky birder today was Will Walmsley who was with a HOS walk party in the New Forest today and enjoyed the sight of two Peregrines, two Ravens and two (separate) Hen Harriers in the Ocknell Plain area.

News from the Isle of Wight for yesterday (Feb 22) includes two Whitefront Geese at Dodnor on the River Medina just north of Newport. In the same area were 25 Black-tailed Godwit and 2 Med Gulls. Maybe the Whitefronts were the two that have been at Keyhaven for some time, and if they are getting the wanderlust they may well turn up elsewhere in Hampshire before they leave us. Other late news from Sussex tells of the Ruddy Shelduck still present at Widewater, Lancing on Feb 21 and going back to Feb 16 I see a note of the first Treecreeper song heard in an unlikely place - the Gossops Green area of the Crawley built up area. This last item reminds me that I failed to pass on Lawrence Holloway's report of his first Treecreeper song heard at the Pulborough RSPB Reserve on Feb 21.

FRI 22 FEB

Brian Fellows today had good views of an adult male Ferruginous Duck on the Budds Farm pools after being told of its presence by John Gowen who saw it yesterday. Brian is of course aware of the hybrid 'Dodgey Fudge' duck that has been on these pools and at Farlington Marshes over the past couple of years (and which should now be an adult male), but he says that this bird looked pure enough with its reddish brown head, breast and body, darker back, and clear white belly and stern patches. In particular he noted the white eyes but did not remark on its head shape or bill shape and markings. Shortly after seeing it he spoke to Jason Crook, who had not then seen it, and I am waiting for his verdict. If Jason does decree that this is a grown up version of the hybrid I see that Brian has covered his tracks by reporting the bird on HOSLIST as a Ferruginous Duck! Not quite so bad a mistake as that made by the Rare Bird Alert pagers which gave the location for Budds Farm (in connection with this duck) as some 60 km north west of the actual location and say it is about a mile south west of Burghclere near the A34 in Berkshire (this according to Mike Wall)+++

Also seen on the Budds Farm pools by Brian were 62 Shoveler (these have been building in numbers here recently - I saw 36 on Feb 13) with 70 Teal and 5 Pochard still present. One Shelduck and three Mute Swans were presumably birds intending to nest here (though what the third Swan was doing I don't know). On the nearby harbour shore Brian had a surprise in the shape of a Greenshank which I do not recall hearing of here except when the birds are on passage - maybe they are already starting to move around locally as they feel the urge to move, and that may account for my own sighting of one on the Warblington shore this afternoon where it was at first off the end of Pook Lane, then in the bay where the main Warblington stream enters the harbour. Later in the day Brian had another pleasant surprise when he came eye to eye with an adult summer plumage Med Gull on the Emsworth Harbour shore.

A new feature at Titchfield Haven according to Richard Carpenter is an increasing day roost of Cormorant - not yet quite the line of 100 or more that can usually be seen near the mouth of Pagham Harbour but Richard says that 25 to 29 birds can now be seen on most days and that the number is growing. Less unusual are the current counts of around 250 Wigeon and 200 Lapwing now on the reserve, though I see that the Black-tailed Godwit count is down to 150. Richard says that the young male Marsh Harrier is still showing daily, so if it did take a day trip to Hook last Wednesday (see Feb 20) it has not yet flown off in search of a mate. Going back to the Godwits I am becoming more convinced that warmer than usual winter temperatures

have played a part in the failure of these birds to mass on the wet grassland at Titchfield Haven - not only has life on the exposed mud been less intolerable than it can be in hard weather but also the productivity of the harbour mud has kept up, providing food both for the Godwits and for the Brent Geese which I am pretty sure have spent much less time on farm fields this winter than they usually do. I was reminded of this today while walking along the shore from Langstone to Emsworth and once more saw a good green growth of weed (enteromorpha) on the sea bed. I also saw some 30 Black-tailed Godwit feeding on the mud at Langstone where they have been absent recently, and found 200 Brent in a grass field immediately south of the Warblington cemetery (part of the attraction there is I think a large freshwater winter pond at which they can drink and bathe). The striking thing about these geese was the contrast between their presence today and general absence this winter (this is the first time I have seen any large flock on the Warblington fields, whereas in previous winters they would have been on the fields in numbers up to 1000 everyday from perhaps mid-December onward). I know Brent have been on some fields regularly as usual but my impression based on the Warblington and West Hayling fields is that they have hardly used them at all this winter. Going back to the Godwits I see that a flock of around 50 were in the North Walls area of Pagham Harbour yesterday according to Lawrence Holloway - I think these are new there.

Another short bulletin on the HWT website from Bob Chapman today records something that I have not previously heard of from others - the first Dartford Warbler song from the bird wintering in the Point Field at Farlington Marshes. Cetti's Warblers are also singing there as they have been elsewhere and over the main marsh the Lapwing are now making their glorious display flights and calls - Lawrence Holloway noted the same observation of the Lapwing at Pulborough Brooks yesterday. Another sight to delight any birder was given to Les Stride at Eyeworth Pond in the New Forest today - not only did he see a male Lesser Spotted Woodpecker but also seven Bullfinch in a mass of flowering Blackthorn blossom which must have been a wonderfully colourful sight. I am sure that the white blossom there was Blackthorn which is covered with buds wherever I look but it may be worth reminding other keen birders who are not botanists that the first great display of white blossom each year, especially along the coast, is not of Blackthorn but of Cherry Plum which is giving a magnificent show at the moment. The surest way of telling which is which is to look for the tips of the new growth shoots on the tree - with Cherry Plum some will have a distinct green colour which never occurs on Blackthorn. Other distinctions are that Blackthorn has thorns (they may be difficult to find) and has smaller flowers more tightly packed together, and the trees never grow very tall but prefer to contort themselves into tangled low masses, whereas the Plum trees have straighter branches and grow much taller (though never into substantial tall trees). In general Cherry Plum starts to flower in late January, Blackthorn in mid March (and later in the year Blackthorn has Sloes while the plum trees have small round red plums). Les did not report any Mandarin on Eyeworth pond but when Richard Bonser was there on Wednesday Feb 20 he saw 11 Mandarin. including 5 males.

Ian Thirlwell looked in vain for Purple Sandpiper at Southsea Castle today but did find 4 Sanderling feeding there as they have done frequently this winter against all expectation. Over on the Isle of Wight Purple Sandpiper are also proving elusive this winter - Derek Hale could not find any at Bembridge Foreland yesterday despite a report that ten had been there on Feb 19, though Derek did see a Red-throated Diver and three Shags

THU 21 FEB

Lawrence Holloway has just opened a new website that is well worth a visit by those interested in wildlife in West Sussex and which has, in addition to his personal wildlife diary, some first class pages devoted to sites including Ebernoe, Burton Mill Pond and Coates Common, Stopham Bridge, West Dean Woods, Mill Hill near Shoreham, and of course Pagham Harbour, Pulborough RSPB reserve and the Arundel Wildfowl reserve - a link to it is now on my What's New page links section. Lawrence was at Pulborough today where 11 Whitefront Geese can still be seen (with lots more birds) and on the way he stopped at Amberley and saw 30 Bewick's Swans, 20 Shelduck and displaying Lapwings. Someone who was at Amberley yesterday reports on the SOS website that there were then (Feb 20) 35 Bewick's, 2 male Hen Harriers, 3 Whooper Swans and at least one Bittern seen in flight.+++

Lawrence's diary also includes an entry for Feb 18 when he walked the west wall of Pagham Harbour and saw a Dartford Warbler (not far from the Long Pool), a Kingfisher, a Spotted Redshank and 19 Avocet plus 43 Knot - he had the impression that many of the wildfowl had already left the harbour and writes of hearing Teal flying off over his house in Aldwick one night recently.

The latest issue of British Wildlife mag which has just reached me has an article on the introduction of Red Kites into the Chilterns which, while I have not read it carefully, seems to indicate that the general success of the project did not include as wide a dispersal of the breeding pairs as had been hoped for (nearly all the nests have been within a 20 km radius of the central point) but I am sure that will come. One wandering Kite was over the River Hamble today, heading west just south of Bursledon, and some of these wanderers must soon pick on nest sites in Hampshire. It seems that their requirements for a nest site can be satisfied with quite ordinary trees in small copses (or even isolated trees in hedgerows) so it remains a puzzle as to why they cluster together. Another bird with a high points value for most birders is the Great Grey Shrike and I see that Richard Bonser is currently advertising the presence of one at Thursley in Surrey, but I appreciate that the allotting of points to bird species is a matter of personal taste as Chris Packham demonstrated in this week's edition of his Wildwatch programme on TV when he asked people to give points out of ten to House and Tree Sparrows. Richard Ford gives us the first news of Woodcock roding for the year - he saw three in the air at Woolmer Forest on Feb 14. He does not claim they were roding, and emphasises that they were silent, but I remember Richard Williamson telling us that they would begin roding at Kingley Vale in January each year so I suspect that these birds were at least guarding their territories and not just flying to feeding areas - Richard does not give the time of day, nor say if the birds came round more than once.

Miscellaneous news for this update includes reports for today of Brants still at Hook (seen by Trevor Carpenter) and at Frater Lake (Ian Calderwood), and of a Brant yesterday at Pagham Harbour with the Glaucous Gull.. Trevor also reports the arrival of the first Coot on the Hook Links scrape (presumably to take up breeding territory), a Kingfisher seen over Hook Lake, and notes 4 Greenshank at Hook Spit (another indication that they are getting restless and moving from their winter quarters?). At Romsey Richard Bonser yesterday could still find at least two Hawfinch and today Andy Collins saw a Common Scoter male in Southampton Water off Weston

WED 20 FEB

Bob Marchant was at Hook Links on the Solent shore this morning when, around 09:25, he saw a Marsh Harrier flying east from him into the sun. What he could see of it led him to think it was a male and it was probably the bird that has been based at Titchfield Haven since Aug 16 last summer. The female that was seen with it in September and I think October may well have flown on south, as I suspect did several birds reported last autumn at Farlington and Lower Test Marsh as well as Winchester sewage farm but this young male seems to have remained at the Haven throughout the winter - it could well be feeling an urge to move and meet up with a female by this time and hence be making a short preliminary excursion into the hinterland, but I suppose it could equally well be a new bird already on passage from the south (though I get the impression that the main migration does not normally start until April). Also at the old Hook Scrape Bob saw 6 Black-tailed Godwit and 12 Gadwall among a good list of wildfowl.

Richard Carpenter was also in the Hook/Warsash area today and heard the first spring calls of Lesser Spotted Woodpecker (does anyone know if only males drum and only females issue the 'Pee-pee-pee' calls, or do both sexes call?). In the Hook valley Richard saw over 50 Siskin and at least 5 Redpoll, and nearer the shore counted 90 Wigeon (Bob Matchant only saw 24 at the Links). Another good sighting today came from Chris Leaver, landlord of a pub by the River Avon at Fordingbridge where he had his second garden Bittern sighting at lunchtime. The first sighting was on Feb 4.

My own outing today included a brief stop at Aldsworth Pond where there are now a dozen Canada Geese and some 20 Tufted Duck with at least four Gadwall and three Shoveller as well as a few Mallard, Coot, Moorhen and a Little grebe.

TUE 19 FEB

A Shorelark (I see that we are now supposed to call them Horned Larks) was seen today near the cliff edge on Tennyson Down by the Needles on the Isle of Wight. I associate these birds with lowlying sandy shores rather than high grassland, though I see that most of them breed on mountainous high ground above the tree line in northern Scandinavia. As the bird was said to be restless I guess it will not stay there for long - at this time of year it is probably on its way north east from its winter home and will not stay long anywhere. A Peregrine, two Ravens and a Shag could be seen in the same place but I don't know if the Shag indicates the start of a return of these birds to their cliff nests.

Other, commoner, birds heading in the same direction as the Lark were a flock of at least 90 Redwing which attracted Richard Carpenter's attention today by their massed chattering subsong which I always regard as being part of the preparation for migration. The birds were at Kilmeston, a few miles south of Alresford, and there were five Buzzards (but only two Yellowhammer) to be seen in the same area. On the subject of migration a number of messages on HOSLIST currently indicate the first appearance of Siskin in gardens, as happens each February, and I think that it is normally assumed that this happens when the birds run short of food in the countryside and in desperation make for gardens but my own feeling is that these birds are not as shy of gardens as this would imply (and would have entered them earlier in the winter if they were in neighbourhood), but I think it much more likely that the garden influx that we are now seeing comes from birds that have wintered further south on the continent and have only just reached southern England as they gradually push northwards. I wonder if anyone else shares this view and has any evidence to prove it?

This being Tuesday Brian Fellows made his round of Portsmouth sites, finding a couple of Canada geese with 52 Swans on the Southsea Canoe Lake - I assume the geese are a young pair prospecting for a nest site and perhaps they will find one in the nearby Rose Garden! In the extreme south east corner of Portsea Island 142 Knot were feeding in Eastney Lake and in the nearby Langstone Harbour entrance channel two Shags were fishing - Brian comments on the extremely athletic way in which they leap clear of the water before each dive to get maximum impetus. Later in the day I happened to be at the Langstone Harbour office on the other side of the entrance channel and got very close views of one these birds which has a very different head and bill shape from a Cormorant - the bill seems longer and thinner, the head much squarer and with a very steep 'forehead' as well as having the start of a crest on top, and of course the yellow at the base of the bill is much less than you get on a Cormorant, but the great leap before each dive is what drew my eye to the bird and got me to wait for the end of its lengthy underwater period before I could take in the visual details (Brian timed some of these dives which were normally around 43 seconds long).+++

Going on to Baffins Pond Brian found the duck numbers much reduced, presumably as pairs head off to nest - only 1 Shoveler and 8 Tufted Duck with just 50 Mallard. I doubt the Tufted Duck are thinking of nesting as they seem to be much later nesters than say the Mallard which I am sure are nesting already. The 'Baffins gang' of 10 Barnacle Geese, 11 Snow Goose and 1 hybrid (possibly a Bar-Head x Greylag originating from a north Hampshire nest) were all present and there were 32 Canadas but no Swans - there were 2 here on Feb 12 and this week there were two back on the IBM Lake today allowing us to put two and two together and come out with the wrong answer!

On the subject of early nests I see that another Collared Dove nest (following the one in Chichester with a well grown chick which Kevin Stouse told us of on Feb 11) has been found at RAF Odiham with two eggs in it. This news comes via John Eyre and presumably originates from the people involved in the scheme, written up in the HOS Newsletter which came through the post yesterday, to put up Tree Sparrow nest boxes on this RAF station. Ten nest boxes were put up there in April 2001 but there were no takers last year although there have been sightings of Tree Sparrows in this part of Hampshire as recently as 1999. Can anyone tell me if the nest boxes that were put up at Pagham a few years back attracted any success?

Other sightings today were of the Portsmouth Harbour Brant at Frater Lake, two Water Pipits and three Green Sandpipers at the Lower Test reserve, 17 Bewick's and 6 Greylag at Ibsley, and 84 Golden Plover at the Romsey Highwood Lane site.

Yesterday (Feb 18) Tony Parkinson had a quick look at the IBM Lake where 31 Canada Geese were back and 8 Tufted Duck plus 4 Pochard are still present with 37 Coot that have not yet abandoned their winter truce (though a good many pairs are already on territory and attacking anything that enters their space. Best bird was a passing Sparrowhawk - Tony does not mention the Kestrels though I would be surprised if they are not using the main building as their nest site again this year.

More hints of migration and breeding come from the SOS website in reports for yesterday of an Avocet at Cuckmere Haven (I think this is a new arrival at that site, presumably of a bird already heading east to its breeding area) and of two Peregrines 'tousling' which I assume to be part of breeding behaviour though whether the birds were two males battling for possession of a territory or a male attracting the attention of a female I do not know (these birds were in the Beachy Head area and presumably nothing to do with the Brighton Sussex Heights pair that has already been reported back at the nest box). Also in East Sussex I see that the Rye Harbour Whitefront Goose flock has increased to 370 birds and that there were 16 Smew and 2 Bitterns there recently. Nearer to us there were 32 Bewick's Swans at Amberley Wild Brooks yesterday (Feb 18) and 2 Whooper Swans were seen on Feb 17 (there has been a family group of three birds there). Finally there is news for Feb 16 of 220 Scoter on the sea off Pett (east of Hastings), and from what Stephen Harvey has to say after visiting the site it sounds as if there are some Velvet Scoter among them.

MON 18 FEB

Nigel Stubbs is lucky enough to have a garden running down to the banks of the River Avon south of Ringwood, and today he heard his first Chiffchaff song in it, proving that you do not need a sewage works to keep these birds happy through the winter. That thought was prompted by the news last week (see Feb 11) from Mike Wall of the very first Chiffchaff song of the year heard at the Overton (sewage) filtration works near Basingstoke, and my comments on the changes at the Budds Farm works here in Havant, but having written it I felt I must have a look at the map of the Avon valley and that shows me what looks like a very promising bird walk around the southern fringes of Ringwood, starting from Bickerley Common where the abandoned railway headed out over the Avon, passing close to a sewage works at Moortown and then alongside a large lake with two big islands where the old rail track runs between Crow and Hightown. I have never heard any bird news from this area and wonder if those who live thereabouts could comment on its interest?

Here in Emsworth the large number of Mallard that spent the winter living off stale bread in the Emsworth millponds are at last dispersing to nest sites, or so it would seem from a sudden drop in numbers from around 160 for the past month to only 114 reported by Brian Fellows today. The winter total built up from around 130 in November to 160 on Christmas eve and then to 198 on Jan 7 (still 188 on Jan 13) before levelling out at around 160 for the rest of January and the first half of February. Knowing the lack of interest Mallard drakes take in family matters other than copulation would expect a high proportion of those present on the Emsworth ponds in the next month or so to be males, with the females hidden away in the hinterland.

News from the Fareham and Gosport areas gives less of a picture of winter being over. At Cams Bay today Trevor Carpenter found 145 Black-tailed Godwit and 110 Golden Plover still present, with 340 Dunlin, 260 Brent and 8 Goldeneye. Off Hill Head Richard Carpenter found the Great Northern Diver back on station (plus a Rock Pipit on the shore), and at Hook a couple of Merganser had ventured off the sea onto the 'new' nature reserve with the public hide overlooking its pool - 78 Curlew and 33 Wigeon were also present but maybe these were on the 'old' reserve known as the Links between Hook Park (where 3 Little Owls were again showing) and the Solent shore.

While thinking of this area from Fareham Creek to the River Hamble I must tell you that I have just had a first look at a new website just launched by Trevor Carpenter featuring these favourite haunts of his (Cams Bay, Stokes Bay, Hill Head and the Hook area) but much more importantly giving us a source of invaluable information about the background to Hampshire birding not available in such an easily useable form anywhere else. Trevor has spent a great deal of time recently going through the source material on Hampshire birds - mainly the county annual bird reports - and bringing together the basic information to answer questions that recur frequently

in every birder's mind such as 'What is likely to happen on the Hampshire birding scene in the coming month - in particular next weekend?' and whenever someone reports a sighting of a possible or proven real rarity providing the background to previous sightings that put this observation into perspective. For the first time I can actually see the 'Hampshire list' of all species recorded during the past 50 years (yes, I know that Keith Betton is about to provide us all with a that list in a printed booklet but he seems very reluctant to make any promise of keeping it up to date in the future, and in any case I am sure I am not alone in having difficulty in finding any piece of paper in the permanent jumble sale in which I live whereas it takes only seconds to retrieve a document on my computer). Have a look at

<http://members.lycos.co.uk/trevorc28/> and I am sure you will be returning to it pretty frequently. I must add that not only is the layout and colour scheme attractive but I really love the two tiny humming birds that perpetually hover round the homepage heading banner (and that's from someone who normally abhors the gimmicks which adorn some other websites). Well done, Trevor.

Barry Collins walked around Thorney Island yesterday and found two wintering Whimbrel (the latest Sussex bird report gives Whimbrel as very scarce in both summer and winter, but with two in Chichester Harbour and one in Pagham this winter, plus at least one in Langstone Harbour, I wonder if that status will soon be upgraded to scarce?) plus several Greenshank and one Spotted Redshank. The lone feral Barnacle Goose is still present and an adult female Peregrine was also seen, as were 4 Short-eared and 1 Barn Owl. Fifty Merganser, 18 Great-crested Grebe and 12 Goldeneye were on the water and two Med Gulls were seen. On Saturday (Feb 16) Barry found four adult Med Gulls in full summer plumage - one in Emsworth harbour and three at Pilsey Sands where some 4000 Common Gulls were roosting (presumably a gathering of the clans for the journey northward to nest).

In the Itchen Valley near Bishopstoke Colin Bates found two Jack Snipe yesterday, along with 29 Common Snipe and an Egret. One Peregrine was present (the regular on the electricity pylon there?) and Colin also saw two Chiffchaff and four Stonechat. Not far away in the Eastleigh Lakeside Park Simon Ingram had company as birders arrived to play spot the Mealy Redpoll (one or two of them seem to have had some success) among less than 20 Redpoll and over 100 Siskin. At Broadmarsh Paul Winter found the Ring-billed Gull coming to bread thrown for the ducks and watched the normally elusive Common Sandpiper going both up and down the Hermitage Stream. Over on Farlington Marshes Michael Bending enjoyed a good view of a Merlin perched on a fence post and noted several male Stonechat (are these re-appearing at coastal sites recently, and if so where have they been?). Elsewhere in Hampshire Richard Carpenter noted two pairs of Pintail and the male Marsh Harrier at Titchfield Haven, while Dave Pearson found four Hawfinch still in Romsey before going to Keyhaven where he saw 25 Bar-tailed Godwit (still seemingly real rarities this winter) along with the two Whitefront Geese, 12 Knot, 1 Greenshank, 4 Slavonian Grebe and a flock of Eider now numbering 23. Paul Winter saw 11 more Eider off the Meon Shore near Titchfield Haven and confirmed that the Brant was back at Hook near Warsash where he had a good look at it and is prepared to swear that in his opinion it is the same bird that he has seen at the mouth of the Beaulieu River.

Prominent among late news for the weekend is a sighting by Rosemary Webb, driving back from Chichester towards East Ashling on Saturday (Feb 16), of great activity around a rookery in the Oakwood area, so at least one set of Rooks have felt the call of spring. Another springtime first comes from Richard Carpenter in the Wendleholme woodland on the east bank of the River Hamble just north of Warsash where he heard both Nuthatch and Marsh Tit making their spring songs from the tree tops. Down at the Bunny Meadows he saw a not unexpected Kingfisher and watched a Rock Pipit.

PLANTS:

SUN 24 FEB

A walk from my home in Havant to Budds Farm and back today added fresh Oxford Ragwort to my flowering list plus two oddities - one was a plant of Nipplewort in flower by the main road to Langstone and the other was a flowering Cherry Tree on the banks of the Budds Farm pools which has pendulous clusters of long stalked white flowers that look like Bird Cherry. By the

Langbrook stream just south of Mill Lane I was pleased to find more surviving Elm trees in flower, and by the Brockhampton stream one branch in a cluster of Blackthorn bushes has 13 open flowers (this is one of the oddities that flowered in December). Cherry Plum is flowering in masses everywhere but this Blackthorn is an oddity not representative of its kind.

FRI 22 FEB

A phone call from Jill von Westarp this afternoon gave me news of an interesting discovery she had just made at Emsworth where, in the small shoreline copse called Nore Barn at the extreme west end of the town's shore, she had come on a large patch of Sweet Violets, all of them half-way between the normal deep violet colour and the pure white form that is not uncommon. I went to see for myself and was not disappointed - if you want to see them go to the extreme south west corner of the copse and enter it on a line bisecting the angle between the seawall path and that going up the west side of the wood. Some 20 or 30 yards in, where the penetration of light is almost finished and the floor of the wood becomes devoid of growth, the violets grow on their own at the base of a substantial tree, covering a good square metre of ground - you can't miss them if you are in the right area.

At Farlington Marshes Bob Chapman today reports that Alexanders is beginning to flower near the western entrance to the reserve. - the earliest of these were out on Feb 9 in a more sheltered site along the edge of the A3 climbing the southern slope of Portsdown.

THU 21 FEB

Richard Carpenter today found the very first flowers of Coltsfoot to appear at Titchfield Haven. I have been looking for them but have seen none since the three that I found on the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth on Feb 9.

WED 20 FEB

I made a brief outing to Woodlands Lane at Walderton today and found just one open flower on the 20 or so plants of Green Hellebore that overflow from the large colony in the private woodland of Lordington Copse. There were plenty of buds on the other plants I could see so I reckon flowering has only just started. On the way home I stopped off at Racton and found just one flowerhead of Butterbur pushing up through the damp soil - as usual some of the flowers were open even though the complete flowerhead was not yet above ground.

TUE 19 FEB

Ground Ivy is one of the earlier spring flowers but I was much surprised to hear the Richard Carpenter had found some out today when he was at Kilmeston, about a mile south of the source of the River Itchen.

MON 18 FEB

Walking through central Havant this morning in bright sunshine I saw the first examples of two plants, one of which will soon be abundant everywhere and the other is locally common around Havant. The first is Ivy-leaved Speedwell whose tiny mauve flowers are, I think, much under-rated by most people (in fact I suspect that the 'ordinary man in the country' does not notice it at all). The other plant, White Comfrey, is much more eye-catching and almost certainly arrived in our area as a garden escape but is now sufficiently well established to be regarded as a native by me (rather like Green Alkanet which has been flowering in Havant since Feb 8). Another plant in a similar category is Yellow Corydalis, and this too put out its first cluster of yellow flowers in Havant this morning after a pretty shore winter break.

From Titchfield Haven Richard Carpenter sends news that yesterday he found the first King Cups in flower there - those that I report from the IBM North Harbour site always flower earlier than they should because of the slightly warmed water in the canals there, and a sheltered position, so Richard's sighting should be taken as the first of the year and get people out looking at their favourite sites for Marsh Marigolds.

INSECTS:

SUN 24 FEB

The SOS website today included some insect observations from Jame Havers in the Crawley area relating to Feb 16 when he saw one definite Red Admiral, one unidentified Nymphalid

butterfly (presumably another Red Admiral, a Peacock or a Tortoiseshell) and two species of hoverfly - both the Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*) and the Marmalade Fly (*Episyrphus balteatus*)

TUE 19 FEB

A single Common Quaker moth was found lurking in Lee Marshall's flat at Rowner, Gosport, today and he is pretty sure it was one that was overlooked when checking his moth trap after last night's session. Last year the first of these moths appeared on March 5 so this year's early observation is presumably a result of the continuing high temperatures that have tempted so many butterflies out early.

MON 18 FEB

Looking back through my Hampshire Butterfly Reports I see that a Small Copper was recorded on March 16 in 1998 (other than one on Mar 31 all other years have had their first in April) but the Small Copper is among the first flight of butterflies each spring so in this exceptional year it should be no surprise to hear that when Rosemary Webb was talking to another naturalist she had met in Bound Lane on Hayling last Saturday they both immediately identified the tiny butterfly that flew past them as a Small Copper. Today's news, from Trevor Carpenter at Cams Bay near Fareham, is only of another Red Admiral!

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 21 FEB

Although probably of little news value to those who live in the north east corner of the Isle of Wight a report of 8 Red Squirrels seen today in Firestone Copse is well worth a mention to arouse the envy of mainlanders such as myself ...

TUE 19 FEB

A third report of Glistening Inkcup fungus for the year comes today from Richard Carpenter at Kilmeston near the source of the River Itchen.

From Sussex comes a report of four Common Dolphin seen off the Glynde Gap at Bexhill in East Sussex sometime last week.

MON 18 FEB

With frogspawn arriving on the scene later than expected this year I am very surprised to hear from Simon Ingram at Eastleigh that he already has tadpoles swimming in his garden pond. While I do not doubt that these are 'tinies' just emerged from the spawn I am reminded that it is not unknown for tadpoles to fail (normally through lack of food) to become Frogs in the summer of the year in which they hatched, and to stay in the pond as tadpoles through the autumn and winter to have a second go at maturing in the following year. One reason for staying in the pond might be to avoid being caught by a Fox like the one currently patrolling Tony Wilson's pond in his Hove garden with a mind to a Frog supper - this fox is clearly a gourmet as he only eats the Frog legs, leaving the bodies on the lawn. It is possible that the Fox is not really after food - merely fascinated by the hopping of the Frogs and finding the taste of frog not to its liking. This reminds me of a plea for help that I once received from a lady whose old dog had died and who had just acquired two active hunting dogs which could not resist a game of catch the frog in her garden - the message I got was to come prepared to remove up to 300 frogs from the garden so I duly turned up with several large old suitcases lined with plastic bin liners but luckily for me she had either been over optimistic in her estimation of the numbers, or the dogs had done a good job in reducing the numbers and scaring off the rest, as we could find very few to carry away.

David Parker has today confirmed that the Toads that breed in Brick-kiln Pond on the southern edge of Stansted Forest were already crossing the road that runs through the Forest back on the night of Feb 11 when reports of them came in from Alton, Alresford and Portsmouth indicating a general movement (unlike the extraordinary behaviour of those that arrived in Charles Cuthbert's pond at Alresford starting on Jan 31).

Getting away from fresh to salt water I see that Dave Pearson watched a Seal eating a large flatfish when he was at Keyhaven yesterday, and both he and (previously) Rosi Woods refer to this creature as a Grey Seal - not having seen it I cannot contradict them but it is very much more likely to have been a Common Seal (with the friendly snub nose rather than the long

snout of a Grey).

In the Itchen Valley near Bishopstoke Colin Bates yesterday came on a bunch of five Roe Deer, one being a buck, and Colin comments on its antlers being in velvet. As Roe have their rutting season in May they drop their old antlers in December and grow new ones from January onwards so all Roe Buck should now have their antlers covered with velvet which will probably be frayed off in April or early May.

Not really a wildlife news item but when I heard on the radio this morning that the RSPCA Ark at Stubbington currently has 40 Ferrets in its care (found in gardens and pub bars!) I could not help but reflect on the impact which such 'pets' must have on our real wildlife. Of course if you have a rabbit problem in your garden you may welcome this chance to get a 'perfect pet' from the RSPCA (and they will be very grateful to anyone prepared to take a few of the creatures off their hands and food bill).

WEEK 07 FEB 11 - 17

BIRDS:

SUN 17 FEB

Each winter from 1975 to 1991 there were at least 100 Bewick's Swans in the Avon Valley (i.e at least one count in each winter exceeded 100) and in the 1986/87 winter the peak count was around 300. This winter the peak (around Jan 8) was only 30 birds, and that immediately dropped to half a dozen as at least some of the Swans moved on to Slimbridge. News today is of 21 back at Ibsley, seen by Giles Darvill, and this increase could be a sign that the swans are already on the move back to their breeding quarters so they may not stay at Ibsley. If you haven't seen them in the Avon Valley you might like to join Kevin Stouse's walk next Sunday (Feb 24) to Amberley Wild Brooks on the River Arun where 41 Bewick's (plus 4 Whitefront Geese and 10 Ruff) were seen today. Mentioning the 4 Whitefronts at Amberley reminds me of the even more dramatic downturn there has been in their numbers in the Avon Valley - between 1961 and 1982 there were ten winters in which the peak count there was over 1000, with at least 200 present in every winter from 1951 to 1986 after which numbers have declined until there are none there this winter, and so far as I know the biggest flock in the south of England is that with 240 birds counted today at Scotney Court (Rye Harbour on the Sussex/Kent border)

Nothing special in the other news I have for today. I myself saw a flock of at least 20 Redwing in Stansted Forest, and I see that Rosi Woods saw an unspecified number of Hawfinch still at the Romsey canal site (where Paul Winter saw 5 yesterday - there were also Redwing there today). In Sussex a Little Egret was reported from Burton Mill Pond west of Pulborough (I only mention this as I cannot recall hearing of one there previously), and at Pagham the Glaucous Gull was seen again together with 12 Slavonian Grebe and 20 Eider (outside the harbour) plus a Firecrest near Greenleaze Farm. In the north of Hampshire Robert Watson was pleased with the sight of four Water Rails in disused cressbeds by the road from Basingstoke to Old Basing.

SAT 16 FEB

Among visitors to Farlington Marshes today were the Havant Wildlife Group and some Young Explorers from the Eastleigh area accompanied by Simon Ingram in loco parentis. The Havant Group clearly enjoyed themselves in the sunshine, recording 54 bird species including Water Pipit and a Peregrine perched motionless on one of the islands. A pair of Stonechat were also on their list as were 30 Knot and the great mass of ducks in the main marsh around the Deeps. Simon stayed later than them and had both male and female Peregrine (which I gather is unusual at the marshes this winter) and may have seen a Merlin sitting on the ground too far away to be certain. He did see a Slavonian Grebe in the harbour, a Water Rail and three Bearded Tits in the reeds and a single Dartford Warbler (place not given)

The IBM building in the centre of Basingstoke acts as base for both a Peregrine and a large night roost of Pied Wagtails, and the latter were counted by Robert Watson this evening as exceeding 445 birds. It seems that at one point they all took flight, giving Robert a very impressive sight, but I don't think that was anything to do with the Peregrine. While thinking of Peregrines I see on the SOS website that the Sussex Heights pair were back near their nest

box on Feb 13, but I do not know if this was their first re-appearance there.

I have still to see a Rook taking any interest in repairing or guarding its nest so far this year and in East Meon today Christoph Harwood saw a similar lack of interest in the rookery there except for one bird which was sitting in a nest. During his regular circuit of Park Hill, Rookham Down and the Green Lane which takes him back to his home in East Meon he saw the expected selection of finches and game birds, plus the resident pair of Grey Wagtail in the village, a flock of Fieldfare on Park Hill, and a group of 3 or 4 Bullfinch in the Green Lane. Christoph describes the Bullfinch as singing, but as their song is no more than a jumble of variations on their call note, I wonder if this was the effect of several birds calling together in a more excited fashion than usual. I have only heard Bullfinch song once in my life, and that was from a lone male perched prominently in what I assume was his nest territory - I would be very interested to hear more reports of their song as I feel rather deprived of it! In addition to his own sightings Christoph tells me that someone claims to have seen a Wheatear in the East Meon area this week and if true this would be exceptionally early (the earliest ever in Hampshire is given as 6 Feb 1989 so this does not break the record but I have never heard of birds arriving before Mar 1. I am asking Christoph if he can get more detail on this sighting and confirm that the bird was clearly identified (and not just a glimpse of a white rump that could have been on a Bullfinch, Brambling or even Jay or some partial albino of another species)

Simon Ingram this morning found a Mealy Redpoll among seven normal Lessers at his Eastleigh Lakeside patch and I think this the first reported in Hampshire this winter (after a couple of reports from Sussex on Jan 4 at Cowfold and Jan 5 at Burton Mill Pond). He also saw 25 Golden Plover (probably part of the Wide Lane flock) while Paul Winter found 97 Golden Plover in the Highwood Lane fields east of Romsey. Paul also saw 5 Hawfinch in Romsey and saw the second winter Iceland Gull at Weston Shore on Southampton Water before heading to the northern New Forest and seeing a Great Grey Shrike and a male Hen Harrier. Mark Litjens was in the same area of the Forest and found more than 14 Hawfinch as well as hearing more than 5 Great Spotted Woodpeckers drumming - he could only see 2 Redpoll but also had 2 Dartford Warbler (these should be singing now on a sunny day)

Moira Doherty went to Ibsley today and saw 15 Bewick's with 71 Mute Swans, four Egrets and 2 Shelduck, and down at Keyhaven Rosi Woods saw at least one Whitefront Goose (the only one in the county at the moment?). Near the mouth of the Hamble Bob Marchant saw the Brant still present near Hook Spit. along with a Greenhank and a Water Rail. On the links the number of wildfowl had increased and he saw 45 Wigeon, 11 Gadwall, 42 Teal, 3 Pochard and 2 Shelduck.

Sussex news for today has a family of 3 Whooper Swans at Amberley Wild Brooks as its highlight - there were 39 Bewick's and 8 Whitefront Geese with them plus 8 Ruff and a Barn Owl. At Burton Mill Pond two male Lesser Spotted Woodpeckers were seen and at West Dean one Hawfinch and a ringtail Hen Harrier were present. Closer to Hampshire there were two Short-eared Owl on the Thornham Marshes landing lights.

Yesterday (Feb 15) Jason Crook was on the Hayling Coastal Path counting a flock of Brent on one of the fields with a cereal crop when he found a Brant among them which he was sure was not the same as the two which have been in Langstone Harbour earlier this winter - as the four known Hampshire birds still seem to be present at Keyhaven (2), Needs Ore and Hook Spit wonder if this is one of the West Wittering family or even the one from the Pagham north fields. If anyone wants to take a look at it Jason gives the map reference for his sighting as SU 714006

FRI 15 FEB

The HWT website today carries news from both Blashford Lakes and Farlington Marshes including the first Lesser Spotted Woodpecker drumming heard at Blashford and the recent appearance of pairs of Med Gulls over the Langstone Harbour islands, their mewing calls being audible from Farlington Marshes. Lesser Spotted drumming was also heard early this morning by Simon Woolley in Denny Wood when he was in the New Forest and heard all three woodpeckers as well as singing Woodlark and calling Tawny Owl (another Tawny Owl was calling in daylight near the Canal Path at Titchfield Haven when Richard Carpenter was there today - do these calls come from disgruntled males recently turned out of their preferred tree holes as the females get the house ready for nesting?). Another bird becoming vocal slightly

early in the year is Yellowhammer - Robert Watson heard the first one singing in the Silchester area (east of Pamber Forest and north of Basingstoke) on Wednesday Feb 13 and says that this is the earliest date he has recorded (his first in 1999 was Feb 15, but last year it was Feb 21 and in 2000 not until Feb 23). Going back to Bob Chapman's report of the Farlington highlights he mentions that up to six Pale-bellied Brent may still be seen among the large but unspecified number of normal Brent and over 750 Wigeon, and that the wintering Whimbrel is still present. Off 'The Point' both Great Northern Diver and Common Scoter have been seen recently

When Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today he found at least 8 Water Pipit still present along the canal path (with at least 15 Siskin, presumably on the alders) but in the reserve he could only find some 300 Black-tailed Godwit (plus at least 200 noisy Lapwing). This could mean that half of the Godwits have already moved on, and that thought of birds on the move northward is backed by Will Walmsley's report of more than 250 at Farlington Marshes yesterday (Bob Chapman does not mention them in his brief news bulletin issued today) and Brian Fellows sighting of at least 34 in the Nutbourne area of Chichester Harbour today (the first report of them in that area that I have seen this winter). While Brian was at Nutbourne he also noted that there was still a female Stonechat present and heard the calls of 28 Fieldfare from the orchards. In Nutbourne Bay he saw 12 Knot and in the wet meadow there were at least 13 Snipe and 200 Teal.

The Portsmouth NEWS is not always the most accurate source of wildlife news but this evening's edition tells us that 7 Mute Swans have died of unknown causes at Southsea's Canoe Lake this winter, and passes on a plea from the City's Leisure Department for people not to feed the Swans as one possible cause of illness is an excess of bread rotting in the water. Not quite so accurate is the statement that the lake is 'home to 80 Swans' - in the summer you are lucky to see half a dozen Swans among the boats, during September last year there were 30- 40 present, topping 50 in early October and 60 by the end of the month. On Nov 7 Brian recorded his peak count of 75 birds but from then until now the average count has been around 45, suddenly increasing to 64 on Tuesday this week (no doubt birds flocking back to take advantage of the media publicity).

Want to earn a bob or two picking up Fox droppings? Then ring Prof Steven Harris of Bristol University at home this weekend on 0117-9287479 or at latest next Monday on 0117-9685585. This plea for help reached me via the RSPB at Brighton and I know little of the details but I gather that Prof Harris has failed to recruit anyone in the Portsmouth to Brighton section of the south coast to gather Fox droppings for analysis as part of some project he is running. All I know is that there is some recompense for the work - probably a minimal fee and travel expenses - and that he must find someone by Monday 18 Feb.

THU 14 FEB

With recent news of the first Herons back at their nests, and with long plumes showing on many of the Little Egrets, I have been expecting to see fewer Egrets as they start a springtime dispersal to nest sites, so I was quite surprised to count 59 arriving at the Wade Court night roost here in Havant this evening. It is true that the number of Grey Herons seen with them at Wade Court during the day has suddenly dropped off (there were none there this evening) but a look at the figures which Barry Collins has recorded over the past ten years at the Thorney Island roost immediately shows me that the Egrets do not disperse until April. The counts which Barry made in 1999 provide a good illustration of the pattern that is repeated in each of the years that the birds have used the Thorney roost - the monthly figures for 1999 were: - Jan 106; Feb 106; Mar 105; Apr 71; May 14; June 10; July 154; Aug 281 .. and so on. One thing that I did notice this evening was that a good proportion of the birds arriving did so from the harbour to the south where recently they have all apparently been feeding inland and coming from the north.+++

Before arriving at the Wade Court site I took a walk to Warblington, finding one of the Little Owls staring at me from within its nest hole in an oak next to the Old Rectory in Pook Lane (where Alistair Martin saw both birds yesterday), and by the roadside just west of the driveway into the Old Rectory a very obvious new nest in a small tree looks as if it is the work of Mistle Thrushes. On the harbour mud at low tide I found 78 Shelduck in the stretch from Conigar Point to Langstone Pond - a much higher number than I have come to expect in recent winters. I did not count the Brent Geese in this section but estimate there were around 100 of them, fewer

than usual for the time of year - what I did notice is that once again there was no flock on the grassland of the farm fields, and that there was a rich growth of green weed (I think all *Enteromorpha* rather than Eel Grass) on the exposed mud of the shore. I would be very interested to hear if others have also noticed far fewer Brent than usual feeding on farm fields this winter, and if anyone knows if the mild weather has provided a longer lasting supply of green food for them in the harbours. When I say that there were no Brent on the fields I was not entirely truthful as there were just two of them in the field immediately south of Warblington cemetery, and this suggests to me the thought that the few geese who do not intend to migrate are already separating from the winter flocks that may already be having thoughts of travel.

I have not visited Old Idsworth Farm since before Christmas and was encouraged to resume my visits by a phone call from David Uren at the farm telling me that there had been several recent sightings of what must be a Merlin hunting the western hedgerows of the farm along the road which runs parallel to the railway below Idsworth Down - he described it as like a small Sparrowhawk or Hobby. This news reminded me of a sighting which I had of a Merlin perhaps ten years ago when the fields around the thousand year old chapel here were set aside and brought a huge flock of Linnets and other small passerines to feed, and the Merlin to prey on them - I was sufficiently carried away by the sense of history in the landscape around that old chapel to base a short article that I wrote for the Wildlife Trust magazine on the theme of the spirit of ancient Merlin the magician still at work in the countryside. Coming back to present reality David Uren also told me that he had recently seen a small party of Grey Partridge in one of his fields - no doubt a remnant of the fifty which he released in his farmyard last September, not with any thought of shooting but merely to encourage them to repopulate a farm on which he does a great deal to support wildlife.

Brian Fellows checked out the Emsworth ponds today and was pleased to see two Kingfishers. One was in what is called Dolphin Lake which is the unobstructed mouth of the River Ems running out on the west side of the Slipper Mill Pond (which receives the rest of the water from the river and controls its exit to the sea by sluice gates), and the other Kingfisher was in the marina where there is a potential nest bank for a pair (though no proof that they have ever nested there). 168 Mallard were still around, so the majority are probably not yet nesting, and there was still a winter flock of 25 Coot. The Black Swan was with 59 Mutes (including the Peter Pond pair which have not yet started nesting) and there were just 2 Canada Geese which probably are there with thoughts of nesting though I don't think they have done so in past years.

From Bourley in the heathland between Fleet and Aldershot John Eyre today reports a sighting of 5 Jack Snipe, possibly indicating that these birds are on the move (I think many unexpected sightings of this and other species occur when the birds have made a temporary stopover in some place where they are not familiar with the habitat and have not learned to avoid discovery by humans). In the past John has seen Jack Snipe here in the sort of habitat that most of us do not associate with Snipe - dry burnt heathland - but he does not tell us what habitat these were in today. Another single Jack Snipe seen by Mike Rafter in the northern New Forest today was also possibly in heathland (but equally likely to have been in a boggy area). While in the Ashley Walk/Pitts Wood area Mike heard Skylark and Woodlark song and found 80 Redpoll feeding, not in birch trees but in short grass on the ground. Both he and Doug Munts watched two Ravens - at first in the air harrying Buzzards but later looking very much at home feeding on the ground - and Doug also saw four Hawfinch, causing him to comment on the possibility that current large scale forestry operations in the Rhinefield arboretum may cause the Hawfinch to move to a new roost site. Doug also tells us that, of six Brambling that regularly feed in his West Wellow garden at the moment, one is a male and is now rapidly acquiring its smart black spring head-dress.

Other Hampshire news for today includes Will Walmsley's meeting with the Broadmarsh Ring-billed Gull, which he saw come to within five feet of someone feeding it with bread, and his find of a Common Sandpiper by the stream at Farlington Marshes. On Southampton Water Richard Bonser saw the leucistic Herring Gull and one Yellow-leg still at Weston Shore, plus a small flock of 23 Great Crested Grebe on the water, but at Hook Richard Carpenter could not

pick out the Brant among over 900 Brent on the Hook Links.

News for yesterday (Feb 13) on the Sussex website includes a reported five minute sighting of a Bonaparte's Gull in Pagham Harbour where there were also 21 Avocet and 6 Spotted Redshank as well as the wintering Whimbrel and the Brant in the north fields. Another possible rarity was a 'small crane' seen by the Long Pool, and yet another was a reported Great White Egret seen from a train at Ford near the River Arun.

Also seen yesterday at Langstone by John Chapman was the interesting sight of some 32 Little Egrets all fighting for fish in a small pool, less than the size of a tennis court, left by the falling tide. This occurred at dusk close to the Wade Court Egret night roost and was presumably the result of the birds coming to roost being diverted by the chance of a free fish and mud supper. Alistair Martin had passed this point slightly earlier in the afternoon when 19 Egrets were huddled in the field south of the roost, presumably forced from the sea by the high tide but too early to be allowed into the roost trees. Alistair went on to see the pair of Little Owls in their oak near the Pook Lane Old Rectory (he only claims to have seen one bird twice but I am pretty sure both of the pair are in residence), and Alistair assures me that the pair based on the west Hayling shore in line with Daw Lane (in the 'Aston Villa' shore field hedgerow) are still using the tree which they did last year.+++

Another piece of news from Alistair which may interest a number of birders is that a friend of his has moved to the Scilly Islands and has recently set up a birding website which he updates more or less daily. If you are interested have a look at www.scillybirding.co.uk

From Portsmouth Harbour an Calderwood reports that the Brant which has been in the northwest corner of the harbour this winter was still to be seen yesterday at Frater Lake with 30 Brent. The Sussex birds at Wittering was also seen yesterday with a Pale-bellied Brent and four Ruff, and Richard Bonser saw the Keyhaven Brant and, while there, heard that there are still two Whitefront geese with a flock of Canadas near the rubbish tip.

Yesterday Brian Fellows took a walk round Brook Meadow at Emsworth and saw something that he has not seen before - a Cormorant trying to catch one of the small trout in the Lumley Mill Stream (the branch of the River Ems that runs down the east side of the meadow). For the third successive week a Kestrel flew over the meadow and for the first time this year a Chaffinch sang - Brian comments that he did not hear a Blackbird, but I suspect that if he sat on his favourite bench after the sun has set on a fine evening he would probably hear at least one in song (I have yet to hear a Blackbird in full daylight this year but hear them on any evening that I am out at dusk). In his own garden Brian had the first Blackcap that he has seen there this year - a female apparently searching for small insects in the foliage.

I have mentioned above (Feb 15) the Portsmouth NEWS article on Swans at the Southsea Canoe Lake, and Brian Fellows was at that lake on Tuesday (Feb 12), finding the Swan flock had increased to 64. Nearby 76 Brent were back on the playing field (not seen there since last autumn), and at Baffins Pond the 10 Barnacles and the Snow Goose were back after their day trip to Titchfield Haven on Feb 8. Numbers of most species of wildfowl at the pond are now beginning to decline but there were still 21 Canada Geese. 32 Tufted Duck, 15 Shoveler and 92 Mallard.

WED 13 FEB

A mild and rain free early morning gave me garden bird song from twelve different species including Mistle as well as Song Thrush and Wood Pigeon as well as Collared Dove. The most significant for me was the first Chaffinch song heard from the garden - more than one local bird was in action.

Walking to the shops later in the morning I heard a Greenfinch singing and watched it making its 'butterfly like' territorial flight overhead, and nearby I heard Goldcrest song from the 'lone pine' in a garden at the Beechworth Road end of the East Pallant (as in previous years this bird has a most unexpected territory based on one Scots Pine and a few shrubs in small front gardens along the street)+++

In the afternoon I cycled to Broadmarsh and was shown the Ring-billed Gull through the telescope of a friendly birder. Before that I went past Bedhampton Mill pool where I saw the pair of

Gadwall are still present and heard the whinnying song of a Dabchick. Later at Budds Farm pools I found the Shoveler number up to 36 with little else of interest present other than a newly arrived pair of Shelduck that will probably nest here again this year. Going back up Southmoor Lane I hear my second Goldcrest song of the day and saw a party of some 20 'dancing dots' fly over - they must have been the small flock of Linnet that has been based here since at least mid-January.

The first Blackcap subsong was heard by Graham Roberts on Sunday (Feb 10) in the garden at Cosham (Portsmouth) where he and his father have studied them for many winters - I have the impression that there have been fewer than usual this winter, but there have been two Firecrest present to add variety. Moving from the sublime to the ridiculous I see that two cock Reed Buntings were heard serenading a single female at Hook (Warsash) by Bob Marchant on the links yesterday (can anyone tell me if this strip of shoreline between Hook Park and the sea was a golf course before it became a nature reserve?). In my opinion Reed Bunting is definitely the worst singer among British Birds, but I was perhaps over-enthusiastic in referring to the Blackcap as a sublime singer - again in my opinion that accolade should go either to the Nightingale or to the Woodlark, and the latter bird can now be heard in most if not all its regular sites. I see that Les Stride heard three singing when he was in the Pitts Wood area of the northern New Forest yesterday, and read that John Eyre heard his first (presumably in the heathland around Bourley Hill between Fleet and Aldershot) on Jan 31 - though I suspect that others in Hampshire may have been singing earlier as I see that there were an estimated ten Woodlark singing at Ambersham Common (west of Pulborough) in Sussex on Jan 16 and at least two singing there on Jan 17.

Not all birds are enjoying the pleasures of spring as can be seen from three reports of oiled corpses washed up on the Solent shore yesterday. Both Mike Rafter and Barrie Roberts comment on their visits to Hurst spit yesterday when they seem to have seen more birds dead than alive - there were at least four Guillemot, two Razorbill and a Gannet lying on the tideline and the shingle was covered with tarry blobs. Another corpse was a headless Great Blackback Gull, causing Mike to wonder if it had fallen victim to some massive raptor and died with glory at the talons of a Gyr-falcon. My own guess would be that its end was as sordid as the auks, probably getting tangled in fishing nets while they were being hauled in and it was trying to steal from the catch. In the past I have seen a number of headless auks washed up and been told that they had most likely become entangled in fishing nets - the fishermen then getting them free of the nets in the simplest way by cutting off the head and throwing it away as the body falls back into the sea from the other side of the net.+++

It seems that the latest issue of British Birds not only has a note by John Eyre on the intelligent behaviour of a Great Spotted Woodpecker which he observed last spring considerably amplifying its drumming, and directing the sound towards its nearest rival, by drumming on the metal of one of the loudspeakers on poles around the Tweseldon racecourse, but also has a note from a different source about a sheep eating a grouse chick. This latter item reminds me of something I read years ago in (I think) BTO News about a Tern colony on a remote Scottish island which had been wiped out by sheep - as soon as the chicks hatched out the sheep would come along and eat the legs and feet off the living chicks. In both cases, and in a further one which John Eyre has just told us of where electric cables sheathed in green insulation had been lain on the surface of snow covered Derbyshire dales and were promptly nibbled through by the sheep, it seems that the sheep were desperate for minerals to supplement their very poor diet and found them in these strange sources.

Going back to the auks not all are oiled and Ian Watts today saw one swimming up the River Itchen where it passes under the toll bridge at Woolston - I wonder if it will get far enough upstream to feature in Colin Bates new website devoted to the Itchen Valley birds he sees around Bishpstone (link to his website has been added to the What's New page of mine). Another one off urban bird sighting today gave pleasure to Martin Gillingham when he looked out of his office window in central Portsmouth and watched a Sparrowhawk preening itself on a tree in Victoria Park.

TUE 12 FEB

In the fifty years from 1951 to 2000 eighty four new species have been added to the Hampshire

list. The peak year for new additions was 1986 when Cattle Egret, Sociable Plover, Baird's Sandpiper, Spotted Sandpiper, Black Guillemot, and Little Bunting were all recorded in the county for the first time. By 2000 you might have expected that there would be few species left to add to the list but in fact it was one of the best years with Great Spotted Cuckoo, Little Swift, Cliff Swallow, and Paddyfield Warbler all arriving for the first time. Keith Betton, John Clark and others have been hard at work recently to put together a full Hampshire check list with details of when each species was first recorded, and the above details were taken from a list which Keith published on the internet last month, but (perhaps purposefully) that list did not give the total number of species now on the Hampshire List...+++

The full facts about the Hampshire Bird Species List are about to be published in a hard copy booklet that will go free of charge to all HOS members but which is also available to anyone who sends a cheque for £1-50, made payable to Hampshire Ornithological Society, to Margaret Boswell, 5 Clarence Road, Lyndhurst SO43 7AL (the £1-50 includes postage)+++

While greatly welcoming this news I hope that comments I have made earlier will not go unheeded - new species will continue to be added to the list, and I hope that this publication will provide the basis for a permanent feature of each annual Hampshire Bird Report in future years to show the latest status of the list and to give a quick reference to when rarities were seen (e.g. how many times has a Moustached Warbler been recorded in Hampshire since it first arrived in 1951, and what were the dates of say the last three sightings of each rare species that was not seen in the year of the current latest annual report - if these details are not given in each report anyone who thinks he has seen a rare species will continue to have to thumb back through every previous year's report until he find a mention of the species)

Paying a quick visit to Ewhurst Lake, a few miles north west of Basingstoke on the Newbury road, before starting his day's work today Mike Wall found a newcomer among the geese and it turned out to be a Pinkfoot loosely associating with seven Greylag. Probably originating from a collection in this country it seems it could be a bird that was at Theale near Reading in the autumn (showing signs of being a young bird - maybe one that flew before it was pinioned?), but it could be a wild bird that has not only lost its chasers in the wild goose chase but also lost itself! If it stays around it will certainly add interest to birding in north Hampshire and I look forward to mapping reports of its sightings in the same way that I do for the lone Emperor Goose that is now in the part of the county after stays in the south east of the county and on Southampton Water. Mike's visit also gave him a good selection of other birds including Gadwall and Cormorant that are uncommon on that lake, plus Sparrowhawk, Kestrel and Buzzard, and a view of some 40 Golden Plover that have been wandering in that area this winter. Three Redpoll and ten Siskin were also on Mike's list.

In response to recent discussion of how many Bitterns have been in Hampshire this winter someone in the Rare Bird Alert office has kindly provided us with a full list of all the Hampshire sightings reported to them this winter starting with one at Fleet Pond on Oct 30. This list is of course just a record of those sightings reported to them, mainly by those enthusiasts who use the service to enable them to go chasing after birds that other people have seen, and may not include number of Bitterns that chose to winter in unwatched sites. What it does show is that there have been 24 reports from Fleet Pond between Oct 30 and Feb 2 with a maximum of four birds seen on Nov 15 and two on three dates in December and January. There were 16 reports from Titchfield Haven between Nov 6 and Feb 10, with just one report of two birds on Feb 7. The only other Hampshire reports were single sightings from the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood and the Overton Filtration Works near Basingstoke, both in January.

Other news in today's messages includes a sighting of two Ravens in the Keyhaven area (where they were seen almost daily last winter but rarely this winter) and of 11 Hawfinch in the Pitts Wood area of the northern New Forest where there were over 100 Fieldfare with a few Redwing and a Merlin was seen carrying off one of our rare Skylarks (will the RSPB be advocating the shooting of Merlins to save the Skylarks which are much better money-raisers for them?). From Sussex comes a report of a Willow Tit in the carpark of the Wildfowl Reserve at Arundel and a sighting of 7 Bewick's Swans on the Ouse at Rodmell south of Lewes. Back in Hampshire I see the Brant was seen again at Hook near the path leading from the shore to Hook Park via Beam Cottage where the Little Owl was showing and a Stonechat could still be

seen (have they vanished from other coastal sites by now?). Finally I am glad to hear from Steve Mansfield that the Wood Duck is still resident at Kings Pond in Alton (I still miss the drake that spent a good few years at the IBM Lake before (probably) becoming a dog's dinner for a fox.

MON 11 FEB

The first Chiffchaff song for the year was heard yesterday (Feb 10) at Overton, close to the source of the Test, by Mike Wall. In past winters with temperatures as high as they have been recently I would have expected several reports of Chiffchaff singing at the Budds Farm sewage works where, until the massive rebuilding and modernisation of the place that is now more or less complete, there was a plentiful supply of insects and good cover in scrub around the edges of the site providing a winter home for around 20 of the birds. This winter I have never seen more than one Chiffchaff, and that by the Brockhampton stream alongside the sewage works, so it is interesting that Mike's bird at Overton was at what he politely calls the 'Filtration Beds' which are I assume part of the old fashioned sewage treatment system preferred by birds. Another sign of spring comes from Kevin Stouse who has been told by a friend who works in Chichester that a Collared Dove recently hatched three eggs in a nest outside a city office window and now has one well grown chick in the nest (the other two have presumably fallen out of the flimsy structure that these birds call a nest).

27 Buzzards were seen soaring over woods to the south of Romsey by David Thelwell today, about a month earlier than I would have expected the first mass uprising of these birds. David was in the Broadlands Estate with many of the birds overhead but they could be seen over the woods stretching south towards the M27 on the west bank of the River Test (at one point there were 14 in the air together over the Moorcourt and Ridge copses). This lower Test valley does seem to be the Hampshire hotspot for Buzzards - I seem to remember that Paul Winter reckoned he had seen 40 of them during a walk along this part of the valley last spring. Yesterday 9 Buzzards were in the air over the marshes west of Bembridge on the Isle of Wight and Dave Pearson saw 10 over the upper Itchen east of Winchester (and interestingly Derek Radden on that day only saw one when he was in the Hollands Wood area of the New Forest near Brockenhurst, though that cannot really tell us that the density of the Buzzard population is now much higher on wooded farmland outside the New Forest than it is in the traditional Hampshire habitat for these birds in the Forest). On Saturday (Feb 9) Richard Carpenter saw four pairs of Buzzard in the Bramdean area east of Winchester.

Some birds still stick to the calendar, and February is traditionally the month in which Siskin become common visitors to gardens (especially those with peanuts held in red mesh bags). This weekend brought reports of them making their first appearance in gardens at Marchwood on Southampton Water and at Fleet in north Hampshire, along with reports of 40 in the Lower Test marshes reserve, 8 near the Itchen in the Bishopstoke/Eastleigh area and the odd bird (plus 25 Redpoll) on the Isle of Wight (where Siskin and Redpoll have been scarce this winter). Richard Carpenter assures me that the Bittern(s) have not deserted Titchfield Haven as one was seen there yesterday - he doesn't mention the male Marsh Harrier which has been such a regular feature of the reserve for some time, and I wonder if it could have taken a day trip to the Isle of Wight where an immature male was seen over the marshes by the River Yar west of Bembridge (the other birds seen there - two Hen Harriers and two Short-eared Owls - were regulars but the Marsh Harrier was new to the site). Raven sightings have been relatively few this winter but I see that one was flying up the Beaulieu river yesterday making its presence known with its deep calls.

When Will Walmsley reported his extraordinary sighting of a Peregrine catching two Linnets at one go, one in each foot, when he was at Romsey on Saturday I suspect I was not alone in wondering if the raptor was really a Peregrine and not perhaps a male Merlin or Sparrowhawk, and I am glad to see that both Mike Rafter and Lee Marshall saw a male Peregrine in the Romsey area over the weekend. Mike saw it disturbing the Golden Plover that are back in the Romsey area (only about 20 of them, present for about a week and probably based in the Highwood Lane fields where Paul Winter's dad saw them), and Lee saw the tiercel flying north

from the Lower Test (it could be based thereabouts) and later saw it again over Romsey. At the Lower Test on Sunday (Feb 10) Lee saw at least 25 Water Pipits and in Romsey he found 6 or 7 Hawfinch in the Mercer's Way site where David Thelwell saw 10 on Feb 8 (and Birdline has recently reported more than 20 there). It would be interesting to know how far these Hawfinches range - the odd one that was seen at the Lower Test reserve on Feb 3 was only 5 miles south of the Romsey site, and another singleton that appeared in Derek Allnut's garden at West Wellow yesterday was perhaps 4 miles west of the site.

John Clark was in the Avon Valley yesterday for another of his checks on the wildfowl but only found 6 Bewick's Swans (and no Whitefront geese this winter). There was a massive 217 Mute Swans north of Ringwood (up to Bickton), and at the south end of his stretch (near the Avon Causeway) there were over 350 Canada Geese, 180 Greylag and 110 Cormorant plus 1320 Wigeon (another 500 of these at the Blashford Lakes) and over 280 Pintail (plus 10 at Blashford). On the Blashford Lakes the big numbers were 1182 Teal (plus 675 south of Ringwood). 232 Gadwall (plus 71 on the river north of Ringwood) and 293 Tufted Duck (but only 161 Coot). The Smew was not seen but the young male Scaup is still present along with just 3 Ruddy Duck. To add to the discussion on the shortage of Godwits this winter I see John could only find three Black-tails ...+++

On his way home John called in at Alresford pond at dusk, finding the roost of 36 Cormorant but seeing no Hen Harriers and only 4 Egrets - not roosting but flying west (perhaps back to their alternative roost site near Borough Farm?)

I am confused by the recent reports of Iceland Gulls, and wonder if there may be three in the area. Richard Bonser's reports of a third winter bird in Southampton Water seem to have been echoed by other reports north and south of the Weston shore establishing the presence of a third winter bird. On Feb 2 Ivor McPherson saw an adult off Hill Head and I think this same bird was seen by Peter Raby at the Lee on Solent slipway today (Peter does not give an age but refers to a white winged gull as if it were an adult - a report from Selsey Bill on Jan 27 was also assumed by me to be an adult). The possibility of a third bird came about when Paul Winter yesterday (Feb 10) saw what he thought to be a first or second winter bird off the Meon Shore at Titchfield Haven. Peter Raby's sighting today was with an adult Med Gull, so it seems we once more may have a resident Med Gull at the Lee on Solent slipway (a few years ago there was a bird here that was as reliable as the one at the Milford carpark is now).

Ian Calderwood was at the Broadmarsh slipway yesterday and found the adult Ring-billed Gull present and correct, while Paul Norris saw the more elusive Common Sandpiper back at the nearby Budds Farm pools, and down at Gilkicker Lee Marshall saw a redhead Goosander was on the lake behind the fort. While at Broadmarsh Ian also saw one Black-necked Grebe, had a Peregrine fly over, and noticed a leucistic Black headed Gull with red bill and legs and black wing tips (but not the white Common Gull). The leucistic Herring Gull was still off Weston Shore yesterday - seen by Lee Marshall. Back in the Stokes Bay area Ian had one unidentified Diver and later Trevor Carpenter saw the regular Great Northern Diver off the Chilling shore (maybe it is heading back for Hill Head?)

Sussex news for yesterday had a Grey Phalarope off Selsey Bill as its highspot. Other news was of the Ruddy Shelduck still at Widewater near Worthing, and of birds in the West Wittering area where we seem to be back to just one Brant with one Pale-bellied Brent, 6 Ruff, 2 Little Stint and a Greenshank plus a Black-necked Grebe which is I think a newcomer here (the Langstone harbour flock seems to have broken up now and presumably this is another bird on its way north).

PLANTS:

SUN 17 FEB

Today I found four lovely blue flowers in half an acre of Lesser Periwinkle leaves thickly covering the ground in Pitts Copse, just across Park Lane from the Stansted Groves. In the Groves I was surprised to see how well developed were the leaves of many Early Purple orchids - Dogs Mercury there was aonly just starting to flower and none of the primrose buds were open

SAT 16 FEB

Those who know Langstone Mill will know that there is a narrow footpath leading north on the

west side of the Lymbourne stream before the path crosses the fields to join the Hayling Billy trail. Beside this narrow path are many dead elms but as you step over the stile into the fields there is one living English Elm on your right, and tonight this was covered with a mass of flowers in their tiny 'pincushion' bundles.

FRI 15 FEB

I am not familiar with the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood and did not know that Wild Daffodils grew there but I see from news today on the HWT website that they are just beginning to show at the site (whatever that may mean - I assume there are yellow buds but none yet open). Nearer to home Brian Fellows noted two things that I have not yet seen this year - firstly the small red female flowers among the Alder catkins that are now open everywhere, and secondly tiny tight flower buds appearing with the first leaves on at least one Elder bush.

WED 13 FEB

Cycling around the Broadmarsh area today I found a dozen Cherry Plum trees just coming into flower alongside Harts Farm Way just west of the bridge over the Hermitage Stream, and an even better display at the south end of Southmoor Lane by Budds Farm, but in between the two places (beside the Brockhampton Stream) I was surprised to find two or three blossoms still showing on a Blackthorn bush which had participated in the unprecedented winter flowering last December. The great mass of Blackthorn now shows no sign of flower buds and will not do so I think until well into March (it usually starts to flower when the Cherry Plum is over). Another plant which flowered in the winter and is now showing one fresh blue flower is the Lesser Periwinkle growing in a Grove Road garden. Beside the railway line at Bedhampton (just east of the Mill Lane road bridge) flowers were out on a small colony of wild Primroses that have flowered here for more than 20 years, gradually being choked out by ivy growing over the ground.

TUE 12 FEB

The first fresh spring Cow Parsley was flowering in Sinah Lane on Hayling today, marking another significant milestone in the progress of spring - only one plant so far but soon there will be masses. In my own garden the first Celandines were in flower.

MON 11 FEB

Ken Hearne tells me that the Wild Daffodils were starting to flower on Washington Common beside the A24 just north of the downs and Worthing when he was there yesterday - I wonder if it is worth a trip to West Dean Woods yet? A commoner but perhaps more beautiful spring flower was photographed in the Hurstwood area or Waterlooville on Saturday by Alan Cokes - this is the glorious Larch Rose that will eventually become yet another dull Larch cone. Alongside this female flower the bright green leaves were just starting to appear.

INSECTS:

SAT 16 FEB

A phone call today from a lady living in Farlington at the foot of Portsdown asked my advice on what to do with a Peacock butterfly which had been disturbed from hibernation in plastic plant pots under a water butt earlier in the day. She had put it in a conservatory and was preparing to feed it with sugar and water, but my advice to her was to put it as soon as possible in a cool, dry, dark outside building where it will remain at an even, cool temperature until the air become really warm in spring (when the insect must be able to find a way out of the building). If anyone would like to correct this advice I would be grateful to hear from them - in particular as to whether an insect that has been disturbed should be given sustenance before putting it back in a suitable hibernation place.

Genuine sightings of flying butterflies today were all of Red Admirals - at least five. The Petersfield group of Hampshire Wildlife Trust found two of them at the Pagham north walls, Chris Corrigan (from the RSPB Brighton office) found one on Thorney Island and the other two were at Brighton and Newick (between Haywards Heath and Uckfield). Also in Sussex yesterday were two more that I have not previously reported (at Brighton and Shoreham)

FRI 15 FEB

I had one of those unanswerable questions put to me this week, asking 'were the bees which I

saw round some Snowdrop flowers in the Test vally last Sunday early?'. The main difficulty is of course what sort of bees they were, or were they bees at all (they could have been the Dronefly Hoverflies which appear at this time of year (one has already asked me to let it out of my garage). If they were Honey bees, as I think the question implies, I suspect that some have already been on foraging trips from their hives in this warm winter but I would be glad to hear from any bee-keeper of their behaviour at this time of year. What I do know is that Richard Carpenter reports his first sighting of a Honey Bee in his Hill Head garden yesterday (Feb 14).

Butterfly sightings are now becoming a deluge with at least five Red Admirals being seen today despite freezingly cold north east winds (out of the wind, though, the sun is becoming hot as it rises higher in the sky). Philip Hack was one of those who saw a Red Admiral today (by the Test at Nursling) and Trevor Carpenter not only had one in his Fareham Garden but narrowly missed one with his car when driving towards the Meon at Funtley. Brian Fellows also saw two today when he was at Nutbourne, and Trevor says the one in his garden was the third sighting there this week. Other new sightings of Red Admirals reported yesterday were at Weston Shore in Southampton, Farlington Marshes (the second seen there), and in central Brighton.+++

Only two more Brimstone have been reported - Tony Hale had one in Romsey on Wednesday (Feb 13) and Rupert Broadway had one in Winchester on Tuesday. Also on Tuesday evening (Feb 12) the first Spring Usher moth came to Lee Marshall's moth trap at Gosport.

TUE 12 FEB

A Small Tortoiseshell was out in Derek Allnutt's garden at West Wellow today - pleasant to see but sadly likely to be one less in the number available to carry forward the species when spring really comes. Also out today at Great Funtley Farm, near the Meon between the M27 and the Botley Woods, Jenny Mallett saw a male Brimstone, not currently so endangered a species as the Tortoiseshell, and in Southampton Paul Winter saw a Red Admiral in the Shirley area. Paul also tells us of another Red Admiral that flew in through a window at Southampton General Hospital on Jan 24 but was put out again to join the queue at the A&E department (can't have anyone trying to beat the queues or getting in without triage assessment!) Another Red Admiral was seen in Cosham, Portsmouth, by Graham Roberts last Sunday (Feb 10)

MON 11 FEB

Paul Norris found a dozy Peacock butterfly in a warehouse in the Woolston area of Southampton this morning. He says >> It was in immaculate condition. I left in in a warmer area of our site, out of the wind and rain and it was soon warm enough to fly into the rafters where it presumably settled down again. << I wish the people who found a Small Tortoiseshell in their Andover house on Jan 12 (as reported on the Butterfly Conservation website) had taken an equally sympathetic approach to saving the insect's life but they (presumably with good intention) waited till the following morning and put the butterfly out of doors where it may or may not have found somewhere to resume its hibernation.

I don't want to bore anyone. but I must mention that yesterday Richard Carpenter saw yet another Red Admiral out in the Hill Head area near Titchfield Haven. Perhaps I can make that less boring by adding that as write this on the morning of Feb 12 I have just released from my garage the first hoverfly of the year - as you have probably guessed it was a Drone Fly (*Eristalis tenax*)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 16 FEB

At Keyhaven today Rosi Woods saw a Seal which she describes as a Grey Seal but I very much suspect that it was a Common Seal as Greys are extremely rare on the Hampshire coast whereas Common are (surprisingly) quite common. I suspect that there are still two in Langstone Harbour, but I have not heard any reports from Chichester Harbour for several months.

FRI 15 FEB

Want to earn a bob or two picking up Fox droppings? Then ring Prof Steven Harris of Bristol University at home this weekend on 0117-9287479 or at latest next Monday on 0117-9685585.

This plea for help reached me via the RSPB at Brighton and I know little of the details but I gather that Prof Harris has failed to recruit anyone in the Portsmouth to Brighton section of the south coast to gather Fox droppings for analysis as part of some project he is running. All I know is that there is some recompense for the work - probably a minimal fee and travel expenses - and that he must find someone by Monday 18 Feb.

THU 14 FEB

Last Saturday (Feb 9) I commented on Mike Wall's report of seeing 30 Roe Deer in country near Ibworth to the west of Basingstoke, and I have now had a look at the photos of them which he has on his website. He naturally didn't manage to get a group shot of 30 in one bunch but he did get a shot of six together which is one more than allowed by my personal rule of them that you never see Roe in groups other than single families, and these are at the most five in number (mum, dad and a maximum of three kids). Are Roe becoming herd animals like Fallow? Can you tell us of similar large bunches elsewhere? One extra item that I picked up from Mike's website is that there are at least some Muntjac in the same area, and he has seen at least two of these tiny deer clearly showing their long teeth. A less unusual but still interesting sighting of Roe is reported today by Tony Parkinson who lives in the new housing development at Whitely to the northwest of Fareham - he was driving home and had to make an emergency stop to avoid hitting a buck and doe crossing the road near Round Coppice (one piece of woodland that was not destroyed by the housing development and which, in a couple of months time, should have a great show of Early Purple Orchids (though I last saw them before any of the land had been built on and things may well have changed!))

This afternoon I made a quick check on the wet area of the Hayling Billy disused rail line north of the East Street bridge here in Havant and found a reasonable amount of frogspawn has now appeared, proving both that we still have a few frogs in the area around my house and that the work of constructing the new tarmac cycleway has not destroyed the habitat for them. When building the new cycleway it seemed that the construction workers were trying to drain the wetland by putting in new ditches alongside the tarmac pathway and by digging a large 'soak away' pit for the water, but as this soak away was not connected to any effective drain all that has happened is that the water in the area has a slightly different distribution to that which it had before the work, and the water displaced by the new path is now confined to a smaller area making a better pond than before. While here I noticed a fresh clump of Common Inkcap toadstools forcing their way up through the soil just south of the bridge where the cycleway meets the existing carpark - Roger Phillips gives the season for this toadstool as starting in spring so, with the similar find of this fungus recently made by Brian Fellows at Emsworth, we have another indication that spring is here.

TUE 12 FEB

Graham Roberts tells me that Toads began to arrive at the pond in his father's garden at Cosham, Portsmouth, on Sunday (Feb 10) and that one male was already clamped onto a female though no spawn was to be seen then.

MON 11 FEB

Toads do not normally head for their spawning ponds before March, so news from Charles Cuthbert at Alresford yesterday that there has been a mass arrival of Toads in his garden, and that they have already started to spawn there before any frogspawn has been laid by the Frogs that have been present for some time, is really unusual. Charles says the Toads are a month ahead of schedule. The fact that one of the male frogs has clamped itself on the back of a female Toad is less unusual (I believe that fish are regularly drowned by frogs which clasp them around the gills and prevent them from breathing) but I suppose it could start a hybrid race (unlikely!).

In view of Charles' news Steve Mansfield was wise to be cautious in announcing that, as he cycled to work at 7:15 this morning through allotments in the southern area of Alton, he saw a number of amphibians on the move. He assumes they were frogs but says that he did not have the time to stop and check them out so there is a chance that Toads are heading to spawning ponds up there - I wonder when David Parker will see the first crossing the road through Stansted Forest?

More reports of frogspawn continue - Richard Carpenter found it at Titchfield Haven yesterday and today Rita Brookhouse found some in her garden on Portsdown, while at Hurstwood in Waterlooville Alan Cokes reported lots of it present on Feb 9.

Hares traditionally become noticeable in March as they chase each other around large open fields. This year they are already attracting attention with reports of them near Basingstoke (see Mike Wall's sighting reported on Feb 9), in the Alresford area (Dave Pearson had one there yesterday) and in the Test Valley near Romsey where David Thelwell found 16 yesterday.

WEEK 06 FEB 4 - 10

BIRDS:

SUN 10 FEB

A morning cycle ride around north Hayling at high tide gave me spectacular views of some 5000 Dunlin in a 'smoke' over the Hayling Oysterbeds before they settled to closely carpet a small island. I could hear Ringed Plover and Turnstone but could not pick any of them out of the mass of Dunlin. Groups of less than twenty each of Shelduck, Wigeon, Lapwing and Merganser were present with slightly more Brent but I could not see any substantial roost of either Oystercatcher or Redshank. A single Great-crested Grebe and a pair of Goldeneye were the only other birds I saw in or around the pools. I did notice that the Friends of Langstone Harbour had been hard at work adding shingle to the northern end of the island on which the Little Terns nest in the lagoon, and I hope they have time for another major effort before the Terns come back as the area where the birds prefer to nest (probably because it has more vegetation to afford cover) has not yet been reached by the gravel spreaders (and it is the lowest part of the island, and most prone to flooding of nests built there). On land a Kestrel hunted over the adjacent rough grass field and a Jay was planting an oak on Stoke Common.+++

In my garden this morning Mistle Thrush song could be heard along with Song Thrush and another Mistle Thrush was singing on Hayling where Greenfinch could be heard practising their song in several places though none as yet have been seen by me making their butterfly like figure of eight song flights above the chosen nest territory. Late in the afternoon at Langstone I heard a Chaffinch also practising - the third I have heard since I heard my first of the year yesterday at Emsworth, ten days after Brian Fellows heard the first on Jan 31, and two days after Jim Berry heard one at Stoughton.

Far better song, that of a Woodlark, was heard this morning by Mark Litjens in the northern New Forest where several Great Spotted Woodpeckers were drumming. Less vocal were 5 or more Hawfinch (Mark does not mention if he detected them by their explosive 'pzik' calls - something which I still have to learn to recognize!), a Peregrine, a Great Grey Shrike and 60+ Fieldfare.

Peter Morrison was at Hook (Warsash) this morning and found a single Brant on the fields near Beam Cottage in Hook Park (I think this is the first sighting of one in the Hook area this winter and wonder where it has come from). While in that area Peter upped the Little Owl count from the two seen recently by Richard Carpenter to three seen by himself today. Another item in today's news is that the immature Iceland Gull (thought to be a third winter) was once more in Southampton Water off the Weston shore where it was seen today by Andy Collins, along with a single Red-throated Diver and an adult Med Gull. Finally for today John Firth reports a sighting of some Golden Plover over his home in Romsey, maybe indicating that the Highwood Lane flock of previous winters has just returned there.

SAT 09 FEB

After a period with so few Godwit sightings (either by myself or reported on the internet) that I was wondering what had happened to these birds the increase in numbers at Titchfield Haven which has been reported in the past few days has now been matched by reports from Hayling Island, Pagham Harbour and Cams Bay in Portsmouth Harbour. The first of these reports is of 530 Black-tailed Godwit in Pagham Harbour on Feb 6, and the second is of 185 Black-tails seen today by Trevor Carpenter in Cams Bay at the mouth of Fareham Creek. Trevor says this by far the highest count he has had there, though it may be accounted for by just a local

movement in Portsmouth Harbour (on Jan 22 Dennis Bill told me there were 90 at Cams Bay and another 90 in Paulsgrove Lake north of Portchester Castle). The third sudden increase was reported today from Black Point on Hayling Island where Brian Fellows upped his previous maximum count (for this winter) of just 8 Bar-tailed Godwit to 121. These may all be local birds gathering together to be noticed by birders, but I suspect there has been a movement north from the continent.

Steve Mansfield was in the Alresford area today and saw the first two Herons back at their nests in a Cedar tree in Arlebury Park to the west of Arlesford Pond, presumably indicating that at least a couple of pairs are thinking of nesting already. Interestingly, although Herons are social nesters I understand that they spread the actual time at which each pair uses their nest over a period from February to May, a practice thought to make it easier for each pair to find the extra fish they need for their young (if they all nested together the local fish stocks might not be able to supply the sudden increase in demand when the young were growing. Two other signs of spring noticed by Steve were a pair of copulating Mallard and a male Mandarin in full finery displaying it to the Mallards for lack of a female Mandarin. The flock of 16 Barnacle Geese which turned up in the Alresford area on Jan 23 are still there, grazing in one of the water meadows. One female Stonechat is still in the area and the flock of Golden Plover are still based on fields to the north of Alresford - Steve saw 60 of them on the wing.+++

Last night (Feb 8) Dave Pearson was at Alresford Pond and found 32 Egrets and 35 Cormorant roosting there with the two ring-tail Hen Harriers still coming there for the night. In view of Lee Marshall's recent sighting of a rooftop 'flock' of Grey Wagtail in Gosport I am interested to see that Dave saw 6 Grey Wagtail at Alresford though he does not say if they were together.

Will Walmsley got to Romsey in time to see at least four Hawfinch still visiting the Mercer's Way/Canal site today and went on to walk up the canal to Fishlake Meadows where he had a really extraordinary sighting. He says >> As I was watching a flock of finches, almost completely made up of Linnets with a few Chaffinches thrown in, a rush of air above me alerted me to an adult Peregrine which proceeded to hunt the finch flock. On its final swoop it managed to catch two Linnets at the same time, one in each talon. << This sounds like an all-time first for Peregrine behaviour - Will does not say if the Peregrine was a male or female, but the only sense I can make of it is that this was a male demonstrating his prowess to a watching female, trying to persuade her that if he could perform this trick he would be able to bring her, and any offspring, all the food they might need when in the nest.

Sussex news for today includes another Leach's Petrel seen at Selsey Bill, along with an Iceland Gull (assume an adult though no age is given). More regular sightings at the Bill were of a Little Gull, a Slavonian Grebe and 2 Great Northern Divers. Also in the Sussex news is a report of four Crossbill seen at Coates Common to the west of Pulborough. Here in Hampshire Bob Marchant had another Great Northern Diver off Hook (Warsash) today so it sounds as if the bird that was off Hill Head for some time has moved west and is staying near the mouth of the River Hamble. A Slavonian Grebe and an adult Kittiwake were also off Hook and a Cetti's Warbler was heard in the Hook Lake reeds.

In Langstone Harbour Lee Marshall visited Broadmarsh today and found the adult Ring-billed Gull still at the mouth of the Hermitage Stream with a single adult winter Med Gull. Also seen from here were flocks of 13+ Little Grebe, 39+ Great-crested Grebe, 25+ Merganser and 16+ Goldeneye, while two Short-eared Owls could be seen over North Binniss island where they were joined by a Merlin which flew out over Broadmarsh. Also here were a flock of some 30 Linnets (based here since Jan 13, I think) and a Rock Pipit. Earlier in the day Lee had been at Stokes Bay where 9 Pintail flew west and some 30 Auks went past. Just in Portsmouth Harbour the winter flock Little Grebe in Haslar Creek (probably in Stoke Lake) numbered 13 and at the north end of the built up Gosport foreshore there were 9 Black-tailed Godwit (possibly a remnant of an influx that has brought a flock of 185 to Cams Bay - see Feb 10 above)

Among other news from the Havant area today is an account from Jim Berry of the Havant Wildlife Group's outing to the Stoughton/Up Marden area north of the source of the River Ems - their most interesting sighting was of five Buzzards all soaring over Blinkard Copse close to Up Marden (they had a sixth Buzzard over Inholmes Wood to the south).

Way to the south Brian Fellows and I were both involved in a low tide count of Chichester Harbour and I have already mentioned Brian's most interesting find (the 121 Bar-tailed Godwit at Black Point). Also in that area he recorded 2353 Dunlin, 44 Ringed Plover and 34 Knot but only 6 Grey Plover. A Peregrine sat peacefully on a grassy island off Tournerbury Wood, and there were 49 Shelduck plus 166 Brent in the area.

In the north west corner of the harbour I walked the section from Langstone to Emsworth, finding most of the mud bare of birds (no doubt because of the strong wind to which it was exposed). Around 180 Golden Plover were still prepared to roost there and nearly 100 Shelduck were feeding on the mud along with around 320 Brent plus a few Curlew. Other than one flock of nearly 200 Dunlin there were no other waders to be seen other than half a dozen each of Ringed and Grey Plover - hardly an Oystercatcher to be seen. There was also a surprising absence of gulls - only about 300 Black-headed and 30 Great-blackbacks with one Lesser and my only interesting note was of my first Chaffinch song of the year, heard at Emsworth.+++

In the morning I was at the IBM Lake for the Portsmouth Harbour high tide WeBS count and again found few birds - even the Canada Geese seemed to be down to just 5. No Snipe, no Great-crested Grebe and no Swans (I doubt they will nest here this year as the reeds have been much cut back exposing their preferred site). The male Kestrel was present and behaving as if he was guarding his territory though I did not see the female. One interesting sight was of a Heron flying off with a Frog in its bill.

FRI 08 FEB

There were at least 600 Black-tailed Godwit in the Titchfield Haven area today according to Richard Carpenter so it seems that numbers are continuing to rise towards the expected level of at least 1000 before they start to return to Iceland. Richard also comments that there have been no Bittern sightings there for a few days, which does not mean that no Bittern are present as the high water level gives them lots of hunting area within the cover of the reed beds. Peter Morrison today tells us that one of the two Bittern that have been at Titchfield Haven this winter is supposedly carrying a radio-transmitter fitted by the RSPB before it flew here, so it should be easy to locate (if its battery has not run out!). I have already mentioned the sighting of a Bittern at the Swanwick Nature Reserve last Saturday (Feb 2), and I now hear that there was another Bittern seen at the Itchen Valley Country Park (just north of the M27) on Feb 3, so maybe one of the Titchfield birds has decided to follow the M27 westward (but far more likely this is a different bird)

Brian Fellows took a look around the Emsworth ponds today and found the first four Merganser had come onto the fresh water as they tend to do at this time of year - maybe they are getting fed up with the salt water and are hankering for the inland waters where they will soon be nesting? Another change in the scenery was the presence of the first Cormorant since last October on the Slipper Mill Pond, but I would not read too much into that move - it probably spotted some fish as it was flying over and dropped in for a snack.

Another possible sign of birds moving north from the coast was the presence of 377 Golden Plover on the Wide Lane playing fields near the M27 at Eastleigh today (they could have been there through the winter but this is the first report I have heard of them there for several months.

THU 07 FEB

An adult Iceland Gull was seen at Hill Head today by Ivor McPherson - maybe this is one recently reported in Pagham Harbour but it must be a different bird from the third winter bird seen off Hook and at the Weston Shore in Southampton Water recently if it was correctly aged. Not a newcomer is the Portsmouth Harbour Brant which was seen again today at Frater Lake by Ian Calderwood.

The Hampshire Wildlife Trust website today has new reports from Bob Chapman at Farlington Marshes and from Jess Pain at the Lower Test reserve. Bob reports that Blackbird is in regular song now at his reserve and was joined by Greenfinch for the first time today. Also at Farlington a Short-eared Owl is a fairly regular sight, but it is based on North Binniss island and does not visit the marshes every day (though it did come over recently when the high tide washed it out of its preferred roost!) Still no numbers on the Brent this winter but Bob does have 1000 Wigeon on his reserve and several Pale-bellied Brent may be seen by visitors. Out in the harbour just three Black-necked Grebe have been seen from the reserve and Bob

suggests that the total in the harbour is now down from the 17 present before Christmas to about 12. At the Lower Test marshes Jess Pain reports that there are still 28 Water Pipits, 4 Green and 1 Common Sandpiper, plus the Firecrest, and that the number of Jack Snipe has risen to three. Last Sunday (Feb 3) saw a visit of a Hawfinch to the reserve.

Barry Collins has been down with the flu recently but I am glad to hear that he has recovered enough to check the original Egret roost at Thorney Deeps and last night (Feb 6) found 43 Egrets using it. Elsewhere in Chichester Harbour yesterday two Brant were reported at West Wittering along with 3 Pale-bellied Brent, 7 Ruff, 8 Little Stint and a Greenshank, and at Church Norton the number of Med Gulls had risen to 6 with a single Glaucous Gull.

Going back to Feb 5 I see that my last update missed Brian Fellows' news from Portsmouth, where he did find the 'Baffins gang' of feral geese still at Baffins Pond (though they flew to Titchfield Haven next day). On Milton Common Brian heard his first Little Grebe give its whinnying call and saw the Swan pair back at their regular nest site. On Feb 4 the SOS website tells us that a female Garganey was at the Pulborough Brooks RSPB reserve (with the Ruddy Shelduck still at Widewater, Lancing near Shoreham)

WED 06 FEB

Ron King was at Titchfield Haven today and is the first to report another substantial increase in the flock of Black-tailed Godwit there - he says the number was over 500 but that is still only about half the number expected. Ron also reports the return of the Baffins pond geese (10 Barnacles and a Snow Goose - he does not mention the hybrid Bar-Head that is usually with them) as well as the excellent views that the male Marsh Harrier continues to give. An unusual sight in the centre of Gosport today was witnessed by Lee Marshall who saw a small flock of up to six Grey Wagtail on rooftops in the town - I am not surprised at their presence in the town or on rooves (we have been seeing this in Havant for a couple of years now) but this is the first report I have heard of Grey Wagtails in a 'flock'. Lee also found 3 Med Gulls in Haslar Lake near the main town centre carpark, one of them having a partial summer hood. Another 'flock' of birds that we did not associate with town areas until this winter were 8 Hawfinch still to be seen at the Romsey site when Mike Rafter was there today - at least one Brambling was also still there.

Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today and remarks on the presence of a single Stonechat - am I right in thinking that the winter birds have already dispersed from the coastal sites? Or is it that no one bothers to remark on them? A single Buzzard flying northwest along the coast was further confirmation that they are no longer unusual along the coastal plain, even in winter. The regular Kingfisher was seen at Brownwich Pond, along with 17 Tufted Duck and a Pochard (and there were 3 Pintail at Titchfield Haven).

The first chance for some time of counting the Egrets using the Langstone Wade Court night roost came this evening with lighter winds and a clearer sky than we have had for a good fortnight. The birds began to arrive about 17:20 and the first 30 did not go to the trees but settled on the wet meadow which was alive with Teal and Moorhen. The next to arrive went directly to the trees, and at about 17:30 there was a mass uplift of the birds from the meadow into the trees. The total was at least 47 birds. On the way home I heard two different Blackbirds singing in the dusk, and I reckon this marks the start of their general spring song (as opposed to the odd bird like the one in my front garden that has been singing about a quarter of an hour before dawn since Jan 10 - this is the bird which not only thrives on fresh apple that I put out for it but also has a go at the nut feeder and was this morning seen avidly pecking up the bird seed I put on the tarmac drive for the sparrows).+++

Going back to the Egrets I have just had a further note from Charles Cuthbert saying that the Alresford Egrets seem to have got over the shock of the recent duck shoot and last night (Feb 5) some 30 of them flew back to their preferred roost at Alresford Pond. Charles also comments on their feeding behaviour, saying that until just recently he has only seen them feeding in small groups at watery sites (cress beds and streams), but, he says, >> on two recent dates (2nd and 4th February) I have watched flocks of around thirty egrets feeding together in open grassland at dusk, prior to roosting here in Alresford. On both dates the conditions were particularly wet, following prolonged rain. The birds were very actively moving around in a loose flock, frequently picking at the ground, as if eating earthworms or similar prey. They seemed quite animated, and at times they were even running, with two or more birds

apparently squabbling for the same food item! << My own observations have shown that most of the Egrets coming to roost remain out of sight at a distance until it is almost dark and then fly straight in to the roost, giving any predators the minimum chance of spotting them and seeing where they are going. Any Egrets returning early to the roost area, while it is still light, (perhaps because the tide is high and they have been driven from their feeding area) will normally form small subroost groups, either on the ground or in nearby trees and these groups do little but stand around and sometimes preen (they are always reluctant to enter the main roost until some magic signal is given just as it is getting dark) but in the past week or so I have noticed the same behaviour as Charles reports - e.g. this evening as I cycled towards the roost I found 14 Egrets in the wet pony fields north of Wade Court (out of sight of the roost) actively searching for food while waiting to complete their journey. Whether this is opportunism (the worms being driven to the surface by the underground water, or churned up by the horses hooves) or whether it is hunger (not having found enough food earlier in the day) I cannot say. This flock feeding in wet fields is not restricted to the evening but is a continuation of what many of them have been doing in other fields further from the roost during the day.

TUE 05 FEB

Workhouse Lake in Gosport lives up to the impression given by its name (a rather squalid place hidden away in the backstreets - no offence intended to those who live there, and the place is of sufficient wildlife interest to have had the personal support of David Bellamy once given to local residents who opposed change there) but it does turn up some interesting birds as Ron King found when he saw a Black-throated Diver there today. This creek is a cul-de-sac branch of the main inlet running west from the entrance of Portsmouth Harbour through Haslar and Stoke Lakes to Anglesey Lake, and the far end of both Workhouse and Anglesey Lakes have dams which allow the tide to overtop them but which retain water (and any fish that have come in on the tide) when the tide ebbs, creating small natural 'fish tanks' which inevitably attract fish-eating birds. Goosanders and Divers are not uncommon in the bigger Anglesey Lake, and this is not the first winter in which a diver has been seen in Workhouse Lake - well worth checking these places as you are guaranteed extremely close views of any birds that do turn up.+++

I am not aware that there have ever been any winter Shearwater sightings on the Hampshire coast until Jan 29 last month when Gary Calderwood reported one off Stokes Bay but was unable to identify the species. Then on Feb 1 Peter Raby had another sighting of what he thought was a Sooty Shearwater, and today Trevor Carpenter had a third sighting of a similar bird flying away from him into the morning sun, making it impossible to be certain of the species but Trevor thinks he saw more white than a Sooty would show ... In commenting on it John Clark raises the possibility that it was a Mediterranean Shearwater, and in view of the recent upsurge in sightings of various species of Mediterranean birds I wonder if these Shearwaters will soon join the list of Mediterranean and Yellow-legged Gulls (and Egrets!) that are now regularly seen here. If so the Calderwood family deserve a plaque on the wall of their house to commemorate the first sighter of a new invader!+++

Among Trevor's other sightings this morning were one diver, more than 20 Kittiwake and maybe 21 auks. At the west end of the Solent Mike Rafter at Hurst had 13 auks, 5 Kittiwakes, a Little Gull and a Bonxie plus the Milford carpark regular Med Gull. Between these two places Richard Carpenter was out in the Hook/Warsash area and tells me that the regular Little Owl at Beam Cottage in Hook Park was joined on his list by a second bird in Workmans Lane some distance to the east (where Chilling Lane reaches the sea by the Solent Breezes caravan site). One of the two owls was rather noisy.

A flock of perhaps 300 Brent on one of the Hayling fields growing cereals between West Lane and Langstone Harbour was the first I have seen on these fields this winter. Admittedly I only drive down West Lane once a week, but in recent winters I have become accustomed to seeing a flock of this size on one of the West Lane fields more or less every week. The same lack of Brent on fields also applies to the Warblington farm fields here on the mainland - in recent winters there would have been Brent (over 1000 at times) on the grass fields west of the cemetery, and more on other fields of the farm, but this winter I have just seen two small flocks (43 on one occasion, only 20 on another) on the southeast most field of the farm. I have seen

huge flocks in flight over the Northney and north Hayling fields, and have seen flocks flying to the Farlington playing fields, but there does seem to have been a dramatic change in their behaviour in this respect - maybe they are all concentrating on the places such as the grassland set aside for them near Baffins pond in Portsmouth, maybe there are a lot fewer Brent in Langstone and Chichester harbours, or maybe mild weather has kept the eelgrass and other weeds growing in the harbour mud to supply more of their food?

A couple of late news items may still be of interest. Both relate to last Saturday (Feb 2) when Richard Ford was working his East Hampshire patch between Sleaford and the southern edge of the Alice Holt Forest, finding a flock of over 350 Fieldfare with Redwings and other thrushes among them. Also in this area were some 100 Skylarks, 30 Yellowhammer and 5 Reed Buntings. Later Richard watched up to 200 Fieldfare flying over Woolmer Pond, more than four miles south of Sleaford - maybe the same flock on the move? The other Saturday sighting was of an adult Yellow-legged Gull at Weston Shore on Southampton Water by Richard Bonser. An even earlier sighting was noted by Mike Rafter who, during the RSPB garden birdwatch on Jan 26/27, had his first garden Siskins on the peanut feeder in his Romsey garden - worth noting as February is traditionally the only month on which garden birdwatchers can expect to see Siskin as they come to garden feeders to build up their strength for the return journey northward. (Of course some lucky birders like Colin Allen at Hythe have New Forest resident Siskin popping over the garden fence at any time of year!)

MON 04 FEB

Titchfield Haven and Fleet Pond in Hampshire, and Rye Harbour in Sussex, produce regular Bittern sightings each winter but even at these hotspots the birds can remain hidden for days at a time and most sightings come from people who know exactly where and when to look for e.g. the 30 second glimpse of a bird flying from its feeding area to its roost at dusk. So if it is difficult to spot a Bittern even when you know that one or more are in a patch of reeds how many more Bitterns pass unseen in places where no one has thought to look? This thought is occasioned by two recent sightings in places where Bittern seems a most unlikely find - on Saturday Tony Parkinson saw one fly off from the lake alongside the Swanwick study centre by the Hamble river and today the lunch time business in Chris Leaver's riverside pub at Fordingbridge was interrupted when his wife drew his attention to a Bittern openly searching the pub garden for a left over packet of crisps. Another similar sighting here in Havant a few years ago came from a lady driving at midday along the narrow part of Prospect Lane north of Leigh Park - she had to swerve to avoid a Bittern standing motionless on the edge of the tarmac with its bill pointing skyward in a vain attempt to make itself invisible (that bird had been regularly disturbed by dog walkers in nearby damp fields for a week or so before this encounter).

Another unexpected encounter with a much commoner bird occurred in the Meon valley this morning when Will Walmsley was woken, not by the alarm clock that gets him up at 06:30 on schooldays, but by the calls of a Little Owl in his garden. Not only was this a much better start to a Monday morning than he could have expected, but it seems it was the first time he had ever heard this bird's calls - a great start to the week. I hope that the bird is a youngster looking to set up a new territory and decides to do so in Will's garden at Shedfield, but I suppose it could be a bird having to look for a new source of worms and other creepy crawlies as a result of its normal hunting ground having become waterlogged?

Another first for the year in terms of bird calls was recorded today by Richard Carpenter at Hook Park near Warsash where 100+ Redwing had gathered in the trees and were making that lovely chattering murmur which I (perhaps wrongly) usually refer to as subsong and which I take to be an indication of the rising hormone level in the birds that will very soon send them north to nest. Nearby in the Hook Lake valley south of Warsash church where one can walk along a pleasant footpath at treetop level (the trees growing in a deep valley carved by the stream) Richard had good views of more than fifty Goldfinch with a couple of Siskin feeding on the Alder cones

While in this area Richard Carpenter checked out the old Hook scrape where the water level is very high and few dabbling duck remain though there were three Gadwall as well as three each of Pochard and Tufted Duck that are prepared to dive for their dinner. By chance Trevor Carpenter was also at this site and saw a single Slavonian Grebe offshore, but he was more

excited by a fly past of a white winged gull going north into Southampton Water - although he could not be certain he thought it might be a third winter Iceland Gull, and that would tie in with the sighting of such a bird at Weston Shore by Richard Bonser on Jan 13, and with a sighting (only a brief distant glimpse) yesterday (Feb 3) in the Eastleigh/Chandlers Ford area by Simon Ingram of what he could only describe as a large white-winged immature gull that he guessed was a second winter bird. Simon says he could not rule out an albino form of some other gull species (maybe the leucistic adult Herring Gull seen by Richard Bonser at Woolston on Jan 31?)

When we see Egrets night after night flying long distances to roost together in a particular group of trees one gets the impression that these 'magic spots' are the only places where the birds are prepared to spend the night, and this impression is partly based on the experience of the first ten years in which the birds existed in any number in southern England and (outside the breeding season) they all returned to a particular patch of trees on the banks of the Great Deeps at Thorney Island, numbers there building up to close on 300 before something (probably overcrowding plus disturbance from joggers) caused them to desert the roost (one night they were there, the next the roost was empty and the massive single roost had split up with birds moving to several other sites). Even when the Thorney roost appeared to be the only one in existence the numbers there varied from month to month and it was clear that some birds must be spending the night in other places though these other roosts were not found. More recently I have come to the opinion that these birds are almost as fickle in their roosting habits as in their feeding places - with both feeding and roosting places there are places which they use regularly, but nevertheless the birds seem prepared to change their apparently long established habits overnight. The recent shooting incident at Alresford Pond is a case in point - one might have expected the birds, violently disturbed just as they were settling down for the night, to scatter over the countryside and take some time to re-establish a new communal roost, but the very next night they were all together again in another suitable site a couple of miles away. My current thought is that when they spread out over the countryside during the day to feed in small groups they note possible roosting places, and when forced to leave an established site one or more of the birds will lead the others to a place that they know of from daytime roosting. So I am not surprised to hear that another roost site has been discovered in the lower Itchen valley (private land, so no location given) where 18 birds have been seen at night, and I suggest that places such as the trees overhanging the Meon at Soberton where John Shillitoe saw 17 birds day-roosting last Saturday (Feb 2) should be checked out again at dusk from time to time - as with the Wade Court trees at Langstone which for years had been a day roost only it suddenly became a night roost in October 2001 and has remained so (in today's wind and rain some 30 birds were huddled in the field adjacent to the roost (which, at all the night roosts that I know of, they never seem to enter until it is almost dark).

John Chapman recently asked if Long-tailed Tits had taken to visiting peanut feeders in other gardens than his at Langstone where he had just noticed them doing so, and I have certainly seen them doing so here in Havant for several years. In my turn I would like to ask people if they have Blackbirds pecking at hanging nut feeders? The bigger Blackbird cannot get into the metal cage which prevents the squirrels from attacking the feeder that hangs in my back-garden, but the older, uncaged, feeder in my front garden hangs close to a branch on which a Blackbird regularly perches to peck away at the nuts when the squirrel is not curled around the feeder sharpening his teeth on the metal grille that keeps it from the nuts (nice shiny metal now!)

PLANTS:

SUN 10 FEB

In Jan 2001 Dogs Mercury was flowering in Pook Lane near Warblington Church on New Year's Day - this year have looked several times and only seen a mass of last year's leaves still looking fresh, but this evening I at last found some new plants with male flowers, though everywhere flowering was about a month later than usual. The first flowers I heard of were not found until Jan 29 this year. Earlier today I had been cycling on Hayling and found the patch of Sweet Violets at the gateway from the Hayling Coastal path into the field adjoining the

Oysterbeds has started to flower prolifically, and further down the coastal path two Primrose flowers were out in the tiny copse between the path and the harbour shore (due west of Daw Lane)

SAT 09 FEB

At the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth this morning I found my first Coltsfoot flowers of the year, almost treading on one and then seeing there were three there. Also at the IBM site I found my first Grey Poplar catkins and saw pollen filling the air around a Yew branch when I shook it. Nearby a female Goat Willow was showing its green catkins and along the banks of the canal were not only Kingcup flowers but also those of the Bulbilifer subspecies of Lesser Celandine. Another first was only seen in passing as I drove up the old A3 onto Portsdown - here there are masses of leaves of Alexanders by the roadside and several plants had creamy 'cauliflower like' flower heads which I took to be open for business.

FRI 08 FEB

A real sign of spring was found at Emsworth Marina today by Brian Fellows when he came on the bright yellow flowers of Yellow Rocket (or Winter Cress). Another bright flower which I have not seen for a month or so was the blue of Green Alkanet, and yesterday this was flowering in the East Pallant here in Havant as a pavement crack garden escape.

WED 06 FEB

The extraordinary winter flowering of Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Cherry Plum is now over and (after the promise seen yesterday at West Town Station on Hayling) today the flowers on the long established Cherry Plum trees which form the arch of the 'tunnel' at the southern end of Wade Lane at Langstone had started to open.

More plants on the verge of flowering were a mass of Opposite Leave Golden Saxifrage seen today by Richard Carpenter at Holly Hill north of Warsash. I don't know of a site for them there but can imagine there is plenty of opportunity for them in the damp areas around the path winding down through the woodland towards Wendelholme and the banks of the Hamble.

TUE 05 FEB

At West Town station on Hayling today I had a look around this southern end of the old Hayling Billy line for any Primroses in the ditches of the adjoining field but saw no sign of them yet. What I did see was a tremendous mass of flower buds on Cherry Plum trees planted at what would once have been the northern end of the station platform, and on nearby grass a plant of Summer Snowflake or some look-alike already had three flowers open. Other signs of spring which I noticed when walking along Mill Lane at Langstone yesterday were my first flower on an apparently wild Primrose and Sweet Violets in flower where they are escaping from one garden. At Langstone Pond many of the Alder catkins are now open.

MON 04 FEB

The glorious tiny yellow flowers of Opposite-leaved Golden Saxifrage have started to open in the Hook Valley where a stream runs down from Fleet End past Warsash Church to Hook Lake by the sea. The flowers were seen there today by Richard Carpenter and he will no doubt soon enjoy more of them at the Curbridge nature reserve on the Hamble river. If anyone knows where I can see the lovely golden mats of flower created by these plants in damp places in the Havant area please tell me! The only site that I am aware of is in the Purbrook Heath area beside the Pur-brook just upstream of Widley Walk road in Alder Moor Coppice.

With the current massive early outburst of male Hazel catkins I was today discussing the chances of our seeing any Hazelnuts later in the year as I feared that none of the later opening female flowers would be open before the gales had blown every male catkin to the ground. Then, in the weekly newsletter which Brian Fellows prepares for the Brook Meadow conservation group in Emsworth, I read that at least some of the tiny red female flowers could be seen on trees there

Also in the Brook Meadow newsletter I read that Havant Borough are supplying up to 30 Alder Buckthorn saplings for the group to plant along the edge of the meadow and thus encourage more of the Brimstone butterflies to flourish there. Another effort to stem the decline of some butterflies, principally I think the White Letter Hairstreak, is being made by members of the south east Hampshire members group of Butterfly Conservation, led by Andrew Brookes, who have been out on the northern slopes of Portsdown this weekend preparing to plant elm trees to

supplement a group of 70 year old elms which has some escaped the ravages of Dutch Elm disease. Unfortunately their efforts involved the removal of some ivy, and maybe this was the reason that they enjoyed the sight of the first Comma butterfly of the year on the wing - I doubt the butterfly shared their enjoyment.

INSECTS:

SUN 10 FEB

The Sussex Ornithological Soc website today carries a report of yet another Red Admiral sighting -- this one was seen yesterday (Feb 9) at Coates Common a little to the west of Pulborough. Much more interesting is a report published on the UK Moths newsgroup and passed to me by Lee Marshall. The original message came from Martin Honey who is in charge of moths at the London Natural History Museum and tells us that a Humming-bird Hawkmoth which had been seen hibernating at Plymouth railway station on Nov 9 last autumn was still there on Feb 7 this week. Sounds as if it has a better chance of surviving the winter than the one seen flying at St Ives near Huntingdon in Cambridgeshire recently (see my entry for Jan 27).

MON 04 FEB

The first Comma of the year to take wing was seen on Portsdown last Saturday (Feb 2) in circumstances described in the following note from Andrew Brookes, leader of the south east Hampshire group of Butterfly Conservation, who writes >> On Saturday, whilst our Group was clearing scrub from the old chalkpit at Pigeonhouse Farm on the north slope of Ports Down, we saw a Comma on the wing [just possibly disturbed by our activities]. The clearance was to prepare the site for the planting of 10 disease-resistant elms later this week, to complement the clump of 70 year old elm that has miraculously survived there. <<

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 09 FEB

Jim Berry tells me that when the Havant Wildlife Group were taking their regular Saturday morning outing in the Up Marden area (just north of the source of the River Ems near Stoughton) today they came on a bunch (I understand that is the technical term for a group of deer!) of 16 Fallow Deer with an all white doe among them - even the black line outlining its 'target' (i.e. its backside) was invisible. It is not often that white deer are seen but there is a white strain which persists among the local population. (The last time I saw one on its own I thought it was a goat!). Jim says that the bunch were behaving very playfully and if anyone can suggest why that might be would like to know.

More deer were seen on the Wootton area west of Basingstoke today by Mike Wall along with 2 Hares. When I read Mike's report of 30 Roe Deer I thought there must be a mistake and he had seen a group of Fallow deer, but he does not say that they were all together and I can well believe that there are 30 or more spread out in the country that he probably traversed on his bike.

At Alresford Pond on the evening of Feb 8 Dave Pearson watched a bat on the wing, and in the Up Marden area today Jim Berry found a few fungi including Silver-leaf fungus which kills fruit trees and other members of the Rose family. This looks superficially like the Many-zoned Polypore (which has a couple of other look-alikes) but the fruiting body of Silver-leaf has a coating of white woolly hairs in concentric bands on its upper surface. Another fungus that they found which I am not familiar with, and which perhaps looks a bit like a grey lichen, is *Ustulina deusta*. Two others which were found are perhaps commoner, both being generally found on Beech - the bracket *Ganoderma adspersum* and the very different one called *Diatrype disciformis* which causes twigs to come out in a measles rash of tiny black spots.

THU 07 FEB

On the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website Jess Pain tells us Frogspawn appeared at the Lower Test Marshes on Feb 4, and that Pipistrelles have been seen in the air with Water Shrew and Weasel on the ground. Here in Emsworth Brian Fellows yesterday found Common Inkcaps flourishing on a tree stump at Brook Meadow - maybe a bit unseasonal, but given the high temperatures how can a poor fungus tell what the date is?

WED 06 FEB

More news of first frogspawn sightings continues to roll in, with Lyndon Hatfield's north Fareham garden pond claiming equal first place alongside Theo and Graham Roberts' Cosham garden - in both the first appeared on Jan 31. In the Havant and Emsworth area spawn was first seen on Feb 2, both at Emsworth's Brook Meadow and in Mike Collins home to the north of Havant. I have also had a phone call from a lady in the Widley area on the north slope of Portsdown wondering if anyone would like to have some of her garden's frogspawn - if anyone wants to establish a colony in their garden I can put you in touch with her, but in general it is nowadays thought not to be a good thing to move frogspawn around for fear of spreading the disease(s) which continue to cause the death of large numbers of frogs.

Another reminder of mortality comes from Mike Collins who has recently seen two Badger corpses along the Havant to Chichester road through Funtington (they were in the Aldsworth to Marlpit Lane section). I think that many Badgers are involved in road accidents as they follow their established routes across the countryside, but it could be that these two were out seeking new places to feed as a result of waterlogged fields driving them from the places where they normally find the worms they feed on.

MON 04 FEB

Just when we thought that Sussex was first with this year's frogspawn (see entry for Feb 2) a note comes in from Graham Roberts to say that the first four clumps had appeared on Jan 31 in the wonderful wildlife pond in his father's garden next door to where he lives in Cosham, Portsmouth. By Feb 2 at least 26 clumps could be seen and the local Heron was in the garden hoping to get his share (probably of the frogs rather than the spawn!).

WEEK 05 JAN 28 - FEB 3

BIRDS:

SUN 03 FEB

Brian Clarke was today walking at Chidham, on the north shore of Chichester Harbour, with a group of Hampshire Wildlife Trust members from Petersfield when they had one of the most unusual birding sights that I have ever heard of. Flying up the harbour, angrily pursued by a host of gulls, came a Bonxie (the dreaded Great Skua normally feared by gulls and humans alike for its vicious and ruthless attacks on them). In Brian's words >> It appeared exhausted (I expect the gales had been too much for it). After a while it settled down in a ditch, with its wings spread out, rather in the way that I've seen swans do on hot days - I guess trying to cool themselves...though this bird was clearly just knackered. When the gulls had gone the skua hauled and straggled its way to the top of the ditch, wings all over the place... and lay there for several minutes. Then it lifted off again and the gulls returned...so it put down on the edge of the nearby field. As we were watching it there, three roe deer came up out of the scrub between the bird - which was rarely more than 50 yards away throughout the whole episode - and us. They stopped and turned and looked at us for maybe 15 seconds, with the great bird in clear view on the ground beyond them - before casually bounding away. We had the skua in full, clear view, on and off for maybe 20 minutes. << Brian does not say if the Skua eventually flew off, but I have the impression that they left it in the field for someone braver than themselves to catch and carry to Brent Lodge and the tender care of Penny Cooper.

Despite the relatively small numbers of Auks and Divers passing through the Solent compared to the hundreds seen off the Sussex coast recently Stokes Bay in Hampshire is now two up on the Sussex birders with the Sooty Shearwater already reported (see Feb 1) and today the first Little Auk that I have heard of in the huge mass of Guillemots and Razorbills. was seen by Ian and Gary Calderwood - and it was flying east towards Sussex! Also seen by Ian and Gary was a single Little Gull going west plus some 9 Auks, 5 Kittiwakes and 2 Divers.

A little way inland up the Itchen, between the country park and Bishopstoke, Glyn Horacek-Davis has been accustomed to the odd Little Egret on his patch near the river but during the past week the single bird has grown to a flock of 16, presumably as yet more Egrets abandon the gale torn coast. Interestingly the birds have chosen fields where the ground is much churned

up by horses, and I would love to know what food they find in such places which act as a magnet for them - probably worms. In yesterday's notes you will see that a similar flock has descended on the Soberton area of the Meon valley.

Sussex news for today comes from Pagham Harbour where the wintering Whimbrel, 12 Avocet and 1 adult Glaucous Gull, plus 50 Knot and a Med Gull, were seen. The most interesting item in this list is a sighting of a Brant in what sounds to be a new location and which might be a new bird. It is unlikely to be the West Wittering bird which seems very site faithful and has family ties there, while the previous sightings of the regular Pagham Harbour Brant have this year been in fields north of Pagham Village. Today's bird was said to be >> in its fields at the entrance of the NR << (sic) - can you work out where that might be?

SAT 02 FEB

Tony Parkinson today visited the Swanwick nature reserve near the M27 on the east bank of the River Hamble, and there saw a Bittern taking flight from the centre lake (by which I understand the lake close to the study centre which has very little cover as far as I can remember). If the bird has stayed around I would think the chances of re-finding it would be greater around the larger lakes to the north east of the centre, across New Road - even more likely is that it has moved to the water which I think exists within the fenced area of the air traffic control centre to the south east of the centre.

Leach's Petrels were also seen in Hampshire today at both Hill Head and Hurst. At Hill Head there were two sightings, one I think by Peter Morrison around 08:00, then flying west at 08:20, and another around 13:35 when the bird was going south east. There is no time on Mike Rafter's report of one seen by himself and Russell Wynn at Hurst Castle and the Hill Head bird was going west in the morning, but would it have gone all the way to Hurst and come back? I doubt it. (See also below the note on the exhausted bird found at West Wittering). Other birds seen in the Solent today include 17 dead or badly oiled birds of various species at Hurst Castle, where there were at least 30 Guillemot and 10 Razorbill with 4 Red-throated Divers and an immature Little Gull. At Stokes Bay there were two Red- and one Black-throated Diver, some 200 Auks (numbers really are increasing!) and over 140 Kittiwake going west - on land 217 Common Gulls were sitting out the wind on a football pitch. Just one Great Northern Diver was seen off the mouth of the Hamble (possibly the regular Hill Head bird?)

John Shillitoe was as usual on his bike for a weekend circuit of the land just east of the Meon and north of his home near Wickham, and today he was rewarded with two Corn Bunting at the Hoe Cross site (just west of Hambledon) with one of them singing. as were a number of Skylark. Nearby a Merlin was seen before John cycled west to the River Meon at Soberton and found 17 Egrets in a tree overhanging the river (with a Kingfisher flying upstream to add to the colour). Before seeing this news I had heard from Gwynne Johnson that she had, also today, seen a dozen Egrets in one of the fields that line Long Road at Soberton (just over the ridge along the east side of the river) where they were I think in a field trampled by cattle so I guess they were part of the same group. Gwynne thinks it possible that there could be an Egret night roost in the private Warneford estate further up river, but in view of John's sighting it might be worth checking out, at dusk, the trees where he saw the birds today.

The Sussex WeBS counts for February were made today though the Hampshire ones take place next week-end - the reason for this is I think that the Langstone Harbour counters, looking from the Farlington Marshes seawall, traditionally count the waders roosting on the RSPB reserve islands as they fly off from the roost on the falling tide - with today's tide being at 14:36 it would be too dark to see the birds by the time the tide had fallen enough for them to resume feeding. Just to confuse the issue a little more the east shore of Hayling Island, though in Hampshire, is part of the Chichester Harbour count organized by Sussex people so Brian Fellows was out on the south east Hayling shore this afternoon. His best find was a flock of 360 Sanderling in the roost east of Black Point (at a guess if the wind had not been so strong they would have been roosting on Pilsey sands across the water), and there were also 270 Grey Plover and 180 Dunlin here but only 8 Bar-tailed Godwit. Over the other side of the Chichester Harbour entrance the counters at West Wittering listed 1200 Brent, 1000 Golden Plover, 300 Lapwing, 38 Ringed Plover, 8 Oystercatcher, and 6 Ruff. In addition there was one Pale-bellied Brent, one Brant and one exhausted Leach's Petrel - the Brant and the Petrel both having stories that

deserve repeating+++

Starting with the Leach's Petrel it seems that the counters (Adrian Thomas and Peter Francis) were going about their business when, in their words >> a guy comes up to us clutching a bird, saying, "What's this then?" It was a Leach's Petrel he had found fluttering on the tideline. It had still got plenty of life in it but was obviously a bit worse for wear. He took the bird off to the local bird rescue, so here's hoping for a happy ending!<< The local bird rescue being Brent Lodge at Sidlesham. The second story about the Brant is a bit more technical, but sits well with the very detailed account of Brant plumage variations recently published by Jason Crook on his website (<http://geocities.com/jasoncrookuk/brentgeese1.html>). Today's item on the SOS website is about the Brant at West Wittering and reads >> The Black Brant is a female and is accompanied by a male Dark-bellied Brent. They still have their 4 hybrid young which now they are in partial moult are beginning to look more like Black Brant than Dark-bellied. This should pose some interesting ID questions if any or all of them return next year. They can be told from Black Brant however by the paler mantle and scapulars and paler fore flanks but are markedly different to the associating juvenile Dark-bellied Brents.<<+++

Also seen in the West Wittering area today were a total of 10 Little Stint, single Greenshank and Spotted Redshank, roost flocks of 176 Redshank and 102 Curlew, and on the sea a Slavonian Grebe with 39 Shelduck, 44 Wigeon and 250 Teal. More interesting were three Water Rails which had come out of cover onto open grass to feed on the worms which had been driven to the surface by the rain (if they stayed underground they would drown, if they came up they would get eaten).

One other news item from Sussex is that the Ruddy Shelduck which had been reported from the mouth of the River Adur at Shoreham on Jan 28 was, on Jan 31, on the Widewater Lagoon at Lancing.

FRI 01 FEB

On Jan 29 I expressed great surprise at hearing of a Shearwater sighting in the Solent as (to my knowledge) there have been no past sightings in Hampshire outside the 'summer months' from March to October, so I am delighted to see that Peter Raby today had another sighting of a Shearwater going west off Stokes Bay at Gosport at 16:35 - he reports it as a probable Sooty Shearwater. Let's hope we get more confirmation of this new phenomenon of winter Shearwaters. The sighting last Tuesday was also from Stokes Bay by Gary Calderwood. Another separate piece of seabird info is that Richard Bonser found a leucistic adult Herring Gull at Woolston (where the Itchen flows into Southampton Water) on Jan 31. He says its upperparts are wholly cream/pale-grey and the primaries pale brown. Three Med Gulls were in the same area and the Yellow-legged gull was seen again off Weston shore

Lee Marshall and Trevor Carpenter were at Stokes Bay, Gosport, this morning and saw a total of around 164 Auks flying west (only 6 Guillemot and 1 Razorbill could be positively identified) - a massive total for Hampshire waters but I suspect only a small fraction of those heading west down the channel, probably those unwillingly forced inland of the Isle of Wight by the gale force southerly winds (to an Auk heading for the open ocean the Solent must look like a cul de sac). The 150+ Kittiwake also flying west are probably more accustomed to our coastal waters (and more prepared to fly overland if they find themselves running out of sea at e.g. the top of Southampton Water). Only 1 diver, a Black-throat, went by and a female Peregrine was also seen. The diver sighting reminds me that a summary (published today) of Russell Wynn's January sightings in the Hurst area includes a record total of 27 Red-throated Divers there on Jan 13 which I did not hear of at the time.

A note on the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website today records a flock of about 200 Golden Plover, with 400 Lapwing, at St Catherine's Hill (Winchester) during the past week. I have no idea if this is unusual - maybe they are birds more commonly seen in the Winchester sewage farm area just north of the hill?

Russell Wynn has just put out his summary of sightings in the Hurst/Keyhaven/Pennington area during January, and it reminds me of my worries over Godwit numbers in Hampshire this winter. I note Russell's report that 20 Bar-tailed Godwit were regular at the Lymington marshes through the month but it seems no Black-tailed Godwit were seen in the whole month to Russell's knowledge (though in Jan 2001 there were 116 near the Avon Water stream and an

extraordinary 2630 of them in the Avon valley south of Ringwood). 20 Bar-tails may be normal for the Lymington area in Jan, but where are the e.g. 470 that were in Langstone Harbour in Jan 2001? Portsmouth Harbour seems to be the only site in which Black-tailed Godwit are at their expected numbers of around 200, and while there is a growing flock of 350 or more currently at Titchfield Haven it seems small in relation to the count of over 900 there in Jan 2001, let alone the 2630 in the Avon Valley that month. Typical of Jan 2002 is a report of 1 Bar-tail at Ryde esplanade today ...

Other Isle of Wight sightings today include 20+ Sanderling at Ryde esplanade and, seen from Seaview to the east of Ryde, a Great Northern Diver, a Shag and the long staying female Velvet Scoter.

In Langstone Harbour Ian Thirlwell had a single Slavonian Grebe off Milton Common on the south east shore of the harbour. With it were 23 Great-crested Grebe and two Goldeneye and there was a single Rock Pipit on the shore.

THU 31 JAN

Top news today is that the first Chaffinch song of the year was heard by Brian Fellows near the River Ems at Westbourne - he says it is the same date as his first for last year. Also in the Ems Valley a single Green Sandpiper was back when I had almost given up hope of hearing of one there this winter. Another unexpected item in today's news is that Lee Marshall had a Buzzard flying west over Rowner on the west edge of Gosport today - although I know they are numerous over the inland hills and woods they are not common along the coast, particularly in winter, so I wonder if this is the start of a new spread of their presence to places like Portsmouth and Hayling Island?

Near the mouth of the Hamble River today Trevor Carpenter saw a lone Knot on the Hook spit, and 3 Pochard on the old Hook scrape were also, I think, unusual for the area. Despite reports that Brent numbers at Hook were falling Trevor saw a flock of 860 there today and heard his first singing Cetti's Warbler of the year.

Over on the Isle of Wight winter finches may be in short supply but a flock of 100 Fieldfare was still to be seen in the Bembridge area today. Also seen from Laundry Lane were single Bar-headed and Barnacle Geese with a couple of Greylag.

News from Pulborough Brooks on the SOS website today tells of an extra large collection of wildfowl there yesterday (Jan 30). 3810 Wigeon and 3346 Teal are very impressive numbers but I am more excited by the count of 800 Pintail. A single American Wigeon was seen in the morning but not refound (not surprising among that crowd!) and the only other count of duck was of 22 Shoveler. Only 8 Bewick's were on the list but no doubt many more were elsewhere in the Arun valley. A male Hen Harrier and a Peregrine were also on the list. At Selsey Bill, also on Jan 30, two Red-necked Grebe were seen. Going back to Monday (Jan 28) is news that 17 Whitefront Geese were still at Pulborough Brooks while at the mouth of the River Adur at Shoreham a Ruddy Shelduck was seen.

WED 30 JAN

When I took a walk along the Langstone shore this afternoon at high tide I noticed more Common Gulls than usual with several of them coming on to the Mill Pond for a wash in fresh water, and I see that Lee Marshall noted more than 200 of them at Stokes Bay making me wonder if these gulls have already felt the call of spring and are massing to return north to their breeding cliffs. Another bird that may also be on the move is the Bar-tailed Godwit. I have already commented on the lack of reports of this species this winter, and in today's messages I see that 15 of them turned up unexpectedly (along with 25 or more Pintail) in Newtown Harbour on the Isle of Wight. Another indication of Barwits on the move is that when Bob Marchant was at Selsey yesterday he mentioned a few passing the Bill.

Lee Marshall's list from Stokes Bay at Gosport this morning includes 8 divers (3 Great Northern, 3 Red-throated and 2 unidentified), plus 55 Auks, maybe indicating that we are going to see a few more of the vast crowds of Divers and Auks which Sussex seawatchers have been enjoying recently. Less unusual was the sight of three Med Gulls but the fact that one was in full summer plumage is a sign of the times. During the previous night Lee ticked Teal, Golden Plover and Lesser Blackback on his garden list as they flew over and he heard their calls from his Rowner home. Another Great Northern Diver was seen by Richard Carpenter today (the

semi-permanent one off Hill Head) and in the Titchfield Haven reserve Richard found the Canada Goose flock had increased to 109 with 25 Cormorants also present, both being site maxima for the year so far

TUE 29 JAN

The Egrets which abandoned their Alresford Pond night roost when it was violently disturbed by the noise of a duck shoot on Saturday night (Jan 26) have moved a couple of kilometres west to willows on the north bank of the old railway near Borough Farm, where Charles Cuthbert spotted them from some 500 metres away on the Drove Lane around the periphery of Arlebury Park. Charles saw 31 of them this evening, and says that it is a quiet and sheltered spot (so the Egrets may well choose to stay there) but, in his words, >> It is a great shame that the egrets were so badly disturbed at Alresford Pond, which was in so many ways a perfect spot. The shooting incident perhaps indicates the sensitivity of this species, and I will make this point to English Nature, but I believe they have a policy of permitting landowners to carry out 'traditional country sports' on SSSIs. <<

One bird that has not been forced from its favourite spot is the Broadmarsh Ring-billed Gull (now adult) where Bob Marchant found it >> loafing 20 yards off the slipway when I arrived at 1.45. It stayed around for around five minutes before flying north up into the creek. << (by the creek I presume he means the Hermitage Stream). This bird was not seen, so far as I know, between early April of last year and Jan 22 this year, and I would love to know where it was in between - these birds are said to be vagrants across the Atlantic, suggesting that the birds we see are hopelessly lost and have no chance of getting back to their homeland, but if humans can row single handed across the Atlantic surely a gull could make the crossing twice in a year? What I am suggesting is that we may be seeing the start of a new pattern of movement for this species, and that our bird is one of the trend setters who has learnt the route across the Atlantic and is able to go back home for the summer, then return to his favourite wintering spot. What he does today all the others may do in the future (or may not!). I suspect it may not be long before crude cannon-netting and ringing of birds is a thing of the past and that the ringers of the future will be armed with laser guns that (like an ink-jet printer) are able to inscribe a pattern on the birds plumage or bare parts which can be read with another device (like a micro-chip in a pet dog). When we can do that we will know a lot more about bird movements and bird watchers will have more equipment to spend their money on and to carry around.

One question that such equipment would help to answer is the current one of identifying individual Peregrines and tracking their hunting routes and roosting places. My suggestion that Peregrines live up to their names and wander far in search of food is supplemented today by a suggestion from John Clark that there may be as many as 50 Peregrines in Hampshire during the winter months of recent years. John admits this is nothing more than a guess, but he is in a position to base that guess on a great deal of personal experience and the mass of bird reports which reach him. I for one would love to be able to go online to some website of the future and see the equivalent of one of the radar screens now operating at Swanick air traffic control centre, but this screen would be showing the movements of all those Peregrines across the skies of Hampshire.

Going back to actuality I am interested to see that Gary Calderwood today reported a single bird which he took to be a Shearwater of some species flying off Stokes Bay. My knowledge of seabirds is minimal but looking in Birds of Hampshire I get the impression that no Shearwaters have been seen in Hampshire waters in the winter months from November to February (I haven't checked all the more recent Hampshire and Sussex Bird Reports but cannot see any January sightings from a casual glance). So was this an ailing bird driven in from the Atlantic by the strong winds or was it another trend setter for future winters? Across the Solent the 'resident' female Velvet Scoter was seen again today from Seaview Esplanade to the east of Ryde. A single Shag was fishing in the same area.

Among other news to catch my attention today was Richard Carpenter's report of two Goldcrest singing along the old rail track running north up the Meon Valley from Wickham, with a colourful Grey Wagtail seen nearby. Being Tuesday Brian Fellows was making his usual round of Portsmouth sites and once more failed to find a Purple Sandpiper at Southsea Castle (it seems to be a poor winter for them in Hampshire and perhaps the nearest are five in Shoreham

Harbour) but he did find a mass of Dunlin sitting out the high tide on the shingle of Eastney Beach (west of Fort Cumberland, near the eastern end of the Southsea seafront road). At Baffins Pond the feral geese were still present and at Southsea Canoe Lake the Swan numbers were low (my guess is that this is function of warm weather rather than any problem with the pond). Also in today's news are a couple of messages from Colin Allen and Martin Gillingham both reporting Feral Pigeon deaths caused by Peregrines in the Portsmouth Dockyard and nearby Victoria Park respectively - the corpses are usually headless and breastless when found.

MON 28 JAN

Bob Chapman has just told me that he is now contributing news from the Farlington Marshes reserve to the Hampshire Wildlife Trust website, and visiting it today I found some very useful background information about birds at the marshes in mid-January plus news from the Lower Test reserve of 28 Water Pipits and a Jack Snipe there on this very day. Also today at the Lower Test there was a Scaup, one Common and four Green Sandpiper, plus the single Firecrest and a Peregrine. At Farlington on or around Jan 17 there were some 1350 Wigeon, 530 Shelduck, 210 Pintail and a good number of Teal, though fewer than expected (though I think that generally most sites are reporting more Teal than usual this winter). Up to 8 Pale-bellied Brent could be seen in the area and a Merlin was a daily visitor though Peregrines are less frequently seen (I think in the previous winter it was common to see two each day, now it is just one that turns up and not every day). At that time one Short-eared Owl was seen occasionally but a few Bearded Tits and a Cetti's Warbler could be detected on most days if you stood outside the reserve building and looked downstream. Earlier news was of 4 Greylags, possibly wild birds, which had flown in for one day on Jan 12 and more recent news was of the Ring-billed Gull at the Lake yesterday (Jan 27) of which I passed on Jason Crook's news yesterday. If you want to access this reserve news go to www.hwt.org.uk and click the Reserves button at the top of the page, then select the feedback noticeboard. Although the news currently posted probably comes from the reserve wardens (it is anonymous so you can't tell) I think the idea is that any visitor to a reserve can send in information about their sightings but I have no idea how well it may be monitored for accuracy.

Richard Carpenter was at Titchfield Haven today and found 74 Pochard there (his highest count this winter). Over at Hook near the mouth of the Hamble he found the Brent Goose flock diminished to 250 birds but there were 74 Curlew and 80 Oystercatcher. Yesterday (Jan 27) he was also at Titchfield Haven and found that the Black-tailed Godwit flock there had grown to 350 birds (still far short of the 1000 which records from recent winters lead us to expect), and that the rising water level had driven some 30 Snipe out into the open on the islands in the scrapes where Richard says >> some were displaying by standing upright and touching each other with their long bills. <<

Last Saturday (Jan 26) I reported how Dave Pearson had been at Alresford Pond at dusk when duck shooters caused much noise and disturbance to the birds, and he only saw three Egrets in total rather than 40 or so that should have been coming in to roost near the Cormorants in trees on the island. Since then I have heard from Charles Cuthbert who went down to pond last night (Jan 27) and was there from 16:45 to 17:20 over the dusk period when the Egrets should arrive but saw just one Egret overhead which circled, saw no others there, and went off elsewhere. Charles is now attempting to find where the Egrets now go to roost. One thought from Dave Pearson was that they might use the trees in nearby Arlebury Park where Herons will soon be nesting, and a thought that occurs to me is that they might possibly prefer to stand for the night in the centre of some open field rather than entering trees which they are unfamiliar with (I remember Jason Crook once reported a small group settling for the night in the middle of the main marsh at Farlington)

Sussex news for yesterday (Jan 27) includes a sighting of the Egyptian Goose with a single Bar-head on Ivy Lake at Chichester and an unusual sighting of a Slavonian Grebe on what is described as the 'Sussex pit' which I take to be the New Lake at Chichester (the nature reserve lake). At Selsey Bill more than 1000 Auks were seen along with 3 Red-throated and 1 Great Northern Diver plus an adult Little Gull

At 8am this morning Martin Gillingham saw a Peregrine flying west over the Hilsea Lines, battling

against the wind with a small bird in its talons, and this prompted Trevor Carpenter to ask where this falcon might be based. Without some identifying rings or tags on the bird I doubt we will ever know but my guess is that a Peregrine at this time of year would have no difficulty in covering an area of 20 miles radius around its base, and that would bring Hilsa Lines into the orbit of a Peregrine that had spent the night on Chichester Cathedral (where one was once more reported on Saturday night - Jan 26), or at the top of Southampton Water, or one based on the Isle of Wight. I imagine the Peregrines know the lie of the land much further afield than 20 miles from their roost or nest, and have several favourite hunting grounds within that area. I also guess that they know the benefit of surprise in the timing of their attacks and so will vary their routes from day to day, but I am equally sure that not every Peregrine behaves in the same way. If anyone out there has evidence of the daily routine of one or more hunting birds I hope they will let us know...

While on the subject of raptor behaviour I have heard from Cris Little, a one time falconer, what he thinks about the likelihood that the Sparrowhawk which Charles Cuthbert saw carrying its captured prey into his garden pond did so with the intention of drowning it. Cris says >> It strikes me that sparrowhawks have all the tools available to kill starlings without having to resort to water to help. I can't see this as a deliberate ploy. I have noticed that birds of prey sometimes get distracted from feeding by other behaviours. For example I've seen buzzards preen and scatch while still holding onto food in one foot. The urge to keep hold of prey is extremely strong even if the bird isn't hungry. I speculate that this sparrowhawk had caught a starling but got distracted by the pond for a bath. Then it realised it had prey and gave up on the idea. speculation of course! <<

Christoph Harwood has resumed his regular nature walk around the village of East Meon now that Foot and Mouth restrictions have been lifted, and last Saturday he climbed the steep hill north of the village to find what must have been five Golden Plover among a flock of Lapwing but driving rain and a gale did not make identification easy, nor was he able to be certain of the finches feeding on seed in the game cover planted nearby - though there were Yellowhammer among them and two Red-legged Partridge were also seen. Down in the excellent 'green lane' heading back to the village there was a Jay and near the youthful Meon river at Frogmore was a Grey Wagtail. Much further north near Basingstoke Mike Wall tells us that the Wood Duck which John Clark saw at 'The Vyne' yesterday may well not be a newcomer but a long term resident of the village pond at Sherborne St John having a day out. Here in Emsworth Brian Fellows found a Kingfisher perched on a tree overhanging the Emsworth marina from the steep sided and inaccessible tree covered island in the centre of the marina, prompting him to wonder if there could be a Kingfisher nest hole hidden in the steep banks of the island -no doubt Brian will be keeping an eye on the site when the time comes for the two Kingfisher that are often seen over the ponds and Lumley Stream just north of the marina to start nesting. Brian also watched a Kestrel hunting over the Brook Meadow site for the second time in a week, prompting thoughts that it might decide to nest nearby this year.

On the Isle of Wight a sighting of 6 Siskin in the Blackwater area south of Newport prompts Derek Hale to comment that Siskin have been very scarce on the island this winter and there has been no sign of either Redpoll or Brambling

PLANTS:

WED 30 JAN

Thanks to Pete Durnell I have just become aware of a fascinating account of strange plants appearing by the side of the Eastern Road in Portsmouth last summer. The proper account can be found in the January issue of the BSBI newsletter, which I have not seen, but Pete has forwarded to me a summary of it sent out by Fred Haynes. I think the article was probably written by Eric Clement rather than by Fred, but I do know that Ian Thirlwell was the original finder of this extraordinary mass of plants which appeared after the verges of the Eastern Road near Milton Common had felt the effects of the roadworks and had been 'restored' with much imported soil, and it was Ian who called in Eric's expertise to identify the plants. The following is based on what Fred Haynes had to say about the plants found, and may not correspond with

the facts in the original article! I have used Stace to translate the Latin names listed by Fred into English names that I and the majority of my readers will probably find more meaningful, and I have only picked out a few of the much longer list of plants actually found.+++

After roadworks last year the verges of the Eastern Road produced a great variety of strange plants from Tomatoes, Sweet Peppers, Melon and Aubergines to Hemp (=Cannabis) and poisonous plants such as Thorn Apple, Angel's Trumpets, and Apple of Peru. Among them were many species that I have never heard of, such as Velvetleaf, Greater Honeywort (this one is not even listed by Stace), Red and Green Nightshade, Purple Viper's Bugloss (normally found only in Jersey or Cornwall), and four Pigweeds (=Amaranthus) - Common, Short-tepalled, Green and Purple. A couple of plants that I did recognize, but which are very uncommon in the Havant area, were Weasels Snout and Dwarf Mallow. Other plants which caught my eye in the list were Field Pennycress, Bastard Cabbage, Foxtail Bristlegrass, Hoary Mustard, Buckwheat and Californian Poppy. I am not sure who wrote the article but it seems that Ian Thirlwell living nearby was one of the first to notice the new plants and Eric Clement from Gosport was the authority who identified them.+++

These are by no means the only interesting plants to be found on Milton Common where much of the land was only reclaimed from Langstone Harbour in the last fifty years, was then used as a rubbish tip and when that was closed down it was landscaped with more imported soil. Before this current outburst the land was known to have a good selection of plants varying from Sea Clover (which could have been a native of the original shoreline) to the Bermuda Grass found there in the last couple of years by Richard Jones (who looks after Portsdown hill for Portsmouth City), and including Yellow and Grass Vetchling (*Lathyrus aphaca* and *nissolia*) plus Bastard Cabbage (which looks more like Charlock or a Mustard species with small yellow flowers than a cabbage bought in a greengrocers). One plant mentioned by Fred Haynes as occurring >> not far to the north of the Eastern Road site << is Small Melilot, and it may well be thriving along the Langstone Harbour shore but if Fred is referring to the colony which Dick Barrett found some ten years ago at the IBM North Harbour site I can report that (after seeing masses of plants there earlier) I could find no trace of it last summer.

TUE 29 JAN

At long last Richard Carpenter is the first to find (or at least to report the find) of Dog's Mercury in flower - he came on it when walking the old Meon Valley railway track just north of Wickham and says there were also many Snowdrops flowering there.

An item from Christoph Harwood's account of his walk around East Meon last Saturday (Jan 26) which I omitted to mention at the time was the find of leaves already unfolding on an Elder bush - one which is always the earliest to come into leaf in that area.

INSECTS:

SUN 03 FEB

The ever present Red Admiral species sent out two more of its kamakaze pilots in January - on Jan 22 one was seen in Winchester and on Jan 23 one was at Hilsea railway station in Portsmouth. These late reports come from the Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website which also publishes news that will disappoint Lee Marshall (who had two Light Brown Apple Moths -*Epiphyas postvittana*) come to his light as early as Jan 5. It now turns out that Brian Fletcher had one on his kitchen windowsill on the night of Jan 1 - but if you read the note which I wrote on Jan 28 about the papers recently published by Malcolm Lee and Jim Porter on this moth you will know that they are non-stop breeders and can be seen in any month of the year.

FRI 01 FEB

Yet another Red Admiral sighting was published on the SOS website today - the butterfly was seen in a garden at Lewes in East Sussex on Jan 30.

TUE 29 JAN

Another new moth for the year which appeared in Lee Marshall's moth trap at Gosport this evening is named *Ypsolopha ustella*. In looking for some clue as to what this might look like I came on an interesting picture in Chinery's Collins Guide to Insects of one of its cousins called *Ypsolopha dentalla*, or the Honeysuckle moth, which takes on a very strange form when it folds

its wings and rests in the daytime - its brown colour and curved and pointed shape make it look exactly like a Honeysuckle bud as it rests on the stem of the plant.

MON 28 JAN

It seems that Derek Mills who maintains the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website has been away from home for a few days and he apologises for a delay in posting three interesting sightings. Going back to Jan 22 there was a Brimstone seen in a Ropley garden, then on Jan 23 Chris Jackson, a farmer at Gundleton a mile or so east of Aldsworth Pond, reported a sighting of a Small Tortoiseshell. On Jan 24 Lynn Fomison had her first butterfly of the year - guess what, a Red Admiral - and today Trevor Carpenter tells me that he has had another Red Admiral in his Fareham garden.

Going back slightly further (to the 1930s or possibly to Victorian times) is fascinating news of the arrival in Cornwall of insects from New Zealand and Australia via the importation of plants, particularly to the 'garden centre' of the Treseder family, sent back home by members of the family which had emigrated. This news comes to me from Malcolm Lee (whose studies of the Large Blue butterfly I have reported in the past). Both Malcolm and a Jim Porter have recently written articles for the Atropos journal on the extraordinary spread across England in the past twenty years of the moth *Epiphyas postvittana*, an insect that belongs in the antipodes and is so reluctant to move that when it arrives in a new garden it rarely ventures over that garden's fence, but settles down to round the year reproduction (often having four broods) and easily adapting to its new surroundings as its larvae are prepared to eat almost anything.+++

Malcolm had in the past devoted a lot of time to studying the arrival and spread in this country of the New Zealand stick insect which has an even more pronounced inability to travel but does have the ability to reproduce without mating. It seems that the eggs of this insect have for many years travelled to England in the fronds of imported Tree Ferns and the like which were usually destined for the mild Cornish climate, building up a stock of these insects in Cornwall as the eggs hatched (and any females which emerged were then able to lay more fertile eggs without meeting a male). In recent years, with milder winters and the spread of enthusiasm for strange garden plants, these stick insects have ceased to be a speciality of the south west coast.+++

The story of the spread of *Epiphyas postvittana* is similar but wider and more rapid to the extent that Jim Porter calls it the 'Collared Dove of the insect world.' It is almost certainly spread with plants but the articles do not name any particular plant, and the moth may be even more widespread and longer established than the known reports indicate as it is not the sort of insect that people other than moth experts would notice or identify - and even if they did the insect might in the past not have been properly identified (at one stage it was thought to be a native species given the name of the Cornish Twist). It was first properly identified in 1936 but remained local in the southwest until the 1980s when reports of it began to spread rapidly and it now covers most of England to the Scottish border. Jim Porter's article was published in the August 2001 issue of Atropos but I am not sure if Malcolm's article has yet been printed - if anyone wishes to read them I will be pleased to forward copies of the two documents which Malcolm has kindly sent me.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SAT 02 FEB

Three batches of frogspawn appeared in Tony Wilson's garden pond at Hangleton (Hove, Sussex) this evening - the result of some 25 Frogs in the pond. Tony appears to take the cup for first frogspawn

FRI 01 FEB

Toads usually wait until March before they start their traditional journeys back to their breeding ponds but at Alresford late last night (Jan 31) one male was already back in his garden pond when Charles Cuthbert shone his torch over the water. With it were 15 male and 3 female Frogs with one pair already in amplexus (but as yet no spawn from the female). A gentle purring of 'Frog song' was coming from the males, but nowhere near the volume that will hopefully come from them later. Under water the Palmate Newts were beginning to display, and reading this caused me to have another look at my source of knowledge about Newts (the Readers Digest field guide to Animals) which shows me something that I had never noticed

before - it seems that male Palmate newts not only have webbed rear feet and a dark line above the eye but have a short 'filament' trailing behind a rather square cut end to their tails (as if someone had cut off the tip of the tail but left a tiny central spine)

TUE 29 JAN

In the spring and summer months at least four large Terrapins sunbathe around Baffins Pond at Portsmouth, looking completely harmless, but when they feel hungry there is nothing they like more for a snack than a baby duckling (or any other meat then can snap off with their sharp teeth - watch out for your fingers!). In tropical climates they are active all year but these abandoned pets do not enjoy our winters and dive to the bottom of the pond (or burrow into mud) to hibernate under water. Even with their metabolism almost shut down they need some oxygen to keep them alive, and my understanding is that they absorb it through their skins (as do dormant frogs). The only problem for the Terrapin is that most of its body, including the head, is firmly sealed into the shell when in the dormant state, leaving just one part of its anatomy exposed to the water - that happens to be its backside, so in winter Terrapins breathe through their backsides!+++

My reason for mentioning this interesting fact is that today Brian Fellows found the first Terrapin back on the pondside, the high temperature having presumably persuaded it that winter was over - let's hope they all wake up and die in a cold snap.

WEEK 04 JAN 21 - 27

BIRDS:

SUN 27 JAN

Late this afternoon Jason Crook saw a second winter Ring-billed Gull briefly on the lake at Farlington Marshes before it flew out into the harbour, so we may have two Ring-bills in the harbour at the moment since the one which frequents the mud opposite the Broadmarsh slipway, and was seen there by Jason last Tuesday (Jan 22) is now adult. Also at Broadmarsh on Jan 22 Jason saw the white Common Gull still present. If you want to add more gull ticks to your year list try Selsey Bill or the Pagham Harbour gull roost - off the Bill today Iceland, Glaucous, Little and Med Gulls were all seen. There is probably only one Little Gull in that area at the moment, but up to 8 Med Gulls and 2 Glaucous were in the roost last night (and the second Glaucous may have been the one seen today off Worthing).

If you prefer colourful ducks to black and white gulls (and don't mind ticking birds of lowly status in the eyes of the purists) there is a chance of a male Wood Duck on the flooded fields at The Vyne (National Trust property a couple of miles due north of Basingstoke) where John Clark saw it today among a wide selection of wildfowl including three Pintail. If its quantity your after then Richard Ford yesterday found 62 Mandarin on Headley Mill Pond (which is presumably close to Headley Mill Farm, just east of the A325 in Bordon beside the B3006 coming north from Liphook, rather than in the nearby Headley village)

Will Walmsley was with the HOS walk party going around the periphery of Titchfield Haven today and says that they were very lucky with the weather and saw 63 bird species including the male Marsh Harrier and the Great Northern Diver (well out on the sea with a few Guillemot and Razorbill). The three Greenshank were still on the meadows at the north of the site and both Redwing and Fieldfare were seen. I am surprised that Cetti's Warbler is not on Will's list (in view of recent reports that they have restarted singing in more than one site), but not surprised that they miss the Water Pipits, and I see that the flock of Black-tailed Godwit which they saw only numbered around 200 rather than the 1000 expected there at this time of year - see my comments for Jan 18

Wind and rain must pose problems for raptors such as Peregrines which rely on good visibility and accurate aerial manoeuvring to achieve a kill. I was reminded of this in two ways when I was near Langstone Pond today and saw a flock of Brent react to something they had seen overhead which, when I looked up, was a Peregrine apparently being driven against its will by the wind until it dived towards the Warblington Farm fields where no doubt the wind was less near the ground but was almost certainly strong enough to cause any likely prey to be keeping its head down, leaving the Peregrine hungry. The second thought about the problems which

weather causes for raptors came from a memory of being at the Warblington Church on a very wet and chill summer day when a Hobby and perched above me, allowing me to see that it's feathers were almost water-logged (the bird looked like the proverbial drowned rat) and my thought then was that it must have been very hungry to try to hunt in such weather when the sensible strategy would have been to perch in some sheltered spot and wait for the rain to go away (but it had been raining then for several days). The way today's Peregrine was flying (going fast with the wind but coming to a standstill when it tried to turn into it) tied in with the contents of a note in my letterbox when I got home - it was from someone who had been trying to do the RSPB Garden Birdwatch but had seen little except a mass of gulls circling above her garden. The behaviour of the gulls reminded her of the way they circle in a summer thermal when the ants are flying, catching the insects in midair, but I'm pretty sure that what she was seeing today was sheer frustration on the part of the gulls which had finished their shift at the Southleigh Forest rubbish tip and were trying to make their way back to their night roost in the harbour - the direction they wanted to go would have been straight into the wind and they were making no headway.

Raptors may be going hungry but it is lovely weather for ducks (and plenty of other birds seeking worms and the like driven out of the sodden ground to avoid drowning). At Wade Court today there were at least 160 Teal with Mallard and Moorhen enjoying the wet meadow south of the house, and in addition to 8 Egrets and 4 Heron standing patiently to wait for the tide to fall, one Heron was patrolling that meadow in search of food while two more Egrets were feeding in the fields north of Wade Court.

The Isle of Wight website today reports that the sea off Bembridge Foreland was "alive with birds" as the mass of gulls and auks that have been working their way west along the Sussex coast reached the Island. Hundreds of gulls and auks were present, some very close to the shore, and among them two Red-throated and 2 Black-throated Divers were seen flying south west.

SAT 26 JAN

Paul Winter was at the Lower Test Marshes today and saw 12 Water Pipit there, while a little further south on the west shore of Southampton Water Simon King found a Whimbrel and a Scaup along the shore north of Dibden Bay from Bury Marshes to Eling Great Marsh. Also today Lee Marshall was at Stokes Bay and saw a remnant of the huge mass of Auks that has recently gone west past Selsey (reportedly 10,000 Auks in two days). Here in the Solent off Gosport Lee saw around 50 Auks (at least 30 being Guillemots), and with them were more than 50 Kittiwakes plus a second winter Little Gull. Also over the sea were three Gannets and single Red-throated and Great Northern Divers - the two Med Gulls that are usually to be seen on the shore had sensibly moved to grass playing fields a little further inland!

Much further inland Dave Pearson was in the Alresford area late in the afternoon and saw the two ring tail Hen Harriers go to roost in the reeds by the pond (despite shooting heard nearby). 26 Cormorant were also present but the Egrets (whose night roost is close to the Cormorants) did not show up while Dave was there (though they may well not start to show until well after sunset when there is perhaps only ten minutes of daylight left - that's what happens at the Wade Court roost here in Havant). A Sparrowhawk and a Kingfisher were among other birds at the pond. Somewhere near Alresford the flock of 16 Barnacle Geese was still present in the Itchen valley.

News of yesterday's sightings comes from John Gowen, who counted at least 500 Golden Plover off Langstone, and from Richard Ford who was in the Sleaford area (east of Alton in East Hants) and in the adjacent Straits Enclosure woodland which is on the southern edge of the Alice Holt Forest. His list here included 300 Fieldfare and over 100 Skylark with 20+ Yellowhammer and, in the woods with tit flocks, more than 5 Marsh Tits

FRI 25 JAN

In one hour from 9:15 this morning some 400 Razorbill and 200 Guillemot were seen to fly past Selsey Bill but that is nothing compared to the massive passage of Auks westward over the previous two days - an estimated 10,000 birds (mostly Razorbill) is estimated to have passed on the Bill on Jan 23 + 24. Taken with the recent extraordinary passage of divers (mainly Red-throated) along the Sussex coast earlier this month I am becoming more and more

convinced that there must have been a really dramatic decline in their food supplies in the North Sea and right up to the Arctic. Of course this is pure speculation, and I would love to hear a better explanation, but so far no one seems to have put forward any reason for this huge exodus. The fish supply off the Sussex coast seems to have been better than usual during this period, with very large numbers of birds feeding close inshore (and today there was apparently plenty to keep 100 Gannets busily feeding just off Selsey Bill without joining the exodus, and I suppose that another guess at the cause of the westward movement could be that many seabirds have followed fish from the Atlantic into the English Channel and are now returning to the ocean - who knows?+++

Other current news from the Pagham area is a count of only 7 Slavonian Grebe off Church Norton today - the low number could be explained by rough seas making counting very difficult, but I see that 14 Black-necked and 14 Slavonian were anonymously reported off Selsey Bill yesterday so maybe the winter flocks are already breaking up. In Pagham Harbour on Jan 23 six Spotted Redshank were said to be present along with the wintering Whimbrel and the Brant plus 3 Pale-bellied Brent on fields north of Pagham Church (the West Wittering Brant was also reported on Jan 22), and the gull roost in Pagham Harbour has included 2 Yellow-legged and 5 Med Gulls in the past few days as well as the more regular single Glaucous Gull+++

Sussex news mentions plenty of Kittiwake along the coast but only one mention of a Fulmar (one going past Selsey today, though I guess there are lots around the breeding cliffs east of Brighton now). Here in Hampshire a supposed Ross's Gull was driven by the gales from Dorset waters into the west Solent today to give local birders a choice between that rarity in the west of the county and the Ring-billed Gull which seems to have returned to Broadmarsh in Langstone Harbour.

Another new entry on the SOS website is a list of the Jan 14 WeBS count results from Pulborough Brooks when there were 53 Bewick's Swans roosting at the reserve and spreading out along the valley during the day. I believe that this is one of two night roosts in the valley, the other being close to the Arundel WWT reserve with birds from that feeding by day north to Houghton Bridge near Amberley, and the Pulborough birds coming south as far as Amberley Wild Brooks but staying north of the bridge (please correct me if I am wrong in this). Other figures from the WeBS count were Whitefront Goose 16 (still there to Jan 22), Ruff 23, Pintail 168, Shoveler 56, Teal 1108 and Wigeon 3374.

Charles Cuthbert has sent me a fascinating observation of what seems to be the deliberate drowning of a Starling by a Sparrowhawk and asks if I have any other instances of this behaviour, to which the answer is that I am sure there was a similar report on HOSLIST in the last year or so but I cannot at the moment track it down (I seem to remember that most people thought the drowning was pure chance of the hawk happening to bring down its victim in water, but this new account sounds to be a pre-mediated act by the hawk). If you have similar observations please let me know!+++

Charles writes >> At 1035 a.m. all the birds in my garden suddenly flew off in panic. I then saw an adult female Sparrowhawk fly down to land on the lawn, carrying unseen prey, close to the garden pond. It then flew the very short 'hop' into the shallow water at the edge of the pond, a depth of about 4-6 cm. (I later measured it!). At this point I could not see the prey, or even the lower part of the Sparrowhawk, (because it was below the level of the bank from my position inside the kitchen) but it must have been standing directly in the water. I watched it with my binoculars, giving me excellent views of its upper half as it stayed there for at least a minute, without moving, except to look round nervously. I expected it to bathe, or to begin eating the prey, but it did neither. The Sparrowhawk then took off, enabling me to see that it was carrying a Starling in its talons, obviously dead, and dripping wet! It flew away out of the garden and I did not see it again. However, I was left wondering about what had happened - did the Sparrowhawk deliberately carry the Starling in to the pond in order to drown it? Do you know if this kind of behaviour been recorded before? <<+++

With this message Charles also tells us that 16 full winged Barnacle Geese today flew in to the Alresford Pond area and stayed in loose association with the Canada Geese already there. I have no idea where they came from but every time I hear such reports I think of the hundreds of Barnacles that are said to be 'resident' at the 'Flamingo Park' at Seaview near Ryde on the Isle

of Wight - so far they have stayed there where the life is easy and the food is good but there must come at time when their ever-increasing numbers have the same effect as the growing numbers of Egrets did at the Thorney roost, and my guess is that there will be an explosion of Barnacles into Hampshire.

Another account of unusual behaviour seen in Victoria Park, within a stone's throw of Portsmouth's Guildhall Square, comes from John Chapman who watched a Moorhen placidly searching the very wet grass for food items despite the many people who use the paths across the park (as John has done almost daily for the past thirty years without ever seeing a Moorhen). John says the bird was still there when he re-crossed the park several hours later. I am not too surprised at this as there does seem to have been an increase in Moorhen numbers recently (this week Brian Fellows had his highest ever count of them at Baffins Pond in the city) and the presence of many birds in the huge public aviary in the park does seem to attract other birds - I remember going there in the distant past to see a Barred Warbler (though all I saw was a Blackcap in some Holly trees!).

Despite the wind and rain Richard Carpenter went to Titchfield Haven today and heard several bursts of Cetti's Warbler song, the first after a lengthy quiet period, and at Alresford Pond yesterday Charles Cuthbert also remarked on the first song he had heard from them since the cold weather ended. (In my garden here in Havant the wind brought a Mistle Thrush to give it's Stormcock song from the tip of a Beech tree). Another unusual sight for the Hill Head shoreline was a flock of 75 Golden Plover, possibly associated with another unusual sighting of more than 100 of them in Yarmouth Harbour on the Isle of Wight yesterday (not necessarily the same birds but perhaps part of a restless movement of these birds as the air warms up). Going back to Richard's observations at Titchfield Haven he tells me that the general opinion there is that there are two resident Bitterns at the moment, and the male Marsh Harrier is also still present, while offshore he saw a Great Northern Diver. The only other sighting of some interest for today comes from the Isle of Wight where at least 6 Crossbills were seen in Firestone Copse (south of Wootton) along with 5 Red Squirrels.

THU 24 JAN

An adult Ring-billed Gull was seen in the Broadmarsh area of Langstone Harbour for at least five minutes this afternoon according to Bob Chapman (the last time that I heard of it there was on 1 April 2001 but it seems that Jason Crook saw it back again on Jan 22).

From Alresford Charles Cuthbert sends news that the Egret roost count was down to just 39 birds this evening. He also saw a ringtail Hen Harrier there again (presumably going to roost in the reeds), and an inland Goldeneye was on the pond. Earlier in the day Brian Fellows was at Brick-kiln Pond on the southern edge of Stansted Forest and found a pair of Swans had returned to check out a fairly regular nest site there. On the nearby Aldaworth pond the Gadwall had increased to 18 and there were 5 Shoveler and 4 Little Grebe but only six Tufted Duck. While in that area Brian visited the Hollybank woods, hearing Goldcrest song and seeing a Kestrel

On the subject of Long-tailed Tit feeding habits Cris Little tells me that he has had success in attracting them to his garden in Leeds (Yorkshire) by putting balls of lard into a red-mesh holder (left over from Christmas Clementines!). Other Tits also love this, as do Starlings, while a Blackbird which is unable to hang on the mesh still manages to grab a beakful by taking a peck as it flies past.

In addition to the unexpected flock of over 100 Golden Plover (with 200 Lapwing) in Yarmouth Harbour on the Isle of Wight today (already mentioned above) a Spotted Redshank and 10+ Shoveler were seen there and a Cetti's Warbler was heard. On the eastern coast of the island at least 13 Guillemot were seen at Bembridge, and in the Alverstone area (by the eastern river Yar north of Shanklin) a Bittern and some Bearded Tits are said to have been seen.

Yesterday (Jan 23) Ian Calderwood found the Portsmouth Harbour Brant back at Frater Lake with 39 Brent, and on Emsworth's Brook Meadow Brian Fellows was pleased when a Kestrel perched for a short time on an Ash tree above the meadow, while a more regular Grey Wagtail was busy at the north end by the River Ems.

WED 23 JAN

At Stokes Bay this morning Trevor Carpenter saw a Med Gull with an almost complete black-head

- maybe just a freak bird getting it's summer plumage early but maybe a sign that we should be looking out for flocks of Med Gulls building up on the Hayling Island fields prior to moving out to their island nest sites? Less welcome black plumage was caused by oil on one of two Guillemots on the beach at Hill Head today - the bird was weak enough to allow itself to be caught and taken to the RSPCA for a detergent bath, so it has a chance of recovery. This news came from Richard Carpenter who says that the second bird >> looked OK but remained in Hill Head Harbour sitting on the shingle - it may well have ingested something or could simply be storm driven and exhausted << I also see in the Sussex news that on Monday another Guillemot was seen struggling along the beach at Hove Lawns in the Brighton area, and I realise that with the thousands of auks recently reported along the Sussex shore a few must succumb to old age and bad weather but I hope these reported casualties are not the first of many suffering from oil.

More cheerful news comes from the Isle of Wight where more than 10 Red-throated Divers were off St Catherine's Point today, and 20+ were reported there yesterday. On the northern shore of the island there was a male Ruff in Newtown Harbour today (a male and two females were there on Monday Jan 21) - also there today was a small flock of 20+ Knot

The Swan pair were back on the Budds Farm pools today with one bird standing on the nest site and the other on the water among a small flock of a dozen busily feeding Shoveler. A few Tufted Duck and a couple of Pochard were with them, plus the usual large crowd of Teal. Further east on the harbour at the mouth of the Langbrook stream were 83 Wigeon, possibly blown there by the strong wind but more probably there as a staging post on their journey back to breeding quarters. Beside the Langbrook a Blackbird was making flute like noises - not song, but definitely tuning up for song.

TUE 22 JAN

My comments last Friday about apparently low numbers of Black-tailed Godwit in the local harbours at the moment has drawn two responses. From Chichester Harbour Eric Davis writes to say that his observations in the Fishbourne Channel lead him to share my concern - he says >> in the months of December and January I would normally see between 30 and 100 but for the last 2 months the numbers are down to a maximum of 10. Yet the numbers for the other waders etc. are about the same as usual. << But Dennis Bill in Portsmouth Harbour thinks numbers are about normal - he says there are currently >> flocks of about 90 each in Paulsgrove Lake (west) and Cams Bay. Allowing for birds elsewhere the total should be at least in the 200s. Not too far short of what I would expect (the last Low Tide count on 24 Jan 98 was 211).<< No doubt it will turn out that the missing birds at Titchfield Haven and elsewhere are happily feeding in other areas, but at the moment I do not know where they may be.

Dennis Bill does report a significant drop in the number of Golden Plover he is seeing in the Fareham Creek area - he counted 441 there on Jan 9 but can only find 11 there today, though I think these plover are much more mobile than the godwits and would not be surprised if they are not still somewhere in the Portsmouth Harbour area - alternatively they may have fuelled the recent increase in the flock on the mud off Langstone. While in the Fareham Creek area yesterday Dennis had another sighting of a hunting Peregrine which came from the north (Portsmouth?) over the Cams Hall golf course and continued south along the Gosport shore of Portsmouth Harbour (maybe this hunting route is part of the reason for the Golden Plover moving elsewhere but I doubt it is the cause of the absence of the Canada Geese from the golf course which Dennis noticed today).

Brian Fellows found six Cormorant at Baffins Pond today and noticed one of them exhibiting rather strange behaviour - Brian says >> I watched one Cormorant behaving in a manner which I had not seen before. I noticed the bird tossing something into the air, what I thought at first was a small fish, but on closer examination I realised it was a feather. It would toss the feather into the air and then catch it on its way down in its beak. It behaved in this apparently playful manner for several minutes. << Brian also noticed that two of the six birds had the grey heads of breeding plumage and wonders if they might be birds of the continental race, but my understanding is that many of our British race birds can have heads just as grey as the continental race, and that the critical feature in separating the races is the yellow around the base of the bill. The following is what I wrote on the subject on 7 Feb 99 after Tony Gutteridge

had passed on the gist of a talk given by an expert on this subject >> 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. <<

Other news from Brian's tour of Portsmouth sites today is that there were 144 Knot in Eastney Lake close to the Hayling Ferry, near which a Shag was fishing, and that the individual Grey Plover with red rings on both legs was once more feeding there - it was ringed at the Kench, just across the Langstone Harbour entrance, in Nov 1998 and seems to have remained in the area each winter since then (Brian has seen it eight times). Other birds on Baffins pond included the Barnacle/Snow Goose gang, 74 Tufted Duck (numbers approaching an expected max in February), and 26 Moorhen (the most Brian has ever recorded there though there are usually 10 to 20 present). Shoveler were down to 14, the Swan pair were absent, and there were 102 Mallard and 17 Canada Geese.

Trevor Carpenter visited Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley this morning where he saw 3 Buzzards (another 3 were soaring over Newtown near Wickham further down the valley - this warm air seems to be putting them into spring mood very early this year). Also on Beacon Hill were 4 Kestrels and a Sparrowhawk, 20 Fieldfare and 8 Redwing, plus 15 Red-legged Partridge. 50+ Collared Dove were matched by a similar number of Skylark, many of which were singing, and Trevor also saw 3 Yellowhammer and 1 Bullfinch.+++

Trevor goes on to comment on John Chapman's recent query about Long-tailed Tits visiting nut feeders. He says that they often come to his peanut feeder but goes on to give us his hot tip on how to attract them to your garden. He says >> Long Tailed Tits in our garden last winter were particularly partial to a fat slab in a rectangular cage. Unfortunately so are crows and squirrels so keeping one intact long enough for the LTTs to find it is the problem. We put out a new one a few days ago and it has so far avoided damage but no sign of any LTTs <<

Last Saturday (Jan 19) I passed on Richard Ford's sighting of a Sparrowhawk apparently sunbathing at Woolmer Forest and this has prompted Richard Carpenter to tell us of a similar sighting he had in the Chilling area west of Titchfield Haven on Jan 15. Richard writes that he saw >> a female Sparrowhawk on a fence post with wings outspread and tail fanned. Its feathers were fluffed up and it looked huge - for a few delightful moments I thought I had found a Goshawk! It stayed in position for some time. <<

Finally I see that yesterday the Isle of Wight once more outdid all its neighbouring counties with a sighting of not just one or two but three Barn Owls seen together. This was in the Bembridge area west of the harbour viewed from Laundry Lane. With the Barn Owls were two Short-eared and a male Hen Harrier.

MON 21 JAN

My comments last Thursday (Jan 17) about the rarity of seeing Bullfinch feeding on the ground has brought an interesting comment from Ed Giffiths who says that for the past four or five winters he has at one time or another seen from his home in Buckinghamshire >> a large family party (5-6+) visiting the overgrown hedge viewable from my front window, concentrating on the brambles: a few are always seen on the ground beneath the brambles, and from somewhere I've gleaned the information they feed on the bramble 'pips' which have fallen to the ground as the fruit rots - which sounds possible.... << I have occasionally seen Bullfinch going for withered blackberry fruits (and thought how hungry they must be to resort to such unappetising food) without realising that they may be enjoying the equivalent of our Christmas bowl of nuts in the seeds. Andrew Howard, from Petworth in Sussex, also comments on the pleasure of recently seeing five Bullfinch simulataneously from his lounge window. I hope you all get such good garden sightings during next weekend's RSPB great garden birdwatch!

Richard Carpenter found 3 Water Pipit among Meadow Pipit when walking the Canal Path at Titchfield Haven today. Other birds seen there were the male Marsh Harrier, an Egret and a Chiffchaff. Next Sunday (Jan 27) Kevin Stouse will be leading a walk around the periphery of

the reserve and I hope the Water Pipit stay until then ...

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows found the Swan Pair back by their nest site on Peter Pond for the first time, and in the nearby Slipper Mill pond saw a pair of Little Grebe that will hopefully nest there. Also on the ponds and in the harbour are plenty of Mallard, Coot and Tufted Duck that have not yet felt the urges of spring, and a herd of 66 Swans that may never do so this year. The Black Swan is still present, and I see in the Sussex News that a new Black Swan has appeared on the floodplain of the River Adur between Steyning and Henfield

Other Sussex news for today comes from Brighton where 500+ Auks, 500 Kittiwake and 150 Gannet flew west in just 20 minutes. I am not sure if this was just a local movement of birds that are currently in the area but I see that yesterday up to 2000 Auks, 600 Kittiwake and 500+ Gannet were counted at Worthing - no direction is given for these birds (maybe just fishing there?) though I guess that a single Pomarine Skua reported with them may have been the first of the year heading east up channel (a single Bonxie and a Little Gull were also seen). Also on the SOS website is news for Sunday (Jan 20) from Pagham Harbour of the Glaucous Gull again coming to roost with 7 Med Gulls and a Little Gull, while the seven Bewick's Swans reported at Amberley Wild Brooks on Saturday (Jan 19) had increased to 34 showing how these birds move about from day to day in the Arun valley as they do at other sites. In the absence of any Hampshire Tree Sparrows I am glad to see that 10 were seen in the Hastings area on Sunday.

In his weekly 'Brook Meadow newsletter' from Emsworth Brian Fellows yesterday commented on the absence of Wren song which I too have observed recently and which I think is unusual at this time of year when the Robins, Dunnocks, Tits and pigeons are all very vocal. In particular it contrasts with Richard Carpenter's observation of Great Tits to be heard singing everywhere he goes, already paired and defending territories

Richard Carpenter was in the Botley Woods on Saturday (Jan 19) and came on a flock of around 60 Siskin and while there saw a Treecreeper, two Marsh Tits plus Nuthatch, Coal Tit and a single Buzzard.

Normally we have to wait until the second half of March before a sunny day brings the Buzzards out en masse to soar above their territories but we may see them much earlier this year if the mild weather continues, and in Sussex it looks as if some Buzzards have already got the spring feeling - as Andrew Howard was driving up the A285 from Chichester towards Petworth on Saturday (Jan 19) he saw 6 Buzzards all spiralling up over the Duncton Hill/Upwaltham area

PLANTS:

SUN 27 JAN

Hardly of much news value, but of personal interest, were the first Snowdrops and yellow Croci which I have seen this year, bordering Wade Court road here in Havant. At least one Celandine flower was out with them. Another flower which has been on the go for some time is Hairy Bittercress, and I see that yesterday Brian Fellows found what he believes to be Wavy Bittercress when at Titchfield Haven. I have no reason to doubt him (and am pretty sure I could now find some flowering in damp woodland rides at e.g. Stansted Forest) but I think I am not alone in finding it difficult to separate smaller plants of Wavy from the common Hairy Bittercress by counting the number of leaflets or stamens and I recommend a tip that I have only seen printed in the flower book by Fitter, Fitter and Blamey which is that the seed pods of Hairy Bittercress nearly always overtop the stem and terminal flowers while those of Wavy Bittercress never overtop it.

WED 23 JAN

The early flowering Goat Willow which grows among the Cherry Plum trees at the south end of Southmoor Lane opposite Budds Farm was covered with golden pussy paw catkins today and had clearly been in business for a week or so though this is the first time I have seen it this year. A genuine newcomer to my year list today was Chickweed - omnipresent through the winter I have seen flower buds on it for a long time but today the white flowers were open for the first time to my knowledge. Also on my walk today I met Tony Gutteridge who told me he had recently seen both flowering Snowdrops and the first leaves of Lords and Ladies pushing up.

MON 21 JAN

The first leaves of Lords and Ladies had pushed up through the ground at Emsworth when Brian Fellows was making his regular Monday round of the ponds and Brook Meadow today, ticking off another milestone on the road to spring, but I still have not seen or heard of fresh Dog's Mercury which is normally above ground and flowering by now. Not expected at this time of year (and just a freak sighting) were a couple of plants of Wood Avens that I found with fresh flowers in Mill Lane at Langstone last Saturday.

INSECTS:

SUN 27 JAN

My apologies to Lee Marshall for omitting to mention a news item which he sent me over a week ago. This is a report of a sighting of a Hummingbird Hawkmoth seen flying in a garden at St Ives (close to Huntingdon in what is now part of Cambridgeshire) on Jan 19 this year. The observer was someone who works at the Monks Wood Terrestrial Ecology site and there is no doubt of the identification - he does not mention the insect finding any nectar source but he did see it settle on a housewall in a corner under the eaves which sounds (with its appearance at this time of year) pretty good evidence for attempted hibernation. If they can survive in East Anglia I would think they have a better chance down here by the south coast so keep your eyes open ...

Another reason to apologize to Lee is that I also made a mistake on Jan 14 in reporting his unexpected find of a female Minotaur Beetle. I wrongly assumed he had seen it on the ground at Browdown but it had in fact taken wing and arrived in his moth trap overnight - I just wonder where it was going and why at this time of year

THU 24 JAN

Bob Chapman found a Red Admiral out and about in the 'Bushes' area of Farlington Marshes today

MON 21 JAN

Richard Carpenter today saw an early Bumblebee in his Hill Head garden - it was the white tailed *Bombus lucorum* that is often the first to be seen each spring. Also today I see on the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire website that yet another Red Admiral has been seen in Winchester - it was flying near the High Street on Jan 15 and is the fourth to be reported on that website for this year.

In the weekly newsletter of the Emsworth Brook Meadow conservation group I see that the meadow is thought by Andrew Brookes to be the southernmost site in south east Hampshire for the Ringlet butterflies seen there last summer. Looking to the future Andrew has suggested that the group might plant Alder Buckthorn and Elm in the meadow to encourage Brimstone and White-letter Hairstreak respectively, and I am delighted to see that plans are being laid to plant the Buckthorn if not the Elm.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

FRI 25 JAN

From Alresford Charles Cuthbert sends news that Frogs and Palmate Newts have been visible in his garden pond for a week or more, but he does not mention any spawn appearing yet. From the Isle of Wight comes news of five Red Squirrels seen in Firestone Copse at the southern end of Wootton Creek - I assume these Red Squirrels, like our Greys, do not hibernate in these mild winters.

TUE 22 JAN

When Trevor Carpenter was on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley today he noticed five Roe deer one of which, he says, was sitting in a field of horses. Less unusual behaviour for a Roe deer was described to me by Jim Berry who says that one seems to have taken up permanent residence in the gardens of the Bowes Hill area of Rowlands Castle and may often be seen in the gardens or crossing the road in daylight. Jim would like to know how you persuade a Roe deer to leave your garden and go back to the woods - I can't offer any suggestion, can you?

MON 21 JAN

Walking around Pagham Harbour today Lawrence Holloway found Newts active in the dragonfly

pond near the visitor centre and also watched a hunting Weasel nearby. Last Saturday Richard Carpenter was in the Botley Woods and noticed both Yellow Brain fungus and Blushing Brackets - I guess that the rain this weekend, with mild air, will bring a variety of fungi into prominence and add some colour to the woodland scene that can be a bit drab as we get near to February.

WEEK 03 JAN 14 - 20

BIRDS:

SUN 20 JAN

The rain and wind discouraged both birds and birders today but Will Walmsley found his trip to the Blashford Lakes near Ringwood was made worthwhile by a good view of a Bittern on Ivy Lake (which I assume to be the one at SU 153076 north of Snail's Lake across Ivy Lane). The only other report of a Bittern here this winter which I can recall was one which flew south across Snail's Lane on Jan 6, just over the bonnet of Glyn Horacek-Davis' moving car! On the Ibsley meadows Will found some 10 Bewick's and there was of course a great selection of wildfowl plus many other birds including Will's first Treecreeper of the year.

I don't know if anyone saw the Romsey Hawfinch today but Colin Allen saw 9 there yesterday and people who want to see them are reminded by John Clark and David Thelwell that Hawfinch always go to their night roosts early in the afternoon at this time of year - no good looking for them much after 2pm it seems. As well as the Mercer's Way site Rosi Woods has seen Hawfinch at Hillier's Garden Centre but I am not sure if by this she means their main site at Ampfield or possibly their small Garden Centre on the Botley Road in Romsey, much closer to Mercer's Way. Whichever site she means is where she suspects that they spend the night. From the Isle of Wight comes another report of the single female Velvet Scoter which seems to have settled this winter on the sea just east of Ryde. Following a number of reports (latest were Dec 27 and Jan 11) it was seen again today so if anyone needs to tick one they should buy a ticket to Ryde (and go along the coast to Seaview).

SAT 19 JAN

The Havant Wildlife Group went to the Hayling Oysterbeds today and found a pair of Gadwall on the main lagoon and a female Shoveler on another pool nearer Langstone Bridge. From the south end of the bridge they had a good sunlit view of around 380 Golden Plover off Langstone, and on the way back found both Stonechat and Yellowhammer by the coastal path.

From Langstone village John Chapman writes to tell me that a party of Long-tailed Tits in his garden today visited all his feeders (bird table, nut and seed feeders). I think this is the first time he has seen them do this and he wonders how widespread is this change in their feeding habits (previously they would move through the trees and bushes searching for tiny insects, but ignore the feeders). I have seen them on my nut-feeders from time to time, and am pretty sure they take tiny beakfuls of nut, but I far more often see them passing the feeders without visiting them. Has anyone got any scientific information about their feeding?

Still in the Langstone area I took the opportunity of a relatively cloudless sunset to walk down to check the Egret roost at Wade Court but as I arrived so did some very dark clouds which seemed to bring the birds in faster than usual - at one moment about a dozen birds arrived together. My count was 54 birds seen to arrive and there may have been others that were already hidden when I arrived or which I missed as they sneaked in through the trees. This seems to indicate that the number at this roost is still much the same as it was in October and that wherever the Alresford birds have come from it is not this area.

Richard Ford heard Meadow Pipit song at Woolmer Pond near Liss today, several weeks before I would have expected it, though this may have been just a chance utterance of a bird still in a winter flock rather than one already on territory. (I am still waiting for my first Chaffinch song which should begin in the coming week.) Also at Woolmer Richard had another view of the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker which seems to show well there, and he had another unusual sighting of a Sparrowhawk with wings and tail spread as if sunning itself (perched in a tree, not 'anting' on the ground). Perhaps all the Sparrowhawks here are more 'laid back' than usual, as last May (22 May 01) Gill Rooney saw an even more unusual sight of a Tawny Owl dropping its prey when she disturbed it on her early morning dog walk - the prey being a Sparrowhawk!. To

end a full day's birding today, including visits to Moor Green, where he saw up to 70 of maybe 200 Brambling, and to Fleet Pond where he saw a Bittern, Richard had a perfect view of a perched Barn Owl in his car headlights when driving through Wyck on a minor road north of East Worldham, a couple of miles east of Alton.

Back in December Doug Munts was driving on the A34 past Whitchurch and saw a Buzzard hovering like a Kestrel, and suspected it was a Rough-legged Buzzard, but today Keith Betton has been in that area and says that a bird which others have thought to be a Rough-legged is almost certainly just a pale Common Buzzard - nevertheless that part of Hampshire has a good share of raptors, with Short-eared Owl, Merlin, Kestrel, and Sparrowhawk all being seen recently in addition to the Buzzards. Keith drove on to the New Forest and saw three or four male Hen Harriers and a female, plus 3 different Merlins. More raptors were seen today by Dave Pearson and Steve Mansfield - Dave had a ringtail Hen Harrier at Abbots Worthy on the north-east fringe of Winchester and Steve had another in the Old Alresford area a good ten kilometres to the east (maybe these are the two birds that were probably roosting in the reeds around Alresford Pond last Thursday night, Jan 17). Steve also the first winter Little Gull that has been based on Alresford Pond for a couple of weeks and watched two Buzzards fly low over the pond on which he saw 29 Gadwall, 23 Shoveler, and 15 Pochard but only 1 Tufted Duck and 1 Canada Goose. Nearby he found two Green Sandpiper together on cressbeds (so far this winter it seems that only singles have been seen in an area where half a dozen used to be a common sight), and 46 Golden Plover flew over.

Nearer Portsmouth John Shillitoe today saw a covey of 5 Grey Partridge on the northern slopes of Portsdown between the main road to Wickham and Pigeon House Lane, and over at West Wellow Doug Munts had another close view of his garden Firecrest, seeing the yellow rather than orange crest to show that it is a female and being able to contrast the bright green of its back with the dull colour of a Goldcrest before it was driven off by a female Brambling.

Among today's Sussex news I see that there were 42 Bewick's Swans on the River Arun just north of the WWT reserve (seen from Offham) with at least another 7 at Amberley Wild Brooks. After recent sightings of around 60 of these Swans north of Arundel this count may indicate that some of the birds have flown on to Slimbridge (as it seems that perhaps 20 of those in the Avon Valley have done), but others could well still be elsewhere in the Arun valley. A Hen Harrier was over Amberley Wild Brooks.

FRI 18 JAN

On Wednesday I reported Trevor Carpenter's sighting of 150 Fieldfare on the north slope of Portsdown which seemed to be of interest as we have had no recent reports of large flocks, and today come two more such sightings, this time in the Alton area. The first of today's reports came from Moira Doherty who saw 187 or more in the Farringdon area (a little way south west of Alton on the A32) and the second sighting was of over 300 around Hartley Park Farm is on the B3006 Alton to Selborne road about 2 km east of Farringdon. Of course these birds may have been around un-noticed for some time but the presence of such flocks (especially Trevor's birds on Portsdown) suggests that the birds may be gathering into major flocks prior to heading north, or they may be flocks coming north over the Channel from the continent.

We are told that the Solent is a particularly good wintering area for Black-tailed Godwit because, when food in the harbour mud is running low at the end of the winter, the Godwits can move to the wet grassland around the Meon at Titchfield Haven and find plentiful food of the earth-worm variety to build up their strength for migration and breeding. The last two available Hampshire Bird Reports for 1998 and 1999 indicate that we should expect counts of at least 900 to 1000 Black-tailed Godwit at Titchfield Haven in January. Worryingly, Richard Carpenter tells me that the current count is only around 100 birds in the Titchfield Haven reserve now and so far through this month, so where are they all? With no source of current information on the WeBS counts (or any similar overview figures such as those which we used to get from Jason Crook's website) it may well be that there are plenty of birds in Langstone and Chichester Harbours (though they are in very short supply in the areas which I have looked at this month) and I know from the overview of the WeBS count for January in Portsmouth Harbour which has just arrived from Dennis Bill that the total of Black-tailed Godwit seen there on Jan 12 was only 18 (Bar-tailed nil).+++

Richard's other news from Titchfield for today is that the Bittern, Marsh Harrier and male Mandarin are still present, and the single Golden Plover that was on the beach recently seems to have moved into the reserve to join the Lapwing flock which, by its behaviour and chattering, seems to be moving into breeding mode. Close offshore today was a Great Northern Diver, and a full count of birds on the reserve shows that there are currently some 600 Wigeon and 300 Teal present. Richard remarks on the absence of the feral geese that come from Baffins Pond, but weekly reports from Brian Fellows shows that they were back on Baffins Pond on Dec 18 and have remained there since.

Kevin Stouse had a look round the IBM Lake today and saw two Green Woodpeckers together with what may have been a third bird in a different part of the site. His most interesting observation was of a party of ten Black-headed Gulls which flew in from the Paulsgrove tip or Tipner Lake making a deafening din with their calls but Kevin could see no reason for this (they were not pursuing one that had food). What he did notice was that as these birds landed on the lake the large flock of some 500 gulls that had been resting on the water started to take off one by one and fly over to the tip until there were only 100 left. Constant comings and goings are a regular feature as birds alternate between feeding on the rubbish tip and coming to the lake for a drink of moderately fresh water and to wash off some of the grime they have collected, but Kevin is convinced that there was a connection between the arrival of the noisy birds and the departure of the big flock - to suggest that they noisy ones were excitedly 'talking' about something they had just seen, and the others overheard them and went to see what all the fuss was about, may be too anthropomorphic. What do you think? On a connected subject Dennis Bill tells us that he has been in touch with Helen Davies of English Nature at Lyndhurst about the use of falcons on the tip, and she confirms that the requirement for 'gull control' was imposed on the tip management by the Environment Agency but she has been told that >> The contractor's birds are not supposed to leave the tip site and I'm told by someone witnessing the control, that they do not fly more than 100m away from the working face of the tip. << That of course does not include the falcon which first got the birds into the local press with a headline in the Portsmouth NEWS "Missing in Action" over a story of how one of the falcons flew off and was lost to its owner when he was working it on the tip.

A walk from Havant to Warblington and back along the shore via Langstone today gave me good views of the pair of Little Owls together in a big old oak in the field east of the Old Rectory in Pook Lane. If anyone wants to see them come down Church Lane towards Warblington Church, go past the unmade road on your right opposite the farmhouse on your left, then turn right and park in the tarmac road leading to Pook Lane before walking on towards the Old Rectory and Pook Lane proper. After about 100 yards stop before you get to the line of old oaks across the field on your right - this morning the birds were on the largest tree, second in from the road, which splits into two major branches close to the base (forming a Y shape). Near the base of the right hand major branch there is an area of rotten wood with an entrance hole which may well be the intended nest as the birds were close above it. Before seeing the owls I saw (from the footbridge over the A27) 9 Egrets with cattle in the field across the road from the farmhouse, and after passing the church I came on at least 40 Pied Wagtail and an estimated 50 Skylark in the remains of sweetcorn in very large field with the path along its southern edge. Just one Linnet and a few Meadow Pipits were also in this stubble as a Fox strolled along the north edge without worrying them. Over the field to the south of the hedge I heard my first prolonged Skylark song of the year.+++

Coming to the shore at Nore Barn I found 25 Brent in the corner field near the shore (only the second time this winter I have seen Brent on the Warblington fields where in past winters hundreds came onto the grass daily), and earlier I found 23 Curlew on the field south of the Old Rectory, but there was no shortage of birds on the shore proper with the tide coming up. The big flock of over 100 Golden Plover were in the small high mudbank roughly opposite the Northney marina entrance, and on my side of the water I found the first Bar-tailed Godwit I have seen this year - just four of them. A couple of Ringed Plover and two Turnstone were among the other species, but I saw no Knot today.

Lawrence Holloway was at Pagham Harbour today and counted 238 Shelduck in the areas he could see, and he was told that at least 21 Avocet were still present. Among other birds seen

by him were a Kingfisher, a Dartford Warbler and a Spotted Redshank. He goes on to comment that Pintail seem to be fewer in number than they were a month ago.

THU 17 JAN

Charles Cuthbert was at Alresford Pond late this afternoon and found 56 Egrets in the night roost. Other birds spending the night there were 38 Cormorant, 200 Pied Wagtail, 350 or so Starlings, over 20 Magpies and 24 Fieldfare with 25 Black-headed Gulls on the water. More interestingly 2 ringtail Hen Harriers and a first winter Little Gull turned up - the gull has been present (not seen every day) for the past two weeks and the Harriers may also be regular visitors to the reed bed though Charles has had only one other sighting of a single bird on Dec 29.

A story from Tony Hale, who lives in the Whitenap area of Romsey, about a pair of Bullfinch visiting his garden has an interesting tip on how to feed smaller ground feeding birds while excluding the Wood Pigeons. Tony writes >> Yesterday our garden was visited by a pair of Bullfinches which came down to the seed we put out. To try and deter the Collared Doves and Wood Pigeons which Hoover up large beakfuls of seed at a sitting, my wife has constructed a small wigwam of sticks and we put the seed in the middle of this. The female very quickly got the hang of this and filed her claim, driving away the male and any Greenfinches or House Sparrows that tried to venture in. It was amusing to see the male diving in and grabbing a beakful when she was busy chasing the other birds, and retreating swiftly when she returned. All was fine until our resident Robin appeared on the scene, and he very soon sorted out these unwelcome visitors to his patch! << Presumably the Robin is not good at distinguishing the pink of a Bullfinch breast from the red of a Robin. More seriously, when I first heard of Bullfinch feeding on the ground I was a little surprised, but I have since heard more than once that they cannot resist the seeds of wild Violets (does this present us with yet another conservation problem in which we have to choose between the saving the Bullfinch or saving the Fritillary butterflies - Silver Washed, Dark Green, High Brown and both Pearl-bordered - whose caterpillars eat Violet leaves?)

David Parker made a lunch time dash today from his office to the Chichester lakes and found the redhead Smew still present on Runcton Lake plus a female Scaup (a newcomer?) on the Nature Reserve Lake which is marked as New Lake on my map. Other Sussex news for today, taken off the excellent SOS website, comes from Ambersham Common where the regulars included 27 Redpoll, 3 Woodlark (2 singing), and 4 Dartford Warbler - less usual but also seen here were a ringtail Hen Harrier, a Peregrine and a Snipe. From East Sussex there was also a report of a single Jack Snipe by the River Ouse south of Lewes at Southease.

Glancing at the New Scientist today I see the experts claim to have proof that all birds and many marine creatures, but not land mammals, sleep with one half of their brains still awake (presumably alternating the half which is asleep). So if you see a bird with one eye open and the other closed it is not emulating Anne Robinson but is truly half-awake (and ready to react immediately to any threat).

WED 16 JAN

The most exciting bird in Hampshire today was probably the Rough-legged Buzzard which arrived in the Litchfield Down area yesterday afternoon and was still showing well today. I am not sure if Mike Wall was the finder of this bird but its location is at Ashley Warren Farm where he has recently told us of a big finch flock enjoying seed from plants intended as game cover and food. If you want to see the Buzzard or the finches (including a Corn Bunting and a few Brambling) you park at SU 487552 where the road passes under electricity pylons, then walk north west up a track to a farm building at 484557 and look north east for the Buzzard at 486558

Sussex news for today starts with a report of a Caspian Gull (Cachinnans) on Ivy Lake at Chichester, where the easier to identify Egyptian Goose is back for those who miss the yellow-legged gull. Not too far from Chichester in Pagham Harbour you can continue to hone your gull-id skills with a first winter western (Michahellis) Yellow-legged Gull, a first winter Glaucous Gull and an Argentatus Herring Gull from Scandinavia, but I myself would prefer the easier task of finding a flock of 22 Whitefront Geese that has just turned up there. In connection with these geese I see that Lawrence Holloway's lament over what he assumed to be the shooting of 12 of the 13 Whitefronts that were there recently may have brought

un-necessary tears to our eyes as Andrew House now tells us that the lone Whitefront seen on Jan 1/2 was a different bird from the flock of 13 that had been seen around the same time, and Andrew thinks that the loner was probably a Greenland Whitefront (though he did not take note of the more orange bill when he saw it).+++

Also in Pagham Harbour today by Nigel Voaden were 13 Avocet, 3 Spotted Redshank and one Pale-bellied Brent plus single Eider, Whimbrel and a Grey Partridge. The Golden Plover flock there numbered around 750 but there are still around 2000 at West Wittering with the Brant family and a Little Stint. Off Church Norton the Slavonian Grebes number 32 and 2 Red-necked Grebe can be seen near them with 3 Shag. Inland south east of Midhurst some 10 Woodlark were singing today at Ambersham Common, and over in East Sussex one watcher is delighted to see some 20 to 30 thousand Starlings come too roost on the pier at dusk - Sue Knight says >> I am not normally one to rave , but the flight of starlings each night over Eastbourne pier is simply magnificent . I have been watching them for the past few weeks now and they seem to have increased in both numbers and flying prowess . They usually appear from all directions about 30 minutes before sunset , fly around till sunset then go to roost under the pier . At a rough guess 20 to 30 thousand of them . A superb sight in itself but tonight even better - a falcon (presumably a peregrine ?) appeared continually diving and swooping into the swirling flock , getting lost among the melee and then re-appearing . After about 5 minutes it disappeared altogether presumably having caught a bird or having been overcome by the sheer numbers. <<

Both Trevor and Richard Carpenter were both independently birding in the Fareham area today and on the western end of Portsdown Trevor had his first sight of the Peregrine perched on an electricity pylon above the Wallington river valley near the Boarhunt to Fareham road - later Richard saw what was probably the same bird over Fareham Creek where he also enjoyed a Kingfisher, some 80 Golden Plover with 150 Lapwing and noticed a pair of Merganser and two pairs of Goldeneye which seemed to have already chosen their breeding partners. Trevor was also here at a different time of day and also remarks that the 12 Goldeneye and 8 Meganser which he saw here were all paired - not so the lone Brant that was back in the centre of Cams Bay nor a Pochard which had dropped in on the pond (presumably the one close to the creek that was created as a golf course hazard rather than the old established one south of the house). The Little Grebe flock still had 30 birds and the flock of 102 Canada Geese had also not yet turned their mind to producing the next generation of 'little horrors'. When on Portsdown Trevor came on a flock of 150 Fieldfare and 20 Redwing at Ashley Down Farm which (with a couple of houses and an ancient church) is the main feature of South Boarhunt hamlet. Higher on the hillside above the farm were 9 Red-legged Partridge near the tiny Damson Row tree belt.

Derek Hale has asked me to correct two items which I reported on Jan 13 from his Isle of Wight birding website. The first was the report of 106 Black-throated Divers flying past St Catherine's Point - this should have read 104 Red-throated with 2 Back-throated Divers which is more in line with the massive movement of divers seen elsewhere along the south coast. The other correction was of the spelling the the place where the Long-eared Owl and Firecrest had been seen - it was mistyped as Mesley but should have been Mersley which is in the eastern downs south of Wootton Creek. I should have realised this myself as there have been two reports of Long-eared Owl from this same place last year - one on March 3 and the other on Dec 24, the latter probably being the date on which this bird moved into its winter quarters. Andrew Brookes also deduced this was the place and tells me that the chalkpit on nearby Arretton Down is still alive with Chalkhill Blue butterflies in the summer, though sadly these eastern downs are much less rich in butterflies than the magnificent western downs on the island.

Reaching the shore near Langstone pond this morning just after 10:30 I saw a flock of Brent Geese which had been feeding close to the shore suddenly take off in obvious panic though the many other waders further out on the mud and other wildfowl on the water were not disturbed. I could see no people or dogs on the seawall from which the Brent fled, and heard no loud noise, but looking up I eventually saw a very large bird flying east along the shoreline, going away from me already several hundred yards away and perhaps 250 feet up. My first impression was of a Heron because of the size and the very arched wings as it alternated long

glides with occasional flaps but I immediately thought the jizz of the bird was not that of a Heron although because it was end on to me I could see no neck or legs. The first feature that struck me after seeing the very long, very arched wings, was the large round shape of the body, somewhat like a Great Blackback Gull. The second feature was the dead straight, very purposeful but unhurried flight, with the bird maintaining both direction and height with a minimum effort - perhaps two or three slow wing beats and then a long glide. The third feature was the large size (which I know to be very difficult to judge against a featureless sky) - at first glance the wings looked longer than those of a Grey Heron, and the body more bulky, even when the bird was at the limit of the distance I could see it as it approached Emsworth. The fourth point was the panic among the geese (but not the waders) - they went off at the moment when the bird would have appeared in their field of view (when it was hidden from me by trees), but that might be just co-incidence. After this unidentified bird had vanished I checked the others on the shore and estimated that the Golden Plover flock was up to at least 450 while on Langstone Pond that 'reluctant to leave home' cygnet was back with its parents.

No Blackbird song heard today but a Mistle Thrush added to the Song Thrush chorus (and I think I heard two other Mistle Thrushes while cycling around Hayling)

TUE 15 JAN

John Cark tells us that a second winter Med Gull seen on Petersfield Heath Pond has just been reported to him, and also in today's messages are more than one about the 'white gull' seen at Broadmarsh during the walk led by Kevin Stouse last Sunday (Jan 13). Most relevant is one from Jason Crook who says that he has had several recent sightings of a similar gull in the same area, some close enough to be sure that it is a Common Gull. The bill markings indicate that it is not yet mature, but the pink feet which put us off plumping for Common Gull could be part of the poor bird's mixed up genes in respect of colour (normally Common Gulls only have flesh pink feet when they are strictly juveniles). Jason confirms that there are leucistic Black-headed gulls in the Langstone Harbour area - one was to be seen in the South Binness gullery during the past breeding season and what was probably the same bird was seen by Jason yesterday (Jan 15) in Tipner Lake at the other end of Ports Creek connecting Langstone to Portsmouth harbour. Black-headed x Med Gull hybrids are much less common and Jason knows of only one in this area this year (last seen in the summer by Tim Lawman at South Hayling). Barry Collins contributes a recent sighting of an albino Black-headed Gull which he saw in Emsworth Harbour on Dec 29.

Still on the subject of last Sunday's walk Kevin Stouse today tells me that, after I left the walk party on the South Moors they not only had another Kingfisher sighting but also confirmed the presence of Linnet at Broadmarsh by finding 12 there when they returned. Finally, the probable Common Sandpiper seen by Will Walmsley was not at Budds Farm but flying over the harbour near Langston Bridge. On a separate subject Kevin today saw the pair of Kestrel flying together around the IBM buildings at Portsmouth, so the display flight of the male which I saw last Saturday was not in vain.

More recent local news comes from Tony Gutteridge who also saw the Little Owl in old oaks just east of the Old Rectory in Pook Lane at Warblington on Jan 9, one day before I saw it, and Tony tells me the pair were seen together in another nearby tree by Diana Bishop, who lives at Warblington Castle, just before that so it looks as if we have a breeding pair back at this site after an absence of several years (though they have only moved around locally between different nest sites in the same way that Kestrel and perhaps other hole nesting birds do to avoid infestations of mites and other parasites which build up in a regularly used nest hole). Back on Dec 31 Tony had a flock of 20+ Reed Bunting at Thorney marina, and on Jan 1 heard Great Spotted Woodpecker drumming at Noar Hill. Being on the Isle of Wight on Jan 6 he heard the first Song Thrush song at Adgestone at dusk that day, and it seems that these birds have started their song on a staggered schedule, not all on the same day as is sometimes the case.

Here in Havant I was wondering why I had not heard regular Song Thrush song by Jan 9 (they usually start around Christmas) and went in search of their song that day but could hear only one. Then on the morning of Jan 10 two were singing at dawn near my garden and since then they have been a daily sound in Havant. Each day since then others have reported their first

song and yesterday this 'Mexican wave' reached Hill Head where Richard Carpenter heard his first, along with his first Dunnock song. Around my garden in Havant today the local Blackbird again sang briefly at around 6:45am and a little later three Song Thrushes were all shouting their heads off. Richard's main news today comes from Hook near Warsash where the regular Little Owl was once more to be seen at Beam Cottage in Hook Park, and on the scrape there were 150 Wigeon, 99 Teal, 14 Shelduck, 6 Shoveler, 4 Gadwall and 2 Pintail along with 16 Curlew and 17 Black-tailed Godwit

Brian Fellows was in Southsea as usual on a Tuesday and saw a flock of 60 Sanderling flying east past Southsea Castle to land on the shingle west of South Parade Pier, later moving east of the pier. At Baffins Pond the rollcall was much as usual with the feral geese still present. The Canada Geese numbered 26, Mallard 82, Tufted Duck 58 and Shoveler 22. Of 5 Cormorant present 2 had their spring markings (white thigh roundels). A lot more Cormorant can be seen in Pagham Harbour where Lawrence Holloway found 250 of them roosting on Tern Island at the mouth of the harbour (presumably at high tide), and also in the harbour were 11 Avocet

A phone call from John Gowen today told me that the flock of Great Crested Grebe off the Langstone South Moors shore (which numbered around 43 two days ago) had now grown to 63. John also gave me more detail of the Havant Wildlife Group outing in Stansted Forest last Saturday (Jan 12) when they had a close encounter with a Tawny Owl. This happened in the Ladies Walk (eastern side of the Forest north of the road to the House) and began with the noise of birds scolding the owl until it seems it got fed up with them and flew out in pursuit of a Jay which had been particularly annoying it. The brought the owl head on to the walkers, causing the owl to forget the Jay and swerve away to land in a nearby Pine tree whose open structure gave the group excellent close views of it. It seems that there was no flock of Redwing or Fieldfare to be seen in this area (a favourite place for both species last winter) and the only unusual sight was of a tight, single species flock of 15 Great Tits.

Today's Sussex news starts with a Ring-billed Gull seen again at the Arundel WWT reserve and continues with a list of last week-end's WeBS count at Pulborough on Jan 14 - 3374 Wigeon, 1108 Teal, 168 Pintail, 101 Mallard, 54 Shoveler, 5 Gadwall and 1 drake Mandarin plus 53 Bewick's Swan and 16 Whitefront Geese. Also listed were 1273 Lapwing, 23 Ruff, 5 Golden Plover and 1 riingtail Hen Harrier (If you wanted a Whooper Swan you would have had to go to Dungeness in Kent).. There were even more Lapwing (some 2500) seen by Andy Horton in the Shoreham area, and from East Sussex came news of the continuing movement of Red-throated Divers, mainly westward, on Jan 14. At Rye 835 went west in 90 minutes and at Bexhill the counts were of 869 west, 190 east and 15 remaining on the sea. From Hastings 194 Red-throats were seen with 3 Black-throats and 43 unidentified.

In Romsey on Sunday (Jan 13) David Thelwell counted at least 10 Hawfinch and thinks the number there may continue to rise but in the Avon Valley John Clark had a relatively disappointing day - he only found 6 Bewick's Swans and counted just 20 Common Gulls in the night roost where there were 900+ on Jan 4. The single young Scaup and Smew (although a redhead John thinks it may turn out to be a male) were still present, there were only two Ruddy Duck and there was a minimum of 12 Goosander.

Sussex news for Sunday (Jan 13) included a report of a Common Crane over the village of Washington by the A283 between Storrington and Steyning, and from Runcton Lake at Chichester both the single Smew and the pair of Red-crested Pochard were seen on Sunday plus a colour ringed (green) adult Med Gull on Vinnetrow Lake next door. Also worth a mention were 14 Grey Partridge seen in a field near Pagham Village Hall last Friday (Jan 11). Over on the Isle of Wight yesterday (Jan 14) 4 Tundra Bean Geese were on the south west shore inland from Shepherd's Chine.

MON 14 JAN

Gardens in West Wellow, lying on the north east fringe of the New Forest and connected to the River Test by a River Blackwater (not to be confused with other streams of the same name which flow around Aldershot and under the A35 south west of Lyndhurst) should record good lists of garden birds but there was probably an element of luck involved when Derek Allnut today saw a Firecrest fly from his garden towards that of Doug Munts (also living in the same village) and the latter, prompted by a phone call from Derek, was lucky enough to see it working

a holly bush in his garden. In Doug's garden today the list included a Treecreeper, 4 or 5 Redwing, and 3 Brambling (and, at 5am, a Tawny Owl) while Derek's garden witnessed the mating of a pair of Great Spotted Woodpecker and the arrival of a Brambling, both last Saturday (Jan 12). The mating Woodpeckers give me cause for concern - I see the incubation time for their eggs is as little as 12 days and I do not think young hatched in early February will have the best chance of survival.

Richard Carpenter was at Brownwich, just west of Titchfield Haven, today and found 21 Gadwall on the pond (just one more than were there yesterday for the WeBS count) with 12 Tufted Duck, 4 Pochard, 2 Wigeon, 2 Little Grebe and a Kingfisher, on on the sea the Great Crested Grebe now number 24 with 8Eider, 4 Scoter and 8 Merganser. The ponds at Emsworth have a very different assembly of wildfowl and today's check on them by Brian Fellows found the Swans down to 57 and 'only' 158 Mallard and a crowd of 50 Coot (a record for this site). The Black Swan is still present and the good news is that one pair of Swans has separated from the main flock and was seen on the Slipper Mill Pond, hopefully moving towards the traditional nest site on the adjoining Peter Pond. One Little Grebe on the Slipper Millpond also gives hope of a pair nesting there - we shall see.

In Emsworth's Brook Meadow two Song Thrushes sang strongly as I suspect they are doing everywhere now - as I write this on the morning of Jan 15 I have just been listening to three of them around my house plus a good burst of Blackbird song again just before 7am

Yesterday (Jan 13) brought a third winter Iceland Gull to roost in Southampton Water on a hulk off Weston where it was seen by Richard Bonser around 4pm with two adult Med Gulls and a first winter Yellow-legged Gull. Earlier in the day Russell Wynn had been at Hurst and seen 27 Red-throated Divers (a new Hampshire county record day count) with one Great Northern and one Black-throated to show that we are getting a tiny share of the huge movement of divers that has been going west through the Dover Straights recently. Also at Hurst were two Little Gulls, a Med Gull, a Razorbill and a Peregrine. The single Razorbill reminds me that there has also been a very substantial movement of Auks along the Sussex coast in the past week, e.g. a report from Splash Point at Seaford (between Brighton and Beachy Head) records 1300 Auks going east in 9 hours of seawatching over four days (Jan 7-10), while at Brighton on Jan 9 just 15 minutes of watching gave 145 Auks east and 45 west.

Also on Jan 13, near Exbury on the Beaulieu River, Colin Savage saw 38 Mandarin in flight together, and later in the day at Inchmery Lane between Exbury and Lepe he watched 3 Buzzards, a Peregrine and a Barn Owl all in the air at the same time. Inland at Denny Wood Colin came on a flock of over 150 Siskin. Moving from the south of Hampshire to the north I see that Mike Wall was in the Ashley Warren / Watership Down area just east of the A34 between Whitchurch and Newbury and found a large finch flock still enjoying seed of the game crops grown near Ashley Warren farm - among them was a single Corn Bunting (the only one in Hampshire??) and a Brambling with many Reed Bunting and Yellowhammer, and also in the area was a Short-eared Owl.

Moira Doherty was in the Langstone Harbour area yesterday (Jan 13) and shows great enthusiasm for our local birds among which she saw a Goosander (would that have been at the Kench?) and a female Merlin (which I guess was at Farlington Marshes where she probably also recorded Reed Bunting which I still have not got on my year list!). John Goodspeed also passed over the Langstone Bridge to Hayling and confirms my feeling that the Golden Plover flock in the Langstone area of Chchester Harbour is at last growing to a reasonable size - he estimates 300 on Jan 13.

John also visited the Blashford Lakes/lbsley area on Jan 13 seeing the Bewick's Swans and Goosander that attracted most attention - Martin Pitt counted 9 Goosander and saw the redhead Smew, while Simon Harthill estimated 700 Wigeon at lbsley, but no one seems to have seen more than 4 of the recent flock of 30 Bewick's. We know from Keith Betton that at least one of the 30 is now at Slimbridge - he wrote recently >> One of the ringed Bewick's Swans that was at lbsley last Saturday (TPY) arrived at Slimbridge (Gloucestershire) this morning (Jan 11) together with her mate. Actually they arrived overnight at some stage. She has a name - Yalan and her mate is called Vorkuta (each bird has an individual bill pattern which aids identification). This is the second winter they have been recorded together so

maybe next year they will bring back some young. <<

News for Saturday (Jan 12) from Russell Wynn in the Hurst/Keyhaven area tells of a second Little Stint now present (and of the arrival of 5 escaped Yellow-billed Teal). Other birds of note on his list were 13 Red-throated, 2 Black-throated and 4 Great Northern Divers, 2 Brant, 2 Whitefronts, 5 Slavonian Grebe, a Spotted Redhank plus single Med Gull, Barn Owl and Dartford Warbler. Further east in Southampton Water Richard Bonser had 2 Yellow-legged Gulls off Weston (an adult and a first winter) and off Black Point on Hayling Brian Fellows found 11 Bar-tailed Godwit during his WeBS count (are these the only ones in Hampshire??). Oddities observed during his WeBS count were the first Shoveler he has ever seen on Tournerbury Farm pond, and a single Little Egret and Teal on the pool behind the seawall by Mengham Sailing Club (a pool that I think will soon vanish as part of proposed sea defence works).

Inland on Jan 12 Simon Harthill found six Hawfinch still at the Romsey site and Richard Carpenter took a trip to Alresford where he worked the area northwest of Alresford around the fringe of Arlebury Park and lake on which he found 41 Tufted Duck, 10 Pochard and four Gadwall. Also in the area were 9 Herons and 1 Egret plus a Green Sandpiper and a Grey Wagtail. On open country to the north he saw a Buzzard and flocks of around 200 each of Lapwing and Golden Plover. Also on Saturday I hear that the Havant Wildlife Group in Stansted Forest had a close encounter with a Tawny Owl which flew out low over their heads

PLANTS:

SAT 19 JAN

The first wild Snowdrops were seen today by Rosi Woods in Dorset, reminding us that others may well be flowering in places like Warneford in the Meon Valley where acres of them appear each spring. Not quite so exciting was the one Sweet Violet flower seen by the Havant Wildlife Group with a Creeping Buttercup near the Hayling Oysterbeds, but their find of White Melilot in flower at this time of year was very unusual..

FRI 18 JAN

In a normal spring Butterbur flower spikes appear above ground before we see any leaves but this winter is not normal and there are now plenty of fresh leaves (but no flowers) to be seen on the plants by the Langbrook stream at Langstone. Admittedly these are plants which some would say should not be here as they are females and were planted to 'enhance' the land acquired by IBM around 1980 but they have settled in and flourished without any gardener's attentions since then. I suspect that the 'native' male plants at Emsworth's Brook Meadow and further up the River Ems at Racton may be behaving as the books tell them to do, but I have not checked. The reason for mentioning this plant today is that it had a special mention on the TV News in connection with an announcement that it has been found to be the cure for Hay Fever - stopping the runny nose and headache without the drowsiness brought on by current cures. I hope the Brook Meadow Group are ready to repel the Butterbur poachers!

WED 16 JAN

In Brook Meadow at Emsworth today Brian Fellows found the first Celandine flowers and Goat Willow male catkins were open for business, and yesterday Richard Carpenter saw Common Ragwort still flowering on the shore at Hook near Warsash (a couple of plants of this have also survived by the Brockhampton stream where it meets Langstone Harbour - I suppose the slightly warmer air over the sea helps to protect them from frost?).

On my way down the Hayling coastal path today I stopped to check the Primrose plants in the little shoreline copse south of Stoke Bay but could see no sign of flower buds among the many fresh leaves. I suspect some Primroses are flowering in favoured spots and Tony Gutteridge tells me that he found two flowers on one apparently wild plant in the Liphook area as early as Jan 5.

MON 14 JAN

More Hazel catkins were showing yellow in the Brownwich area west of Titchfield Haven when Richard Carpenter was there today and last Saturday (Jan 12) he recorded the first 'sticky buds' (I guess this means Horse Chestnut buds that will soon open to release both leaves and flowers). Also on Saturday the Havant Wildlife Group in Stansted Forest came on an unseasonal Blackberry flower ...

INSECTS:

SAT 19 JAN

Two Hares were seen today by John Shillitoe in fields on the northern slope of Portsdown, east of Southwick village and north of the Wickham road, and I hear from a friend in Dorset that he saw a Common Seal in Christchurch Harbour when he was at Stanpit Marshes recently.

FRI 18 JAN

On 27 July 2001 I described a close observation of what can only have been a Green Hairstreak feeding on Marjoram, but from only a couple of feet away I could detect no hint of green colour on any of its underwings. On 29 Sept I had an email from a Roger Hill in Devon saying that he had found more than one Green Hairstreak this year on which almost all the scales (which generate the green colour by their optical properties) had dropped off, and Roger quoted from the Observer's Book of Butterflies in which W J Stokoe wrote >> Although generally greenish on the underside of the hind wings, now and then they are found to be brown in colour, and this change has been ascribed to the action of moisture. << By 'action of moisture' I wonder if he means they were bombarded by heavy raindrops which knocked the scales off? Today I see on the Butterfly Conservation Hampshire branch website that a Brian Anderson from East Anglia has picked up my original sighting and commented >> I saw something similar in Norfolk in June 2001. I had the opportunity to study it for some time. In this case only the forewing was brown but the ventral surface had scales - there was simply no optical interference effect creating the green. I imagined that some malformation during pupation had prevented the scales developing the microstructure necessary for optical reinforcement in green wavelengths. What I was seeing was the "ground colour" of the chitin. Seems like yours was the same but more so! << I assume that the words 'ventral surface' refer to the underside of the rear wing which had scales and was green, while the brown underside of the forewing had no scales, but regardless of this I think we can conclude that brown Green Hairstreaks are not unheard of, and due to the absence of the green which catches our eyes may well often be overlooked, but I don't feel that we yet have the true definition of why this occurs.

MON 14 JAN

The Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website has had two more reports of winter butterfly sightings in response to its recent press publicity. One was of a Brimstone seen on Dec 28 in the Tadley area north of Basingstoke, the other of a Small Tortoiseshell disturbed in a house at Andover and sent out into the cold to fend for itself.

Two new moths for the year came to Lee Marshall's light last night - one was a Red Green Carpet which should still be in hibernation until April or even May according to Skinner's book, the other was a Pale Brindled Beauty. Lee also saw a female Minotaur Beetle, presumably on Browdown as these beetles make burrows in sandy soil (the diameter of the burrow being of the right size to take a rabbit dropping pellet which the beetle rolls down it to serve as food for larvae and for adults). I understand that the main purpose of the burrows is as egg-laying chambers but I do not know if the adults also live in some of the tunnels - I gather that they do consume some of the droppings though there is plenty left over to feed the larvae. I also understand that the horns on the male beetles help in the process of rolling the dung pellets to the tunnels but do not know if they are ever used for fighting!

OTHER WILDLIFE:

THU 17 JAN

I regularly see Squirrels heading for my bird table through trees at the end of the garden, even in the depths of winter, but this morning I watched three Squirrels chasing each other around the trees with no apparent intention of invading my garden for food. I have heard that when female Squirrels are ready to mate they select their mating partner through an endurance test which seems to prove that the females of this species are tougher than the males. When the males notice that she is interested in breeding she does not let them approach her easily, but sets off on an marathon race through the trees with all the interested males in hot pursuit. One by one they drop out exhausted, but she keeps going until she has only one pursuer whose standard of fitness is up to hers, and he is the one who is allowed to mate with her. Whether the three

Squirrels that I saw this morning were running one of these marathons, or just practising, I do not know, but if they are thinking of mating then Foresters must be ready to protect young trees which the females will soon be stripping of bark as they gather material to build their breeding dreys.

MON 14 JAN

More Velvet Shank fungus was found in Emsworth's Brook Meadow by Brian Fellows recently and on Saturday (Jan 12) Richard Carpenter found many Brick Caps (which look somewhat like the Velvet Shank but do not have the slimy caps and tough flattened stems). In Stansted Forest the Havant Wildlife Group came on a display of Oyster Mushrooms as they entered the main avenue carpark, and then found a lovely show of Tripe Fungus by the 'Ornamental Dive' just north of the east end of the main avenue.

WEEK 02 JAN 07 - 13

BIRDS:

SUN 13 JAN

This morning I walked to Broadmarsh to join Kevin Stouse's walk along the shore from Broadmarsh to South Moors. On my way there through Bedhampton I heard the sharp calls of a Kingfisher near the mill, with the quieter song of Goldcrest, and had a glimpse of what must have been a Green Sandpiper dropping silently into the Hermitage Stream just above the Water Works entrance. On the Chalkdock channel by which the walk assembled the high tide gave us misty views of many wildfowl (mainly Wigeon and Brent though there were up to four Pintail and a very possible single Pale-bellied Brent) with moderate sized flocks of up to fifty Redshank and Turnstone on the shore (some people saw the occasional Grey and Ringed Plover). All these birds were a bit jittery in response to the distant shots of wildfowling operating just outside the Farlington Marshes reserve, so we headed away from them and the noise towards the mouth of the Hermitage Stream where we spent some time watching an apparently pure white gull (though it had pink legs and markings on its bill which I did not see myself). It was standing on the far shore among a crowd of Black-headed Gulls and one Common Gull and I think everyone agreed its size and headshape were much closer to the Common than the Black-heads, but when it flew (not seen by me) it was said to look like a Black-head. The flight and pink legs would seem to indicate that one of its parents was Black-headed, but was the other parent a Common or a Med Gull? I have heard of more than one Med x Blackhead being seen in our area in recent years and if one of those is now fully adult this could be it, whereas I have not heard of any Common x Blackhead crosses.. No doubt with such a prominent white gull there will soon be a verdict on its identity from those who know such things.+++

Coming down the Brockhampton Stream the regular Chiffchaff was working the bushes near the old mill waterfall but the Kingfisher was more elusive (though it was seen briefly by two different people). Around the Budds Farm outfall a flock of some 20 Goldeneye was mobile on the water and a breeding plumage Cormorant flew up the Hermitage Stream showing grey wing and white thigh roundels. On the Budds Farm pools we had good views of the hybrid Ferruginous (aka 'Dodgey Fudge') duck standing and preening at the water's edge of the promontory in the middle pool, with Shoveler, Pochard, Teal, Mallard and Tufted Duck nearby. Continuing along the South Moors shore we came to a flock of 40+ Great Crested Grebe in Bridge Lake with another half dozen Goldeneye among them, and on the shingle point at the mouth of the Langbrook stream was a roosting flock of Dunlin with the odd Oystercatcher, Redshank and a few Turnstone while two Egrets were busy around the Tamarisk pool just inland and just two Skylark flew over (Meadow and Rock Pipt were also on our list). I left the party to head home up the Langbrook stream, adding Green Woodpecker, Mistle Thrush, Coal Tit and a smart pair of Grey Wagtail to my list.+++

After writing the above I checked Will Walmsley's website for any detail I had missed (he was also on the walk) and see that he had recorded four small birds which flew over the Broadmarsh slipway carpark as Linnet. They looked like Linnet to me and as I have not yet got this species on my year list I will gratefully accept Will's identification! I also see that he recorded a probable Common Sandpiper (presumably at Budds Farm, and maybe when he was there before the walk started). I also see on the SOS website a report of a 'very white Black-headed Gull' in

Pagham Harbour last Thursday (Jan 10) seen by an SOS walk party when they were at Church Norton – could it have been the one we saw today?

Last Tuesday (Jan 8) I commented on a sighting of a Dipper at Arundel, and reflected on a number of sightings in Hampshire in the early 1990s (the last reported in the Hampshire Bird Reports being in 1997). This prompted David Holland to send me the following account of his sightings at that time in the Lordswood area of Southampton. David says >> When I lived in the Lordswood area of Southampton, I regularly wandered around my "very local patch" of Lordswood and Tanners Brook. Regulars there included all three woodpeckers, tawny owls, grey wagtails in winter, siskins, redpolls, nuthatches and treecreepers. Local rarities included the odd kingfisher, a party of firecrests which overwintered in 1993/94 and a dipper! I first saw the dipper on December 12th 1993, on Tanners Brook, very close to the back fence of my garden (now that would have been a great garden record). I saw it again in early 1994, on several dates including Jan 4th and 15th. I last saw it on December 22nd 1995, over two years after my first sighting. The bird was of the British race (chestnut belly) and all the sightings were during or after heavy rain, when the Brook was faster-flowing than normal. Its favourite spot was on the Brook, in the wooded patch just opposite the Lordswood Community Centre on Sandpiper Road (SU398163). <<

Continuing the story of vast numbers of divers moving along the coast (see Jan 12) Derek Hale today reports 106 Black-throated Divers passing St Catherine's Point on the Isle of Wight (presumably going west though no direction given) and 12 Red-throated Divers on the water off Whale Chine, a few miles west of the point. Also seen from the Island last Friday (Jan 11) was a Velvet Scoter and two Great Northern Divers off Seaview near Ryde, and earlier in the week a Firecrest and a Long-eared Owl were seen at somewhere called Mesley which I have not been able to locate.

Ian Calderwood again had a Black Brant at Frater Lake off Portsmouth Harbour today, and by the River Itchen Colin Bates heard 4 Mistle and 4 Song Thrushes all singing today in the Bishopstoke area with 4 Stonechat still around and a female Blackcap in his garden. From his house he can just see the factory rooves of the Chickenhall Industrial Estate where Herring and Lesser Blackback gulls bred successfully last spring, and a few pairs of both species seem to be back and contending for nest space already. Way up the Test Valley in Andover that Emperor Goose was with 20 Canada Geese on the Anton Lakes at Andover today (seen by Tony Polley, news via Brian Rickwood), and around the lakes were 100+ Siskin, 12+ Bullfinch, a Kingfisher and at least 4 Water Rails.

SAT 12 JAN

Paul Troake, warden of the Rye Harbour nature reserve, reports an astonishing passage of divers past the reserve this morning, nearly doubling the Sussex county record for a day count of divers. He reports a count of about 700 Red-throated Divers flying west and another 100 east, and says that the previous county record was 423. Much further west in East Sussex at Seaford 72 divers (unidentified) flew east and at Norman's Bay, Pevensey 55 Red-throated were seen flying west in just 10 minutes! This movement is not a one day wonder as another count of 522 Red-throated Divers flying west was made at Rye Harbour on Thursday (Jan 10) in just 90 minutes. Another observation of divers came from Hastings yesterday (Jan 11) when some 85 Divers were seen close offshore – one was a Great Northern, 60 were Red-throated and 25 were unidentified.

In Hampshire Paul Winter recorded two diver species at Hurst Spit today (but only 3 Red-throated going west and 1 Black-throated going east) and around Keyhaven David Taylor logged one Little Stint, three Yellow-legged Gulls, a Med Gull, one Slavonina Grebe and two Eider. Inland, in his garden at Oliver's Battery south of Winchester, Norman Hunt had three Brambling and a female Blackcap.

Going back to today's Sussex sightings I see that 11 Avocet were still in the Thorney channel (and three Short-eared Owls near the Thorney Deeps), and the two Red-crested Pochard were still in the south-east corner of Ivy Lake at Chichester with the redhead Smew on Runcton Lake. In Pagham Harbour two Brant and single Glaucous and Med Gulls were seen, with two Red-necked Grebe offshore plus 8 Little Stint in the East Head area at the mouth of Chichester Harbour.

My front-garden Blackbird sang again today, not at dawn but in mid-afternoon, and in the morning two Song Thrushes were singing stongly at each other across my garden while a third shouted on its own elsewhere in Havant. Soon after heaing them I was off to North Harbour at Portsmouth to make my WeBS count around the IBM lake where the first of three more signs of approaching spring was the noisy presence of a pair of Canada Geese guarding their regular nest site against a building wall (the nest not only has a brick wall on one side for warmth but the building overhangs the nest to keep off the rain, the site is about ten feet above ground level and unlikely to be on any fox's regular route, and the birds have a large lawn of close mown grass leading down to one of the canals – in human housing terms this perfect location would easily fetch £500,000 on the open market!). Only one other lone Canada Goose was present on the site but no doubt other pairs will soon return. The second sign of spring was the presence of a lone Swan on the lake, probably prospecting for a nest and perhaps confused by the extensive cutting back of the reeds around the lake since last spring – I doubt they will use the nest site at the east end of the lake where they have been for several years, which is now very exposed, but there are three other suitable nest sites that have been used in the past, two in other reed patches and one on the high open ground of one of the islands. The third and most positive sign of spring was a prolonged display by a male Kestrel, flying slowly with 'shivering wings' and continuously calling 'kee-kee-kee-kee ...' towards and around the nest site of recent years high on the east end of the building, then continuing the flight right around the buildings (no sign of a participating female – I don't suppose it possible that she is already sitting, muh more likely the male was just advertising a 'situation vacant' for mate and mother to any female in earshot). A more negative sign was the absence of even one Great Crested Grebe.+++

More normal sights for January included a grazing flock of 42 Coot (though six pairs elsewhere on the water were already in territory holding spring mood). Other winter visitors were ten Shoveler, ten Pochard and nine Teal plus a single Water Rail which gave me a good view as it flew from under the lake bank almost at my feet across a narrow channel of open water, showing its small dumpy, bright brown body and long red bill, disappearing into the vegetation on fast moving long legs as soon as it touched down. 85 Mallard, 5 Tufted Duck and 4 Little Grebe were all possibly residents that will breed. One Heron and three or four hundred Black-headed Gulls (at least one with full chocolate head-dress), plus single Herring and Lesserblacks with perhaps twenty Common Gulls, were the only other species to go on the WeBS report but a couple of other birds deserve a mention – firstly a noisy Jay (uncommon here) and secondly yet another singing Blackbird. Two missing species were the Green Woodpecker and Snipe (and still no Reed Bunting for my year list!)

Richard Carpenter's news from Titchfield Haven for Friday (Jan 11) came in just too late for my Friday update (done early because of Saturday's WeBS count) and tells us that there were five species of diurnal raptor there during the day (Marsh Harrier, Buzzard, Peregrine, Sparrowhawk and Kestrel) plus a couple of Barn Owls hunting at the end of the day. The Bittern and the drake Mandarin were both seen, and in Poplar trees to the west some 100 Fieldfare were recorded (this is a summary of sightings, not all made by Richard). I hear that there were also 8 Eider and a Red-throated Diver offshore.

Sussex news for Thursday (Jan 10) comes from a report on an SOS walk in the Selsey/Pagham area. They saw all three Diver species and an adult Little Gull at Selsey, plus the 'very white Black-headed Gull' in Pagham Harbour where there were two Glaucous, one Iceland and a Yellow-legged Gull reported by others. The Red-crested Pochard and Smew were on the Chichester Lakes and at Pulborough 17 Ruff and an odd Dunlin were seen. From Rye Harbour very high counts of Gadwall (203) and Shoveler (300+) were reported and interestingly their Egret night roost count had fallen to just 11.

In Hampshire more inland Egrets were reported yesterday (Jan 11) – three at Winchester and singles at both West and East Meon (do these, plus those which fish below Meonstoke, all go to Alresford at night?). Other news for Jan 11 is of a first winter Yellow-legged Gull at Weston Shore, Southampton and of a Peregrine once more roosting at the Vosper's site at Woolston (mouth of the Itchen).

FRI 11 JAN

A Robin was already collecting nest material in Lawrence Holloway's garden at Aldwick (Bognor) today – the same garden had a single Egret as a welcome but unexpected visitor. At Pagham Harbour today Lawrence estimated the Golden Plover flock to be between 1000 and 1300 birds and offshore, among a flock of 54 Great Crested Grebes one pair was practising its mutual courtship display.

At Romsey the Hawfinch can still be seen in the usual place where Mercer's Way meets the canal, and Phil Lord is pretty certain that there were at least 8 of them there today. In Emsworth the Black Swan was back on the Mill Pond after nearly a week's absence, and over at Titchfield Haven John Firth found the male Mandarin still showing by the road bridge. John also saw an odd Golden Plover on the beach with Turnstone and Ringed Plover, 8 or 9 Eider on the sea and a Red-throated Diver flying west.

The Blackbird outside my bedroom window here in Havant sang again this morning for about five minutes around 7 am and though the day Song Thrushes were giving their normal winter song – I could hear two from my garden before breakfast, when Brian Fellows was hearing at least one in Emsworth, and at dusk one was singing near Langstone Pond as I counted 37 Egrets coming in to the night roost at Wade Court. While at Langstone I noticed an increase in the Golden Plover roost on the shore to around 200 birds, and could see 69 Shelduck from just one spot on the shore.

THU 10 JAN

An Emperor Goose has just turned up by the River Anton in central Andover and is assumed to be the same one that spent a couple of years in the Emsworth area up to 2000, was then at Hythe on Southampton Water from Jan 2001 until it moved to Overton near Basingstoke in Nov 2001 but then disappeared. Mike Wall was probably the last person to see it at Overton and it was he that saw it today in Andover – roughly 15km from Overton. It may not stay at today's location as the Canada Geese there were not giving it a friendly reception (though not an aggressive one either).

Far more numerous, and perhaps more interesting, wildfowl crowded the Chichester Lakes when Brian Fellows was there today. He did not count all the birds but from what he did record there must have been over 3000 present (probably 5000 if all the gulls had been totalled), and most of the species he did count were there in numbers that exceeded those recorded on the WeBS counts of recent years (though those counts are just snapshots on predetermined dates with no attempt to record when the most birds are present). The single redhead Smew was present on Runcton Lake but the pair of Red-crested Pochard which were there yesterday (Jan 9), and the Egyptian Goose (there as recently as Jan 2), were not to be seen. Species counted by Brian were Coot 2140, Gadwall 368, Mute Swan 115, Tufted Duck 168, Pochard 80, Shoveler 46, Wigeon 10, Canada Goose 50 and Great Blackback Gull 19

Here in Hampshire Richard Bonser remarked that two of the Black-headed Gulls he saw in Southampton Water off the Weston Shore of Southampton today had their full breeding plumage hoods – reminding me that I did not remark on Brian Fellows observation when at Baffins Pond in Portsmouth last Tuesday (Jan 8) of the first Cormorant to show its white 'thigh roundels'. Also off Weston shore today were 26 Great-crested Grebes and an adult Med Gull was in the area. Further east along the coast off the mouth of the Hamble river at Hook Trevor Carpenter saw another flock of 28 Great-crested Grebes and seven Eider, plus 15 Gadwall on Brownwich pond but a more unusual sight nowadays was the flock of 7 Reed Bunting which he saw in the Chilling area (he also had a single at Hook, but Reed Bunting is still not on my own yearlist).

As mentioned in yesterday's notes (when writing them this morning!) I woke to the glorious sound of full throated Blackbird song coming from a tree close to my bedroom window, and then went out of the back door to hear Song Thrush song across the Hayling Billy line at the end of the garden – clearly the mild and damp (plus a glimpse of the sun) reminded the birds that spring was coming (though no doubt they will have many days on which they forget the fact before the real thing starts!). Walking to Warblington in the afternoon I passed at least two more Song Thrushes with similar feelings, and in the mature oak near the Old Rectory in Pook Lane had

an excellent view of a Little Owl where they used to be a regular sight in the last century! As the owl was sitting openly getting damp in the light rain on a branch close to shelter where an old branch had broken off I guess he was a patient male waiting to pay his respects to a sensible female currently occupying the dry space of a nest site.+++

Coming back along the shore from Nore Barn I had a pretty full list of shore birds including Knot and Ringed Plover plus a line of perhaps a hundred Blackback gulls (both Great and Lesser) assembling among other species for their night roost. Approaching Langstone the light was still good enough to pick out at least 100 Golden Plover in their favourite low tide roost spot, and on Langstone Pond I found the Swan pair together without their last cygnet for the first time (leaving them ready to get on with the business of raising another generation when they see fit). The little pink Wigeon x Feral Pigeon was also still present. Although this was the time when the Egrets should be coming in to roost it was also raining fairly heavily so I did not stop to try to count them – all I saw for certain were six Egrets waiting in the pony field.+++

I see that my account of yesterday's cycle ride did not mention a couple of things that may be of interest – firstly the continuing presence of at least one Green Sandpiper in the Lavant stream culvert between Farringdon Road and the Marsh Plant site, and secondly the birds on Aldsworth Pond (one male Gadwall, two male Shoveler, several Coot and Tufted Duck plus single Little Grebe and Teal). Eight Curlew were on fields near the pond, Jays were noisy in the woodland and I passed two small parties of piping Bullfinch.

Items of possible interest from the SOS website include the following, all seen yesterday (Jan 9). Following the Lesser Spotted Woodpecker reported from the Warsash area on Jan 8 I see that one was found at Burton Mill area (west of Pulborough) on Jan 9, with Water Rail around the ponds, and at Ambersham Common nearer Midhurst there were up to 15 Crossbills with 5 Marsh Tits and a Woodcock. From Pagham came a sighting of the two Brant (seen this time near the village hall) and at the Chichester Lakes both the single Smew and the pair of Red-crested Pochard were seen.

WED 09 JAN

One result of having the internet for bird news which I much approve of is that it is encouraging more and more birders to realise that there are interesting birds and places to be discovered close to their homes without making long journeys to the established hotspots to see the same list of birds (however interesting) as everyone else. One reason for this change of habit is that, where previously the only news that was 'broadcast' was that of rarities, the internet now gives everyone the opportunity to broadcast news of whatever interests them (and acquire the kudos of discovering unusual birds, or interesting aspects of their behaviour, wherever they find them). This ability to take pride in 'local patches' is enhanced by the ability to display pictures of the places and birds on private or public (e.g. HOS) websites. Net result – we all get to know more about the overall birding picture of the county and hopefully more birding beginners are encouraged into the hobby.+++

One major factor contributing to this welcome change of birding habits is the concept of patch-listing which is evolving thanks to the efforts of one or two individuals (in particular Paul Winter and Russell Wynn) who have put in a lot of thought and time to encourage the new attitude by introducing the competitive element which drives people in every aspect of life. In this case they have supplied a framework of rules plus a 'bulletin board' on which to post results of each competitor's species list score for 'their patch'. While I am sure the rules and methodology will continue to evolve over coming years the current year's rules require each competitor to choose any set of 25 adjacent 1km squares (they must be arranged as a square block 5km from east to west and 5km from north to south), and to see how many species the competitor can find in that block over the course of the year. To avoid withdrawal symptoms on the part of those who live inland and who want to compete in their home area without giving up their visits to the coast or the New Forest you are allowed to compete in more than one block, but the intention is to get more birders regularly visiting more of the Hampshire countryside than would every have been covered in the past without the spur of e.g. another 'Tetrad Atlas'.+++

Two examples of how this is already working come from the north and south of the county

respectively. In the north (though not specifically Patch listing there) Mike Rafter found a good birding spot around Ashley Warren Farm in square SU 4855 in the triangle between the A34 Whitchurch to Newbury road, the B3400 Whitchurch to Basingstoke road and the A339 Basingstoke to Newbury. Very few birders would normally venture into this area, but in the past couple of weeks Mike Rafter's enthusiasm has rubbed off on both Martin Pitt and Mike Wall. Down in the south Paul Winter has today walked in 12 of the 25 1km squares of his second patch (I think including the Lower Test Marshes) and recorded a list of 64 species – most people would have limited their visit to the immediate area of the nature reserve and missed several of the species on Paul's list.+++

I have always been enthusiastic about the value of maps as a bird watching aid, and I hope that the urge to get the most out of a particular patch of countryside will persuade more birders to spend time studying the roads, tracks and paths shown on the large scale maps to plan out interesting routes to view as much as possible of the likely birding spots revealed by the map. My only adverse comment about the patch listing rules is that, living just 3 km from the Sussex border, and not wishing to use my car to access my 'patch', I find that any local area that I might be interested in has a considerable part in Sussex. While I appreciate that records submitted to HOS and SOS must be of observations with the relevant county I cannot see why 'competitive patch listing' should be bound in the same way by artificial county boundaries – perhaps in future years those living near county boundaries will be allowed to compete if say 50% of their chosen patch lies within Hampshire?

With no feedback available on the internet from the WeBS counts in Langstone and Chichester Harbours, and with Jason Crook's website seemingly permanently suspended, we only hear isolated bits of information about the majority of the regular birds in our harbours (I don't count the 10 mile walk to Farlington Marshes hut and back in order to read the notice board there as a practical alternative, though I would go there regularly if bicycles were allowed into the reserve and there was a reasonably safe parking place for them while their owners were walking round the seawall). So what is the position re Bar-tailed Godwit this winter? The large flock that was off Langstone last winter has not returned, I have not seen one since New Year (and did not see the species on any local NYD lists or hear of them on HOSLIST). Have they all vanished?+++

Late news tells me nothing about Godwits but does relocate the Brant missing from Cams Hall and the Emsworth Black Swan. Today Ian Calderwood found a Brant at Frater Lake, about a mile south of the Cams Hall site, and on Monday (Jan 7) Barry Collins watched the Emsworth Black Swan swimming in the Emsworth Harbour area, then flying and landing on the Thorney Little Deeps, in the company of three Mute Swans (probably three young females that had attracted the amorous intentions of the long frustrated Black male)

Today I cycled around eastern Havant listening for Song Thrush song in some half dozen places where I heard it at this time last year, this time hearing just one bird despite the presence of many small groups of Song Thrushes in fields everywhere. Perhaps I should not despair as when I come to write this paragraph (on Thursday morning – Jan 10 – with much milder weather and a bit of sunshine) I have just heard both Blackbird and Song Thrush song in my garden.

Two unusual sightings are of an Albino House Sparrow at Winchester by Norman Hunt who says that this bird has just returned for the third successive year, showing that despite its colour it has survived for at least 21 months (hatched in spring 2000 and still alive in 2002?). Also in today's mail is an account from Adrian Martin of a personal encounter with the Titchfield Haven Bittern during the recent freeze which is well worth quoting verbatim+++

Adrian writes >> We'd been sitting in the new Spurgit hide for around 20mins looking out over the bird-free iced-scrape and had resorted to our sandwiches for entertainment when something looking like ET with scrawny legs wandered out of the reeds. As it had its back to us it appeared to have no neck, but when it turned it's fair to say we had to suppress a whoop. Unlike the illustrations I've since perused in books it walked across the ice with neck FULLY-extended horizontally to the body, giving it an appearance similar to a tailless Jurassic Park T.Rex. This had the benefit of displaying the beautiful parallel lines of black flecks along the neck. On reaching the next clump of reeds it proceeded to stand stock upright in the classic pose -

apparently this is referred to as bitterning - before disappearing into the reeds a minute or so later. Remarkably, 20min or so later it repeated the trip to the next clump of reeds. All this within 70-80ft of the hide with no reeds to mar impede the view. Absolutely phenomenal! <<

Miscellaneous news today includes Lawrence Holloway's account 20 Avocet in Pagham Harbour, with 2 Spotted Redhawk, 2 Sparrowhawks (one apparently making off with a cock Stonechat), but only 5 Bar-tailed Godwit. In Hampshire Paul Winter found more than 1000 Lapwing at the Lower Test (still only one Green Sandpiper there), and heard a report of a Ring-billed Gull there sometime just after Christmas. Near Eastleigh John Firth counted 90 Golden Plover at the Wide Lane fields, and in Emsworth one of Brian Fellow's neighbours has had three Egrets in his garden together.

TUE 08 JAN

The next couple of months are the most likely time for Lesser Spotted Woodpecker sightings as they advertise their presence with 'pee-pee-pee' calls and drumming, and today Bob Marchant saw one in the Hook Park area (around Christmas House) to remind us all to start looking and listening for them.

At Stokes Bay Lee Marshall noted two adult Med Gulls but could not refind a Black Redstart which had been seen by David Tinling on the Haslar seawall on Dec 22. Up in the north of Portsmouth Harbour Trevor Carpenter found over 200 Golden Plover still in the fields east of the Cams Bay carpark (at the end of Shearwater Drive) and counted another 51 in the Fleetlands area west of the bay.

In Portsmouth there were still 10 Sanderling (but no Purple Sandpiper) for Brian Fellows at Southsea Castle where one Shag was fishing offshore. Another Shag was in a regular spot by the Hayling Ferry across the mouth of Langstone Harbour, and at Baffins Pond the regular gang of feral geese were still present but the count of Shoveler was down to just 8 (plus 14 Canada Geese, 46 Tufties and 124 Mallard).

Five Hawfinch were still to be seen in Romsey when Mike Rafter checked today, and another 3 were seen at West Dean in Sussex by Owen Mitchell in what sounds to be a regular spot.

These showed in flight and on the treetops for around half an hour starting at 9am

Other recent news from Sussex tells us that the Smew was still to be seen on Runcton Lake at Chichester yesterday with a pair of Red-crested Pochard (but not the Egyptian Goose). Further west in the county Neil Marchant writes of an enviable sighting >> Along Underhill Lane, Ditchling, in the morning half-light at 7:45 today, a Merlin chasing and catching a blue tit for breakfast as I followed it in my car. Magic! << and further west still a Willow Tit came to a feeding station at Weir Wood reservoir (east of Crawley) – can anyone come up with a Hampshire Willow Tit for us?

In Hampshire Monday Jan 7 gave Mike Wall at Basingstoke a surprise to see what must have been (by its size) a young brown Sparrowhawk plucking a Woodpigeon which it had killed but was unable to lift and carry off when disturbed. Also in Monday's news I see that there is a new website set up by a Gosport birder, focussing on Gosport area sites and sightings, at <http://www.aolis.btinternet.co.uk/mypatch.htm> and from much further afield (Lancashire) comes news about the omnivorous habits of Water Rails that could be of local significance here. I have heard in the past that if you want to get good photos of Water Rail the best technique is to put an unopened tin of sardines out in the open near the reeds and take some quick pictures in the short time it will take the bird to open the tin and consume the contents, but in Lancashire the photographers use live bait and have a picture (well maybe!) of a Water Rail catching and eating a male Bearded Tit

And finally I read on the SOS website that on Dec 20 there was a Dipper on the Mill Stream at Arundel (which Colin Law says would be the first Sussex sighting of this species since 1964). I don't recall any Hampshire Dipper sightings since those in the Romsey area and Meon Valley in 1990-1992, but that is exactly the sort of info that I would like to be able to look up in the latest Hampshire Bird Report without having to thumb through ten or twenty copies. (See my comments about the format of the Bird Reports in yesterday's update.) Having started this laborious process I am pleased to say that there is an entry in the 1998 report saying that birds were reported in the Test valley in 1996 and 97.

As an afterthought you may be interested to know that I missed the Hayling Oysterbeds Barn Owl yet again today. On Jan 1 I was an hour too early to see it, today I was a quarter hour too late! Happening to be on my way back from Hayling I drew into the carpark behind the Esso garage at 4:15pm and walked up towards the fields with plenty of light to see by, and reaching the southern edge of the fields I met a birder coming south who told me the bird had been active and was now probably on a post on the northern perimeter of the field west of the track – but no glimpse when I got there! I was interested to see that the Highland cattle are now in the field, and from now on I will cease to refer to it as the ‘County Council Ragwort Field’.

MON 07 JAN

Heading off to work in semi-darkness on a Monday morning was made more palatable for David Parker today when he passed a Barn Owl working the roadside of the ‘back road’ from Havant to Chichester via Funtington just west of Aldsworth where the road sweeps down to cross the River Ems and passes a small copse that will soon be noisy with nesting Rooks. Another Barn Owl that you may be more likely to see at dusk is the one at the Hayling Oysterbeds which was out again yesterday evening for Graham Osborne to see, this time over the grass field alongside the main road to the west of the Oysterbeds (that field is now part of the nature reserve as well as the marshy ‘brick field’ and the rough meadow alongside the Oysterbed pools). If you fail to see this one you still have a good chance of seeing the one which operates by the Thorney Deeps among the Short-eared Owls. If it is a Little Owl that you are after one was heard yesterday by Lee Marshall near Cams Bay where Fareham Creek runs into Portsmouth Harbour – the thin strip of woodland just north of the bay, and the parkland/golf course beyond those trees, has been a traditional Little Owl site for years but you would probably get the most reliable sighting at ‘Beam Cottage’ in Hook Park at Warsash+++

Yesterday I was wondering where all the Sparrowhawks had got to, and today reports of them start to roll in! One at least was seen on New Year’s Day by John Goodspeed in the Ropley area and on Saturday (Jan 5) Graham Osborne saw a male fly low over the Budds Farm pools as well as seeing one tangling with a Magpie at the Oysterbeds just across the water. Today one was seen at Hook/Warsash by Bob Marchant.

John Shillitoe was on Portsdown in yesterday morning’s mist (Jan 6) watching two Peregrines using the electricity pylons (which cross the western shoulder of the hill near Fort Nelson) as a perch from which to watch and pursue the 800 Woodpigeons feeding in the fields below. This is probably a regular place to see them (as is the pylon in the Itchen Valley near Eastleigh where Colin Bates often sees one) and Graham Roberts would like to remind everyone that he is eager for sightings of the two young Peregrines which he colour ringed in the nest box on the Sussex Heights tower block in Brighton in late May this year. One of these juveniles was a male (tiercel) and was fitted with a green ring on its right leg while the female had a green ring put on her left leg. A white number was on each ring – the tiercel being 01 and the falcon 02. All sightings are still wanted by Graham at Graham.Roberts@westsussex.gov.uk

Keith Betton noticed that two of the thirty Bewick’s Swans now in the Avon valley north of Ringwood had leg rings with identification letters and today told us on HOSLIST the history of the two females concerned. The one named TPY was a known visitor to Slimbridge from the 96/97 winter but was not ringed there until last January before flying back to Friesland where she was seen with a mate last October (perhaps he persuaded her to change her winter quarters from the Severn to the Hampshire Avon this winter?). The second female is ECP and was ringed at Martin Mere in Lancashire in Nov 99 and stayed there until Jan 2000. The next sighting of her was in the Netherlands in Nov 2000 before she turned up at Martin Mere again on 31 Jan 2001 with a mate and one cygnet. This time she stayed for only a week and was next seen in Germany on 31st March at Tetenhusener Moor, Schleswig-Holstein. Why these two birds have chosen to come to Ibsley this winter remains a mystery but the blank periods in their histories suggests to me that these birds do not settle in any one place for long but live a traveller’s life in a large area that includes the whole of England, the Netherlands and most of Germany.

Keith also contributed a fascinating list of first-sightings of bird species in Hampshire from 1951 to the present day and tell us that the next Hampshire Bird Report will have details of the four ‘new to Hampshire’ species record in 2000 (Great Spotted Cuckoo, Little Swift, Cliff Swallow, and

Paddyfield Warbler). I'm sure all birders in the county would like to have an up to date checklist of all species on the county list available to hand without waiting for the next Birds of Hampshire in perhaps ten or twenty years time and I hope a few more people will support my suggestion (which I have now made several times without success) that each annual bird report should contain some complete checklist of Hampshire birds, not just an account of those for which there were records in that year. I would prefer to see them all listed in the main species accounts with details of at least the first and last sightings plus the status line for the species (e.g. Keith tells us Red-throated Pipit was seen in 1989 and Birds of Hampshire gives brief details but there is no mention of the species in the 1999 report, but if one turned up in the years before the next Birds of Hampshire comes out one would have to search the reports for each year since 1992 to find the details). I am told this would add too much to the cost of the report, and if that is true could we not have a single small print table of sightings of the non-listed birds? Alternatively could we not have a complete county list, with similar indications of the chances of that species turning up again, available on the HOS website?

Coming back to the present I am pleased to hear from Richard Carpenter that a Mistle Thrush was in full and prolonged song today on the northern fringe of Stubbington at Crofton Old Church which I believe is the one near the RSPCA 'Ark' on Ranvilles Lane, and to see that Brian Fellows also heard Goldcrest song during the past week (possibly on Jan 5 when I heard one in Havant). The Mistle Thrush song is to me another reminder of the paucity of Song Thrush song this winter – I have not heard one this year despite the mild weather inducing Robins, Dunnocks, Great, Blue and Coal Tits, Collared Doves and Woodpigeons as well as Starlings and Wrens to give voice to their songs

In Emsworth today Brian Fellows counted record totals of 198 Mallard and 42 Coot on the ponds and harbour, with 73 Swans in the area (85 there yesterday) plus a good show of Pintail still off the Western Parade shore, but he could not find the Black Swan today (nor did I see it on Jan 5) so reports of one seen elsewhere may be of the one normally at Emsworth.

The presence of the Bewick's Swans, male Scaup and other good birds drew many birders to the Blashford Lakes at Ringwood yesterday but only one of them (Glyn Horacek-Davis) seems to have been lucky enough to glimpse a Bittern in flight – as he was driving away the bird flew south from Snail's Lake over the lane (narrowly missing the bonnet of Glyn's car) and seems to have pitched in the rear-gardens of house where it went to ground – maybe the next we will hear of it is a report in the local paper of its corpse being carried in by a cat – or perhaps birders will get some good photos of a cat speared on the bird's bill as it flies back over the lakes?)

In the Fareham area Lee Marshall heard the call of an unseen Whimbrel in the Cams Bay area where Fareham Creek joins Portsmouth Harbour giving promise of a good new tick for next Saturday's WeBS count, but he could not locate the Brant and Pale-bellied Brent – furthermore Trevor's flock of 275 Golden Plover seemed to have dwindled to just seven birds. (Over at Hook/Warsash Trevor Carpenter had another 8 Golden Plover). In Pagham Harbour a Glaucous Gull was reported as it has been intermittently this winter but no one seems to have tracked down its permanent base.

From Alresford Charles Cuthbert once again counted 54 Egrets coming in to roost last night (Jan 6) – he says the great majority arrive from the south west (i.e. coming up the Itchen) but a few come from other directions, and nearly all arrive in small parties of 1 to 3 birds (just one group of 4 and one of 5) which probably indicates the size and number of the different feeding parties that are scattered over the countryside during the day. As at other roosts it was effectively dark when the last birds arrived, probably indicating fairly lengthy journeys.

I must admit to being one of those who unthinkingly accept chemical cleansing of our cress beds as the reason for the absence of Water Pipits in the cress beds where they could be relied on in past winters, and it is very interesting to hear other thoughts expressed currently by Glynne Evans and David Thelwell who both point out that other species such as Meadow Pipits continues to forage among the watercress, and that there could be other reasons why the Water Pipits no longer turn up there. One theory is that the treatment of the beds may selectively remove food items preferred by Water Pipits but leave others, and another theory is that milder winters may mean that more Water Pipits stay at home in their continental mountain areas for the winter, while it could be that it is just a change of fashion such as that we are now

seeing with Grey Wagtails moving from fast flowing streams to gardens and town centre parks. One thing we do know is that there was a flock of 26 or 28 Water Pipits at Titchfield Haven early last month (Dec 9) and up to 17 were there in the spring, so these birds are still coming to Hampshire, though maybe only en route to other places.

Among miscellaneous news from Sussex I see that one or more Mealy Redpoll were near Burton Mill Pond, west of Pulborough, on Jan 5 following the report of four seen at Cowfold last Friday (Jan 4) so maybe some of these continental birds are moving west towards us in Hampshire. Nearer to Midhurst at Ambersham Common 3 Crossbill, 3 Dartford Warbler and a ringtail Hen Harrier were also seen on Jan 5 when the redhead Smew was still at Chichester on Runcton Lake (aka the Scrapyrd Lake, lying between Vinnetrov Lake – the big one on your left as you drive in to the caravan site – and the Nature Reserve lake, named New Lake on the map – which is where the Smew was first seen, and on Jan 4 the Egyptian Goose was still at the Chichester lakes.

In Hampshire Brian Fellows section of the Chichester Harbour low tide count on Saturday (Jan 5) gave him Golden Plover once more back off Tournurbury (possibly part of the big flock that has been in the East Head area across the harbour mouth) and a sizeable flock for these parts of 106 Knot. At Curbridge on the River Hamble just below Botley Richard Carpenter had a good list including single Grey Wagtail, Greenshank and Green Sandpiper plus a couple of Egrets, a Treecreeper and both Fieldfare (24) and Redwing (7). Over in the New Forest Graham Osborne found 5 Hawfinch and a dozen Redpoll on Saturday as well as visiting the Hayling Oysterbeds where he saw 10 Black-necked Grebe in the harbour and spotted the local Kingfisher in a new place on posts above the creek which drains part of Stoke Village into Stoke Bay – the bird was in the section where the creek runs across the meadow south of the North Hayling Halt carpark.

PLANTS:

SUN 13 JAN

Canadian Fleabane was an unexpected addition too today's flowering list in Havant, and Charlock, Hogweed and Shepherd's Purse were other plants I have not seen regularly recently.

SAT 12 JAN

Goat Willow (Sallow) flowers go through a long process of shedding outer skins before they extrude golden anthers and are properly 'in flower', but a few odd flowers on at least two trees at the IBM Lake in Portsmouth had today completed this process, and so (after patient searching of many trees) had the catkins on one Common Alder started to turn from purple to yellow as their flowers opened to reveal anthers and pollen. Another plant which I expected to find in flower was Marsh Marigold but the best I could find was a couple of round headed flower buds just showing yellow between the outer cover of sepals. There were of course flowers on the Hawthorn trees which always flower early here, but some other plants were flowering here that I have not seen anywhere else recently – Ox-eye Daisy, Small Scabious, and Wild Carrot among them. At one point I came on a large and healthy plant of Hogweed holding up a big umbel of flowerbuds just starting to show white, though none were really open. Also not flowering and not wild were swathes of Daffodial shoots already a couple of inches tall in the lakeside grass.

THU 10 JAN

Several bright yellow Celandine flowers were on show this afternoon as I walked from Havant to Warblington. A small patch of them were showing in the south facing sheltered garden where I saw my first flower as early as Dec 5 this winter, another single flower was opening in the ditch by the Pook Lane stables. Down at the seaward end of Pook Lane and on the shore at the end of Wade Lane the blossom on the Cherry Plum trees was looking long past its best, though if this mild weather persists we may see a new outburst of more seasonable flowering within a week. In Pook Lane I checked for fresh Dogs Mercury where male plants were in flower at the start of January 2001 but could see none among the great mass of old plants which still look

quite fresh and healthy.

INSECTS:

SUN 13 JAN

The Hampshire Butterfly Conservation website has today had a response to a press release printed in the Isle of Wight County Press last Friday (Jan 11). One Anne Nutton of Binstead informed them that she had just seen a Red Admiral that very day.

THU 10 JAN

About a month ago I reported how Rob Edmunds found his first Winter Moth of the season on Dec 14 – his wife had collected it on the windscreen of her car and brought it home for Rob to see in the garage – though I never heard whether it was still in good shape or if it had become one of the ‘flattened moths’ I wrote about in my entry for Jan 8. I suspect that Lee Marshall will also have had one of this species coming to his light at Rowner in Gosport during December, but tonight Lee had his first record of the species for 2002.

TUE 08 JAN

Last night gave Lee Marshall another tick on his moth list for 2002 with *Depressaria daucella* which I see from page 126 of my *Chinery's Insects* (Collins guide) is one of a large family of ‘flattened’ (not mentally depressed!) moths which emerge in the autumn, hibernate as adults, and normally come out to start a new generation a little later than January (though that is only my guess). In spring and early summer the caterpillars, which are grey with black spots, feed communally, having tented base camps in umbellifer flower heads. That's what *Chinery* says about *D. pastinacella*, and I guess the habits of *D. daucella* are not that much different. (Can anyone tell me how to get round another of Microsoft's annoying habits – because I put a full stop after the *D* abbreviating *Depressaria* in the scientific name Microsoft insist in turning the initial letter of the species name into upper case when I wrote it in lower case and to correct this I have to sneak back later, using the arrow keys to escape upwards from the correction)

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 13 JAN

A pretty display of fresh Velvet Shank fungus on a tree in the Bedhampton area caught my eye today and reminded me that I saw more of it at Stansted last Wednesday. You might mistake the great clusters of small, bright yellow fungi on tree trunks or stumps for the common Sulphur Polypore, but the extreme greasiness of the caps, the fattened stems and the absence of that verdigris green tinge to the gills of Sulphur Tuft will show you that this is a different species even if it does not have the very dark ‘velvet’ stems that give it its name.

SAT 12 JAN

At the IBM North Harbour site in Portsmouth today I stepped over the low bank separating the carpark at the east end of the main building onto the land that thirty years ago was harbour shore and found on the bank two round patches of orange coloured fresh fungus (like round flat buttons, 3cm across, lying on the ground). My first thought was of Orange Peel fungus but these were I think of the species called *Melastiza chateri*.

WED 09 JAN

With the autumn rutting season over I believe that Fallow bucks have now lost interest in the does, though they will not shed their antlers for another two or three months. This thought is prompted by seeing a couple of bucks on their own yesterday – one of them having a very full head of broad bladed antlers, the other having his first set of ‘baby teeth’. It is possible that the reason they were not with the does was that they were both outcasts (surplus to requirement), the old one having lost his harem through defeat in battle and the youngster clearly not up to acquiring any mates for a year or two. Does anyone know which answer is more likely to be correct (first, that all the bucks have already left the does, or second that these were just a pair of sad losers in the sex game?) I also noticed molehills in soft ground wherever I looked today.

WEEK 01 DEC 31 – JAN 06

BIRDS:

SUN 06 JAN

For most of the year Sparrowhawks are nowadays far more commonly seen than are Kestrels, and it has surprised me that the only sightings of them reported on Jan 1 were singles in East Sussex and the Isle of Wight, with the 'first of the year' in Hampshire not appearing until Will Walmsley spotted a male at Titchfield Haven yesterday. I still have not seen one this year, but Mark Litjens had one on his list for Hurst spit this morning. Also at Hurst, near the castle, Mark had the female Black Redstart (again no reports of these locally this winter, e.g on Hayling), with three Razorbill, two Slavonian Grebe and singles of Eider and Common Scoter. Paul Winter was at Blashford today, finding the six Smew (one drake), the first winter drake Scaup and the redhead Goosander still on the lakes and the flock of 30 Bewick's at Ibsley. In the New Forest John Firth found just two Mandarin on a small part of Eyeworth Pond that is not still frozen and at the Lower Test Marshes he saw a Peregrine and just one Green Sandpiper (I think this reserve normally has a small flock of them in the winter), with one Cetti's Warbler singing. Paul Winter also visited the Lower Test, seeing one Yellow-legged Gull and commenting that the Firecrest there is much less easy to see than was the one (or was it two?) there last winter.

Simon Ingram lengthened his yearlist for the Lakeside country park at Eastleigh today with several new species of duck, probably brought in by frost elsewhere, but the items which interested me in his sightings today were the continuing presence of a second winter Med Gull and of more than six Siskin. He also took a look across Wide Lane and saw more than 80 Golden Plover on the playing fields (where Phil Lord found 410 back on Dec 14)

With much thicker fog this morning (compared to yesterday) I added two birds to my year list – Chiffchaff (just one) at the old mill site on the Brockhampton stream, and a couple of Yellowhammer at Broadmarsh. The Kingfisher flew down the Brockhampton stream while I was there

SAT 05 JAN

A redhead Smew, first reported yesterday, was still at Chichester on the 'Nature Reserve' Lake today when Lawrence Holloway went to look for it. Unfrozen parts of the lakes were crammed with birds including an unusual assembly of 134 Swans, and overhead the Rooks were already starting to repair their nests (probably using twigs stolen from the nests of other pairs not yet back to protect their property). Other good birds mentioned in despatches today are 5 adult Little Gulls and a flock of 14 Red-throated Diver which flew east over Hurst Spit, both seen by Simon Boswell who also reported two Great Northern and two probable Black-throated Divers, three more Red-throats, three adult Kittiwakes and the resident Snow Bunting. Close by at Keyhaven David Taylor saw the resident Brant and a wintering Little Stint, plus – on the sea – four Slavonian Grebe and a Great Northern Diver. Inland David found a Common Sandpiper and 1 Ruddy Duck at the Blashford Lakes before adding two Merlins and five Hen Harriers to his list 'somewhere in the New Forest'.

Nearer my home Mike Collins found Aldsworth Pond unfrozen and counted 8 Gadwall on it, and when he reached Havant he found a hungry cat watching the Green Sandpiper in the culvert which they have adopted as home in the last couple of weeks – just before reading this message my next door neighbour had told me how their cat had brought a dead Kingfisher to their backdoor recently – probably caught as it paused on its journey from a frozen inland water to the coast, foolishly choosing to stop and check out my neighbour's garden pond.

Down at Titchfield Haven Will Walmsley came on the first Hampshire Sparrowhawk of the year (as far as my info goes – no doubt there were plenty about, but not where the year listers were working) and very surprisingly he only found two Canada Geese left on the reserve (where there should be at least two hundred!) – where and why they have moved remains a mystery (but a dozen of them may have reached the Hermitage Stream where I saw them near the Broadmarsh slipway on Sunday morning Jan 6 before they took off and flew out into the mist over Langstone Harbour). Another unusual sight for the reserve was a group of 4 Golden Plover at one of the scrapes. A drake Mandarin was taking bread, and 110 Great Blackbacks were present (matching the large numbers on the Langstone/Emsworth shore today – see below).

Towards dusk Lee Marshall was in the Alver Valley late enough to heard a Tawny Owl calling from

the Wildgrouds, and to see 80 Pied Wagtail in a pre-roost assembly on the HMS Sultan polo field (between Grange Road and Military Road in Rowner) – I wonder if these birds spend the night in one of the nearby forts (Grange, Rowner or even Brockhurst?). Before it got dark he counted 205 Lapwing in the Alder Valley with 13 Snipe plus a Dartford Warbler.

This morning was scheduled for low tide counts in Chichester Harbour, with the usual four hour period (two hours before and two hours after the low point) starting at 7:07am! With sunrise not until after 8am, and with today's mist and cloud obscuring any light from the sun, I did not make my start on the Langstone Bridge to Emsworth Mill Pond section until 8:40, just 25 minutes before the bottom of the tide when the Langstone Wadeway was fully exposed, allowing me to walk out into the centre of the mud on which many Teal were feeding and close to the last remnants of the channel in which the majority of the wildfowl were clustered with 8 Egrets. By going out here I added a species to my year list when I disturbed a Greenshank that would have not been noticed from the shore.+++

Coming back to the village shore I missed the Kingfisher which (I was told) had been perched by the Mill but found the as yet unidentified 'Wigeon x Feral Pigeon' still on the pond. From the end of Pook Lane I counted a good total of 74 Shelduck on the mud in this Langstone section and was pleased to spot 5 Knot among the Dunlin and Brent which dominated the scene. A little further east just one Ringed Plover showed and just one Wigeon went on the list alongside a total of at least 134 Teal. Reaching the east end of the open mudflat I was very surprised to see 45 or more Lesser Blackback Gulls (others were arriving from inland), and there were even more of these gulls in the Emsworth section to give a count of well over 100 with a good smattering of Great Blackbacks.

Rounding Conigar Point I saw 43 Brent on the eastmost of the Warblington Farm fields (the first I have seen on this farm this winter – in recent winters they have been on the grazing fields in their hundreds), and along the Emsworth Western Shore I was delighted to find 33 Pintail among 109 Wigeon (this has always been a place that attracts Pintail but it is many years since I saw such a good number here. Teal were numerous at Emsworth as they had been at Langstone, but in both sections there was an almost complete absence of Godwits (just 5 Black-tailed and not a single Bar-tailed).+++

To round off the count I checked the Emsworth Millpond where the Black Swan was absent but there were 47 Mute Swans and 124 Mallard with a few Tufted Duck and a Coot. As I wrote the finish time for the count on my notepad the sun broke through (not for long) but it encouraged a Goldcrest to sing strongly from a conifer above the East Street bridge in Havant as I arrived home, joining the strong chorus of Robins, Dunnocks, Tits, and Collared Doves that had been rejoicing in the mild air – I also heard my first Woodpigeon song of the year this morning, but not a single Song Thrush – Brian Fellows still has one performing normally in Emsworth but they are silent in perhaps a dozen places where I would expect to hear them now around Havant (despite the large number of immigrant Song Thrushes throughout the countryside hereabouts).

Four Mealy Redpolls were seen yesterday a little east of Cowfold (on the A272 road well north of Shoreham), and this news on the SOS website sent me back to my bird books to try once again to get into my head the distinctions between the various species and subspecies of Redpoll (all of which are described as more or less indistinguishable from each other). There are however a few tips to be gleaned, and the most helpful to me is that one of the two species is very unlikely to turn up in southern England, thus eliminating two of the five candidates from the list. These non-starters are the two subspecies of Arctic Redpoll (*Carduelis hornemanni* which comes as a Greenland race – *C. h. hornemanni* – and a north Eurasian race – *C. h. exilipes*) – a few of these have been recorded in north and east Britain, but none I think in the south. If you do hear the 'ch-ch' call of a Redpoll hereabouts the chances are that it will be a member of the British race (*Carduelis flammea cabaret*) which is present throughout the year and breeds in Hampshire, but the birds seen at Cowfold were (I assume) slightly larger and had much paler plumage (with a whiteish but dark streaked rump) and were presumed to be of the Northern race (*C. f. flammea*) which is called the Mealy Redpoll and comes from the continent. They can also be separated from our 'Lesser Redpolls' by a deeper call note in flight. The third race of Redpoll (*C. f. rostrata*) comes from Greenland and is occasionally found in northern Scotland

and Ireland, thus ruling it out as a possibility in Hampshire.

John Clark spent a full day in the Avon valley yesterday (Jan 4) and recorded a list of sightings which starts with 30 Bewick's swans at Ibsley – 8 young birds were in the flock including the family of 5 which has not been seen for over a month I think. He found the swans roosting on Ibsley Water but they all flew off to nearby meadows by 8am. On the lakes there were 17 Goosander (9 of them males), 15 Goldeneye and 6 Smew (one being a drake). On Snail's Lake he had a good view of a Scaup which he had seen distantly last month, then thinking it was a female, but today he got a good view and realised that it was a first winter male which is likely to remain on the lake as it has been there for some time (Paul Winter saw it –asleep- on Jan 6). John was also very pleased to put up a Jack Snipe (only the second he has seen in 26 years of visiting the Avon valley), while other birds on his list were 4 Pintail, at least 8 Water Rails, 2 Ruddy Duck (male and female) and 2 Yellow-legged Gulls among 4500 Black-headed, 900 Common, 350 Lesser and only 10 Great Blackbacks.

Other news for Jan 4 is of 275 Golden Plover in the Cams Bay area seen by Trevor Carpenter (this seems to be the only substantial flock being currently reported in Hampshire, with no recent news of any inland flocks and the flocks on the north Hayling fields and at Wide Lane, Eastleigh, seemingly having less than 100 birds each, though there is a scattering of smaller flocks along the coast). One of these small 'flocks' was a group of just 4 seen in the Alver Valley by Lee Marshall on Jan 4 (probably moving to Titchfield Haven for Will Walmsley to see it today) – also in the Alver Valley were 10 Jays. Over in the Lyndhurst area Simon Boswell was pleased with a Jack Snipe seen on his home patch.

The evening of Jan 3 saw Charles Cuthbert once more out checking the Egret night roost at Alresford Pond and finding 54 birds present. On Dec 31 I quoted Charles as reporting 40 Egrets in the roost on Dec 30 and I owe him an apology for getting the figure wrong - he actually counted 49 birds on that night and I mistyped the number as 40. I also omitted to mention the extraordinary number of Reed Buntings he is currently managing to attract into his Alresford garden by putting out lots of 'Best Budgie' seed – he can now have up to 30 of them in the garden sounds a great number for those of us who are lucky to see one or two, but he tells me that in recent years he has had up to 70 in the garden and his current count seems to reflect the national decline in numbers of this species.

Although not recorded on anyone's NYD list that I have seen the Little Stint are still present at West Wittering. In December a total of 15 were said to be there, and the SOS website now reports 8 of them at East Head on Jan 3 with the Brant family of 4 hybrid young also still present. On the River Arun (also Jan 3) there were still 60 Bewick's Swans to be seen from the high point of the road above Houghton on the west side of the river, and it seems they frequent the stretch of the river south from Houghton bridge to the Arundel WWT reserve (between South Stoke farm in the north and Offham farm in the south). Still with news for Jan 3 I read that a Long-tailed duck and a Great Northern Diver flew past Selsey Bill, while the large shoal of fish that has been attracting many seabirds to the West Sussex shore was then off Brighton marina giving a display of over 60 diving Gannets plus Cormorant, Kittiwake, 2 Shags and two Little Gulls. Also present on shore were 8 Purple Sandpiper.

FRI 04 JAN

After visiting Titchfield Haven today Richard Carpenter tells me that the freezing up of much water there has forced the Bittern out into the open as it searches for food, giving some birders very good views (though not such good news for the bird). The Barn Owl remains a regular sight towards dusk and a Mandarin drake today added colour to the scene - up to 5 Mandarin have been present in the past few days though I have not been able to add it to my overview of NYD sightings as I have not seen any mention of this species on Jan 1 anywhere in Hants. Dan Houghton had a Yellow-legged Gull offshore today, and Richard learnt that a Siberian Chiffchaff had been ringed at the Haven on Dec 27 (maybe the same bird that went on to be seen at Eastleigh sewage farm by Mike Rafter on Jan 2, or maybe just part of a small invasion of these birds?)

Lawrence Holloway was out on the Pagham Harbour shore and found a flock of 16 Avocet there, then found another loner later, seeming to indicate that a new contingent has arrived to replace those apparently eaten by the Peregrines in December (no hard evidence for this statement!).

The wintering Whimbrel is still present and the line of roosting Cormorant today numbered 150. On his way back from Church Norton Lawrence encountered a Spotted Redshank and also a Reed Bunting (a species missing from the majority of NYD lists this year). Another bird in short supply is Yellowhammer but there were 10 on them on the lawn in Lawrence's garden today thanks to quality feeding.

Miscellaneous news today includes a sighting of 15 Partridge (presumed Red Legs) by John Goodspeed this morning – although he does not give a location I think they were on Portsdown (not at Ropley where he was lucky enough to see a Grey on Jan 1). Over at Eastleigh Simon Ingram had a surprise visitor on his Lakeside park patch today in the shape of a Med Gull, and there were over 20 Siskin in the trees. A Jack Snipe is probably still in this park with plenty of people and dogs though Simon last saw it yesterday. At Kings Pond in Alton a drake Mandarin turned up today (what happened to last year's resident Wood Duck I wonder?) - Steve Mansfield also had a Chiffchaff by the River Wey (fewer of these being seen this winter I think), and in his Alton garden were both male and female Blackcap.

THU 03 JAN

Today's best birds in Hampshire were three Smew which I first heard off via Paul Winter's pager, with the sighting later confirmed by Jason Crook who saw them on the 'Sailing Lake' in the Blashford Lakes complex at Ringwood. Another unexpected bird was a Common Sandpiper seen by John Firth on Baddesley Common north of Southampton beside what I take to be the Tanner's Brook. More expected news comes from Lee Marshall who was out in the Gosport area today and found a female Goldeneye on Stoke Lake and the redhead Goosander still on the nearby Angelsey Lake. From Stokes Bay shore he saw a couple of Fulmar fly east, two Kittiwake loitering over the water and a single Razorbill showing very briefly on the water.

I myself happened to be in Romsey in the late afternoon and as it was not yet dark I visited the Hawfinch site and then walked up the canal to Fishlake Meadows, seeing little at that time of day other than a very tame Kingfisher allowing a dozen people to watch it closely. No Hawfinch seen but I wonder if what has attracted them to this spot is the presence of a glade of Plane trees under which I understand they have been seen – I don't know what those big seed cases hanging from the trees contain but they do look a bit like oversize, long stalked cherries which might arouse interest in a Hawfinch – any comment?

Over on the Isle of Wight today the male Hen Harrier was seen in the Bembridge area, three Spotted Redshank were at Yarmouth, and a female Mandarin was on a pond at Carisbrooke with a female Blackcap nearby

Yesterday (Jan 2) Barry Collins flushed a Woodcock on Thorney Island (probably a bird fleeing continental cold), and he saw 15 Egrets going into the old night roost by the Great Deeps west. 12 Avocet in the Thorney Channel, 2 Short-eared Owls over the Thornham Marshes were as seen recently but 13 Greenshank and a single Spotted Redshank at the west Great Deeps may have been a new sight. I see that the lone Barnacle Goose seen by Barry on Jan 1 was not a remnant of the presumed wild group of 7 Barnacles which I think left Thorney on Dec 27, but seems to be a feral bird attached to the big flock of Canada Geese now on the island.

More news of New Year's Day outings starts with a good list seen by Russell Wynn on foot in the Lymington area – he was 'unavailable for duty' on Jan 1 and so went out on Jan 2, seeing 94 species that included Raven, Little Stint, Kittiwake, Gannet and Whitefront Goose not otherwise seen in Hampshire on Jan 1. Russell's 94 was the longest Hampshire list but the Isle of Wight group came out top with 104, while Richard Ives just reached the 100 in West Sussex (Henfield-Pulborough-Church Norton area). After Russell's 94 next highest score was 92 by John Norton and Peter Raby working together in the Gosport-Titchfield-Hayling area, and close on their heels was Andrew House with 91 in the Pagham-Chichester-Thorney patch. By playing the Feral Pigeon card I scored 80 during an all day bike ride of nearly 40 km around Havant.

Great Northern Diver was missing from every NYD list bar one – that of John Norton and Peter Raby who had one off Titchfield Haven where they also were the only people to tick Bearded Tit (albeit heard only). They also had the only Bar-tailed Godwit of the day and their list included the only Hampshire Greenshank as well as Goosander, Common Scoter, Razorbill and Med Gull

Other sightings deserving mention were the only Grey Partridge of the day – going to John

Goodspeed near Ropley (though I think they were of the 'chicken crossing the road' variety as he was driving along!), the Greylag and Siskin seen at Eastleigh by Simon Ingram, and a count of 12 Bewick's Swans at Ibsley which comes from Andrew Carter

Finally for today I see that Russell Wynn has just published on Hoslist his December highlights for the Lymington area – far too lengthy to copy here but I must mention a count of 11 Water Pipits at Keyhaven on Dec 9 and of 115 Gadwall on Sowley Pond on Dec 15. Among regular birds at Keyhaven through the month were the two Ravens, two or more Bearded Tits and one Dartford Warbler.

WED 02 JAN

Most of the news coming in is naturally about yesterday's outings but Mike Rafter ticked a good new bird today when he located a Siberian Chiffchaff at Eastleigh Sewage Works, getting excellent views and hearing its calls occasionally. Mike says it was certainly different from "our" Chiffchaff. Also seen by Mike today was a Brambling on his Romsey garden bird table, the first he has seen in that garden in two years. Out this morning, both at the mouth of the Hamble River, were Trevor Carpenter and Bob Marchant – Trevor seeing a female Eider and Bob a Red-throated Diver. Trevor then went upriver to the Bunny Meadows where he found 5 Greenshank and a Rock Pipit.

Yesterday's lists in Hampshire included the Snow Bunting at Hurst Spit and the Hawfinches (only two) in Romsey, both seen by John Firth, and the Green-winged Teal which is still at the Moor Green/Eversley lakes on the Berkshire border (seen by Moira Doherty with a dubious hybrid Scaup and 23 Goosander). Back at Keyhaven Tony Hale had two Whitefront Geese, and at Cams Hall (Fareham) Trevor Carpenter found the single Brant still present with both Dark and Pale-bellied Brent among 140 Canada Geese.

By the River Itchen near Eastleigh Colin Bates had 4 Stonechat, Chiffchaff, Siskin and a Buzzard, while upstream at Winchester Geoff Rogers had a bird-table Brambling. Probably the most interesting Hampshire sighting in my opinion was given to David Thelwell at Alresford where 4 Little Egrets were perched in a tree at Pinglestone Farm (by the River Arle just west of Alresford Pond) and, in David's words >> One bird was displaying to another, extending its neck, raising its back plumes, and making loud noises. << (Not necessarily a courthip gesture – maybe the bird was just raising its 'hackles' and shouting at another bird to get out of its sight!). At Alton in East Hampshire Steve Mansfield had a Blackcap in his garden before taking a regular New Year's Day local walkabout which gave him a commendable score of 57 species for inland Hampshire on foot – on his list was a Peregrine, 3 Buzzards seen together and heard calling, a pair of Stonechat, a Marsh Tit and a flock of over 20 Yellowhammer.

Also on foot, but at the coast, the Havant group's New Year walk led by Brian Fellows and John Gowen, scored 62 with a flying Water Rail (over the frozen Budds Farm pools) as their most unusual sighting. They also spotted a Common Sandpiper on the new concrete filter tanks at the sewage works and ticked two birds which I failed to get in the whole day – Goldcrest and Great Crested Grebe. Finally Alistair Martin visited the Hayling Oysterbeds about an hour after I left them and (at 1545) had another show of Barn Owl hunting the rough field north of the lagoon where the Owl put up another of my 'bogey birds' – two Yellowhammer.

West Sussex news for New Year's Day taken off the SOS website starts with Barry Collins' sightings around Thorney Island – 12 Avocet, 1 Barnacle Goose, 1 Barn Owl and multiple Short-eared Owls plus the Fieldfare and Redwing at Nutbourne orchards. At Apuldram, south of Fishbourne in the north east corner of Chichester Harbour, a Water Pipit was recorded with two Stonechat and 2 Chiffchaff, and on Ivy Lake at Chichester the Egyptian Goose was still present. Further east in Pagham Harbour someone saw a first winter drake American Wigeon (today, Jan 2, not yesterday) but the New Year's Day listers found a Glaucous Gull in the harbour roost and saw 2 Whooper Swans fly over the North Wall. In the harbour a Black-throated Diver was listed along with Red-throated and Goosander, and offshore were 20+ Slavonian Grebe, Common Scoter and Eider. Other notable ticks were the wintering Whimbrel, 2 Spotted Redshank, Whitefront Goose (the flock of 13 now down to just 1 bird, attributed by Lawrence Holloway to shooting), Firecrest, Treecreeper, Jack Snipe, Avocet and 6 Pale-bellied Brent.

Elsewhere in West Sussex 2 Peregrines were listed at Shoreham, a Firecrest at Burton Mill, and

16 Bewick's Swans with a Hen Harrier at Waltham south of Pulborough, plus Redpoll and Siskin at Rackham to the east of Amberley

An East Sussex speciality for New Year's Day was the Tundra Bean Goose with 500 Whitefronts and 1 Little Stint at Rye where Smew, Woodcock and Bittern were present with Snow Bunting and >>loads of Water Rails out in the open, some in a gorse patch and others on a dung heap. << Hastings had a Purple Sandpiper and Coombe Haven to the west of the town had 20+ Bearded Tit and a churring Dartford Warbler.

The longest tick list of the day that I have heard of came from the Isle of Wight Group who notched up 104 species. The full list and locations are on Derek Hale's website and I will just pick out a few species not mentioned on other lists so far. For a start they had Raven followed by Fulmar, Gannet, Red-necked Grebe, Kittiwake, Greylag, Merlin, Linnet, Reed Bunting and Little Owl

TUE 01 JAN

The weather was excellent (if chilly at first) for my annual New Year's Day personal 'bird race' and my score of 79 species was good considering the limitations of using a cycle only to get around. Before starting I went into the garden at first light to put out bird food and was greeted with repeated song from a Dunnock, one of 11 species ticked before setting out at 8:35 with the sun up but the air freezing on my exposed face as I rode north up New Lane to find three Green Sandpiper in the stream culvert beside New Lane in Leigh Park. Next piece of luck was to find a Marsh Tit sitting quietly on a branch in the Hollybank Woods, and after that to see singles of Gadwall and Shoveler on an unfrozen part of Aldsworth Pond.

At the south lodge of Stansted Park I stopped to tie up my boot lace below a tree which happened to have a Treecreeper quietly working its branches and after crossing the East Park I stopped again in Woodlands Lane (not looking for birds but checking on the site where wild Green Hellebore will grow before long) and happened to spot 7 Red-legged Partridge in the field north of the lane. My first Redwing were seen in Walderton close to the headwaters of the River Ems (on which a lone Teal was a surprise find at the Racton road junction).

Now heading south via Marlpit Lane I found another Green Sandpiper on the Hairspring Watercress beds from which I followed the Ham Brook down to Nutbourne. In School Lane I was loudly greeted by Fieldfare based on the Nutbourne orchards and on the seawall I had another piece of luck in seeing a Water Rail swim across a pool at the south end of the reedbeds, but I was disappointed to find no Pintail in Nutbourne Bay. At midday I did not see any of the Short-eared Owls over Thornham Marshes (but did reluctantly tick a flock of some 60 Canada Geese, and less reluctantly ticked the Black Swan at Emsworth).

My first Egret of the day was in the Wade Court pony field where a Grey Wagtail flew over before I rode over the bridge to Hayling and by going through Northney and across the fields to the Oysterbeds I picked up Golden Plover (but not the Linnets I was hoping for). As well as Dunlin and Ringed plover at the Oysterbeds I enjoyed a pair of Goldeneye on the lagoon where the Pochard which I had been expecting at Budds Farm pools were passing the time while the Budds pools were frozen. I also met Tim Lawman at the Oysterbeds and learnt that there had been three redhead Goosander on the Kench in the morning.

Nothing more went on my list until I reached the Brockhampton Stream where I met Brian Hedley by the stone bridge at the site of the old watermill, and while we were chatting (he had had Sanderling on Hayling) a Kingfisher flew up and down the stream, passing four times before I rode on to Chalk Dock with the tide just falling and the waders and wildfowl massing along the north shore of the harbour to give me Pintail (just two males among perhaps 500 Wigeon), a few Knot and one Curlew plus a couple of Cormorant. I was not surprised to miss out on Black-necked Grebe but I was surprised to see no Great-crested Grebe (and to have no Sparrowhawk during the day).

News from the SOS website for yesterday includes a report of a singing Crossbill (with others silently eating) plus a churring Dartford Warbler at Ambersham Common near Midhurst. From East Sussex also on Dec 31 comes news of a staggering display of birds on the sea off Pett just east of Hastings. The flock of Great Crested Grebe there was estimated at 500 birds with some 200 Common Scoter and a few Velvet. A party of Bewick's Swans landed briefly on the sea and up to 200 Red-throated Divers flew past the scene. On shore the count of Snow Bunting was up to six and a new visitor was a Chiloe Wigeon

Here in Hampshire David Holland was at the Lower Test Marshes on Dec 31, seeing a Marsh Harrier and a Firecrest as well as hearing the song of the Cetti's Warblers .

MON 31 DEC

More than 400 Skylarks were in a huge flock on Beacon Hill in the Meon Valley when Trevor Carpenter was there today – he says they made a fabulous sound (presumably just chirruping rather than full song?). At Lomer Farm nearby he counted 73 Collared Dove, but other than these he saw few birds, just one or two Redwing and Fieldfare, a Buzzard and 11 Golden Plover

The annual end of year walk from Havant to Langstone was once again led by Cath Cooper this morning and she tells me that they had a couple of good bird sightings plus a quick glimpse of Water Rail at Langstone Pond seen by just one member of the group – the others had moved on and were looking at a small group of Egrets on the ground in the Wade Court pony field (sitting out high tide) and were surprised to see three foxes in the same field, two of them basking in the sun within yards of the Egrets! The other special sighting was of a Great Spotted Woodpecker at what was probably its nest hole (and probably vital to the woodpecker's overnight survival in these low temperatures) – apparently a Starling had got into the hole and the woodpecker was urging it to come out!

David Taylor was at Ibsley today and counted 14 Bewick's Swans, not including the family of 7 that has been seen earlier in the winter and is probably still around. Another message from the Avon valley is from Andrew Carter who saw John Clark's count of 700 Teal in the Blashford Lakes area yesterday and re-inforces the impression that there are more Teal than usual this winter by reporting another 600+ above Downton by the Avon (just into Wiltshire)

Charles Cuthbert has been in hospital for a couple of weeks but is now able to resume his watch on Alresford Pond where he tells me that the night roost of Egrets is currently up to 40 with 37 Cormorant in separate trees from the Egrets. Only one Green Sandpiper seems to be in that area but unusual recent visitors have been a ringtail Hen Harrier (possibly roosting nearby) and a first winter Little Gull that was seen with Black-headed Gulls on both Dec 29 and 30. Charles also watched a Peregrine have two goes at bringing down a Stock Dove, hitting it once but failing to kill. Back on Dec 28 two Mute Swans were demonstrating their full courthip display and the Cob thought his luck was in but the pen backed off at the last minute when she thought about having to sit still for over a month in the cold!

Graham Roberts has already told us how he mist-netted a couple of Firecrest in his Cosham garden recently and today he says that Firecrest song has been heard daily in the garden for the past week or so. Not many Blackcap there yet but Long-tailed Tits are regular visitors to the feeders for both peanuts and cake (up to 20 sometimes present). While thinking of Blackcap I see a message today comes from Eddie Chapman somewhere in Norway to say that he had just been watching a male Blackcap eating apple happily (?) in a temperature of -25C

Richard Carpenter has been out in the Titchfield/Chilling shore area again and reports two uncommon sightings – one of a female Goldeneye on the sea, and two sightings of Nuthatch close to the sea (to which they normally seem to have an aversion)

PLANTS:

SUN 06 JAN

On New Year's day I noted that the single plant of Hemlock that had been flowering on the Langstone Harbour shore by the Budds Farm fence seemed to have succumbed to the frost and to be dead but today it had raised its head again and still had healthy open flowers. Flowers on the trees (Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Cherry Plum) seem to have come through the cold snap unharmed and today I found a couple of new Hawthorn trees with flowers and saw Blackthorn still flowering by the Brockhampton stream. Checking my own garden I found a sheltered plant of Smooth Hawksbeard still holding up three healthy flowers and recorded thirteen more species in flower in a walk this morning – among them two Ivy bushes with fresh flowers bristling with yellow anthers.

TUE 01 JAN

The frost has taken its toll of flowering plants but today's outing gave me blossom on Blackthorn, Hawthorn and Cherry Plum, along with Butcher's Broom, Greater and Intermediate Periwinkle,

and a few commoner winterplants such as White Deadnettle, Annual Mercury, Dandelion and Gorse plus two garden escapes – Feverfew and Sweet Alison.

MON 31 DEC

Cath Cooper tells me that yet more Hazel catkins were fully open by the Hayling Billy Trail in Havant (close to the Grove Road entrance), and yesterday Richard Carpenter was in Chilling Copse and found a 3 foot high Marsh Thistle with flower buds.

INSECTS:

SUN 06 JAN

Checking the Butterfly Conservation website this evening I find two reports of Red Admirals seen since New Year's Day (one at Gosport and one in Chichester) and two reports of Peacocks – one at Downton by the Rover Avon just north of Fordingbridge and the other in Chalton village (to the east of the A3 between Rowlands Castle and the Q E Country Park).

I also have an email from Lee Marshall at Rowner (Gosport) who had his moth light on last night (Jan 5) and attracted three moth species – Light Brown Apple Moth (2), December Moth (5), and one Mottled Umber

THU 03 JAN

When Russell Wynn was birding at the Blashford Lakes, north of Ringwood in the Avon Valley, on Dec 30 he saw a single Peacock butterfly on the wing. Also seen today (at Alton by Steve Mansfield) was one unidentified Bumblebee...

MON 31 DEC

A note from Graham Roberts reports yet another Red Admiral basking in his Cosham garden at the southern foot of Portsdown today.

OTHER WILDLIFE:

SUN 06 JAN

A Pipistrelle bat was flying late yesterday (Jan 5) above the River Alver near the Apple Dumpling bridge which gives the residents of Rowner access to Browndown on the west bank of the river. Lee Marshall saw it and also noted 7 Roe Deer nearby, and on Jan 4, in a different part of the valley, he counted 11 Roe which he believes to be in addition to the 7. Although there are probably far too many Roe deer in Hampshire for the health of the animals themselves (and our wild flowers) it is most unusual to see this species of deer in anything bigger than a family group (maximum of five if the doe had triplets), and I can only assume that a population of these animals has been driven into this area by various chances and now finds itself trapped between the sea and the continuing development of the countryside inland (e.g. the Cherque Farm development which has eliminated the northern end of the AlverValley in the past year). At this time of year the bucks have not yet I think started thinking of keeping an eye on their chosen doe, and so a typical sighting would be that which I had earlier this week at Fishlake Meadow in Romsey (just one doe with last summer's single kid, still much smaller than she is).

THU 03 JAN

John Goodspeed today forwarded to me a note from Ben Sampson (on the Langstone Harbourmaster's staff) to say that there are now two Common Seals in the harbour and that the most likely place and time to see them hauled out is on the Sword Sands (southwest of Farlington Marshes and off the Great Salterns Quay) when the rising tide is half up. I myself saw the one seal which has been in the harbour all autumn just off the Langstone South Moors on Nov 7, and previously it had been in the Bridge Lake area north of the Oysterbeds around Oct 28, but I guess it spends most of its time in the open water of the southern half of the harbour.